

# faith

March and April 2011  
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OF FAITH AND REASON

## **The Virgin Birth and the Marital Act: Shedding Light on Contemporary Confusion**

Editorial

## **Fasting, the Soul of Prayer – in the Saints and in the 21st Century**

James Tolhurst

## **Bringing Catholic Culture Back into the English Curriculum**

Roy Peachey

## **C.S. Lewis and Tolkien on Myth and Knowledge**

Roger Peck

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Hugh MacKenzie meditates on the Virgin Birth

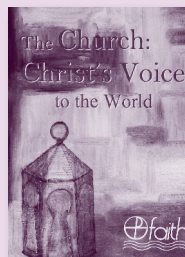
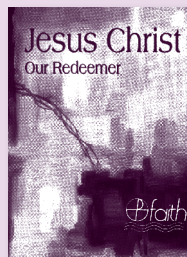
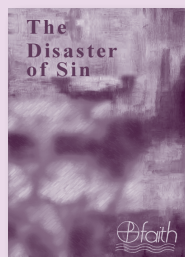
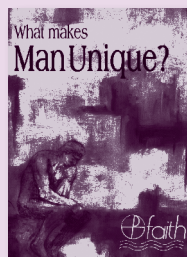
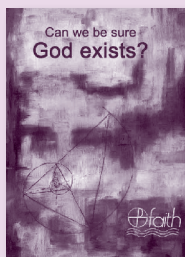
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# faith

**March and April 2011  
Volume 43 Number 2**

Our first two main articles in this issue touch on the central concept of the third, namely the “recovery” of what has been lost. Yet, as we hope is clear from our current and previous editorials, such recovery does not simply mean returning to the past.

Fr James Tolhurst offers an inspiring reflection upon the constructive place of fasting in opening ourselves to the formation of the Holy Spirit. And Roy Peachey’s brilliant description of the emergence of the novel from the British tradition of Christian “protest”, and of the related de-Catholicisation of the English school curriculum, sets the scene for the Church to reclaim this tradition in the name of true humanism. Our next Truth Will Set You Free column will include some of his fascinating practical suggestions for Catholicising the curriculum.

Mr Peachey’s piece highlights the subtle but all the more real danger for our young people from literature imbued with false ideas, and thus from the failure to synthesise our faith with good aspects of modern culture.

The Incarnational “recovery” of human knowing in the writings of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis is well brought out by Fr Roger Peck. Yet for us this epistemological dimension of the redemption is not from the supposedly “incurably” dualistic nature of human knowing but from stubbornly dualistic *theories* of human knowing which over the millennia of their influence have whittled away wonder. This was the theme of our November 2010 editorial on the relationship of scientific knowledge to our knowledge of the spiritual realm.

In our current editorial we attempt to show how recognising the centrality of the Incarnation to all of creation helps us solve some key modern confusions concerning the womb of woman. Fr Stephen Boyle’s review hints at something similar concerning the heterodox leanings of catholic Process Theology, despite this school of thoughts’ laudable and too lonely attempt to take science seriously. Fr Richard Conrad’s beautiful reply to a thought-provoking letter takes the same Christocentric approach to the serious stumbling block of serious suffering.

As ever, we see that, in Agnes Holloway’s phrase, Christ is the Master-Key unlocking the meaning of the universe. Or as the Second Vatican Council put it: “The Church believes that the key, the centre and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master ... who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” [*Gaudium et Spes*, n.7]

**“He gave them power to become children of God ... who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”  
John 1:13**

The BBC’s four part drama *Nativity*, screened in the lead up to last Christmas was well dramatised and, incorporated some related theological truths and a reverence for the clear divinity of the baby in the manger. The Archbishop of Westminster’s strong endorsement was just.

Yet this first episode ended with a depiction of the Annunciation in which Our Lady did not actually articulate her *fiat*. She never spoke the words; rather she agrees to close her eyes and then, as she tells Joseph in a later episode, accepts “what God had done” to her. Thus in this presentation it is not at all clear that God’s plan entailed Mary’s supreme and sovereign free consent to cooperate with the conception of Jesus before the Holy Spirit overshadowed her.

In defending his interpretation the screenplay writer erroneously argued the Gospel writers, after all, were writing “200 years” after the event, and then proceeded to confuse the virginal conception with the “immaculate conception”. Despite the BBC’s laudable attempt to be fairly faithful to the Gospels they certainly don’t hold to the Christian affirmation that “the Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother” [Catechism, 488]. It was through her intentional receptivity that her womb was completed – so that our similarly receptive souls and bodies might be completed and saved by the Word made flesh. As our current Truth Will Set You Free meditation on Mary’s title “Mother of God” concludes, “so fundamental is the cooperation of her whole person, womb and will.”

## The Virgin Birth and Creation

Edward Holloway offered a particularly compelling theological rationale for these truths. He interpreted St. John’s apocalyptic vision of The Woman in the pangs of birth, clothed with the sun, with the moon at her feet and the twelve stars, as representing the fullness of the universe, crowning her head. Catholic tradition, with good reason, has interpreted this woman as our Lady. The vision places Mary at the centre of planet Earth and at the centre of the universe. And she is bringing forth the Christ-child, Himself, in Holloway’s theology, the centre and completion of creation. For Holloway, the central moment of all space-time is the virginal conception of Our Lord. At this moment Creation is completed by the Creator, who actually comes into His creation personally. This is to fulfil the original purpose of creation. As such all other cosmic phenomena flow from this moment at Nazareth, *ontologically* that is, clearly not *chronologically*.



# The Virgin Birth and the Marital Act: Shedding Light on Contemporary Confusion *Editorial*

Creation then is built around its cornerstone: God completing the edifice of space and time that is the material cosmos by entering that sacred space that is the womb of Mary, completing her maternal potential while preserving her virginal exclusivity, and through this Mystery God can enter and complete the spiritual space of our own hearts, which are also made for Christ. The *fiat* of God in creating is a free decision that determines the amazing unity which is the physical cosmos, which is always and everywhere utterly dependent upon this divine determination. At the foundation and heart of this divine *fiat*, and identical with it, is God's determination of the womb of Mary so that He may become Man. The womb, therefore, becomes the means by which the Creator can truly take to Himself the nature of the creature, using the same means in which that this creaturely nature is formed.

But for Holloway this can also be looked at the other way around. The creature is formed in the same way as the Incarnate nature of Christ so that we may be aligned on Him. The identity of human nature and of every human being flows from the human nature of Christ, for we were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians) and He is "the first-born of creation" (Colossians).

“At the foundation and heart of the  
divine fiat, and identical with it, is God’s  
determination of the womb of Mary”

So it is that we are also formed in the womb of woman, for every woman has the power to minister life from God. For the creative and salvific decree of God also includes the delegation of his spiritual powers of intelligent and free activity. We have a certain power over the physical realm, for good or evil, for development or destruction. And this delegated power extends even to the creation of other human beings. We are truly co-creators in all that we do, but most especially in the *pro*-creation of new persons, called indeed to be children of God.

Again, this flows from the Incarnation. Christ's conception – in all its facets across ecclesial, sacramental history – alone of all human conceptions, is not subject to the determination of man, for other human conceptions are subject to *this* conception. We humans find our source and summit, our purpose and fulfilment in Him. Given His *onto*-logical primacy, in his uncreated Personality and his created body and soul, it would be *il*-logical, in the deepest sense of the term (ie. contrary to the Logos), if the conception of the Creator's human nature were subject to that creaturely power of co-creation by which new creatures are brought into being, for this is a fundamental aspect of human procreation.

This creaturely procreation needs an additional factor to the power of conception, namely, the human determination which is decisive for the process. And it must be a power

which can be added to the conceiving power which receives such determination and forms the human nature of new beings. The conceiving power is that of the womb of woman. The male power determines the womb of woman in the creaturely act of procreation to create new human persons. However, at the moment of the Incarnation the male is not present and it is God Himself who determines the potential of the womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is therefore to be a virginal conception.

Thus the pattern of human *pro*-creation flows from the pattern of the virginal conception which is the completion of Creation. The very division of the sexes between determining male and determined female flows from the fact that God is to become man. So the male, who is not necessary for the virginal conception because he is superseded by God whose determining power he ministers in the sexual act, is *therefore* necessary for the procreation by which new human persons are created through the initiative of other men. Ultimately sex is for Christ, and the heart of it all is the Virgin Birth.

## Confusion Over the Marital Act

This insight concerning male and female has a particular resonance with insights emerging from an important Catholic morality debate that has been raging in recent years, and which reached new levels of passion in the lead up to last Christmas. A certain Fr Martin Rhonheimer, known for accusing opponents of "physicalism", has himself been accused by some prominent American writers of "intentionalism" and has laid the counter charge of "coming close to slander". None of these labels would appear to stick in this debate.

The British Professor Luke Gormally has emerged as the most prominent and effective protagonist of Fr Rhonheimer, a priest of Opus Dei. Back in 2004 Rhonheimer used the prominent journal of "loyal dissent", *The Tablet*, to spread his novel idea that the prophylactic use of condoms in marriage might be consistent with the teaching of the 1968 Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

In responding the following year in the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* Gormally brilliantly highlighted the Catholic magisterial and jurisprudential tradition which has consistently and authoritatively maintained that to be the integral marital act, sexual intercourse must, as well as being deliberate, involve the man successfully giving his seed to the woman [this article was also published in *Faith* March 2006]. For it is this act which is naturally, and has been perennially recognised by human beings in general as the act which must be chosen in order for the procreative process to be started. All the other aspects of the generative process, which may or may not be conducive to conception actually happening, are by nature those which are not deliberately enacted by the participants in order to start the process.

# The Virgin Birth and the Marital Act: Shedding Light on Contemporary Confusion

## continued

Thus a special status has been given to the man's very physical "ejaculation of semen in his wife's vagina". For instance a male impotency to do this has been seen in the tradition as an intrinsic inability to consummate marriage, whereas its enaction is the consummation of marriage. Nothing similar has ever been accorded to any of the other biological conditions necessary for conception, such as ovulation (save, implicitly, for the woman's physical reception of the seed into her reproductive tract.) No other biological infertility prevents the consummation of marriage.

Rhonheimer seems to ignore this key difference when he argues back, as he did as recently as December 21st last on Sandro Magister's site using *Humanae Vitae's* "the Church does not consider at all illicit the use of those therapeutic means necessary to cure bodily diseases, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from – provided such impediment is not directly intended." (n.15). All agree this can refer to pill taking. But Rhonheimer applies it to condom use. But this argument does not stand because the use of a condom contradicts the nature of the act. The giving of the seed is, for the human being, the act which determines the womb of woman and thus the act by which a man intends the generative process. The application of the principle of "double effect" that *HV* 15 envisages cannot apply to such an act.

“the pattern of human pro-creation  
flows from the pattern of the  
virginal conception”

As Gormally puts it “As Fr Rhonheimer has rightly noted, ‘not any intention can reasonably inform any act or behaviour: one cannot swallow stones with the intention of nourishing oneself’; nor, I would add, can one” deliberately ejaculate “into a condom” with the intention of remaining open “to serve the task of transmitting human life”.

This special role of the male seed implies necessary, specific and complementary roles to the spouses in a marital act. As we have seen above it is precisely this role which is necessarily absent from, as well as emerging from, the conception of Christ. Its necessity to marriage which is clearly affirmed by Catholic tradition as brilliantly brought out by Gormally, actually, in Holloway's vision, flows from the pattern of the Annunciation. This insight strengthens Gormally's point that such marital giving and receiving is the sacramental enacting of the giving of Christ himself to his Bride the Church – according for instance to the Letter to the Ephesians, “husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. ... as Christ does the Church ... this mystery is a profound one” [5: 28-32]. As Gormally points out, through conception marital sex founds “the reality that is called ‘the domestic church’.”

The Incarnation, God becoming present in and through human nature, is the exemplar and foundation of all

sacramentality. This is especially true of the Annunciation wherein Christ the Bridegroom completes his mother, the first and foremost member of His Bride the Church. The virginal conception gives “profound” meaning to husband and wife, but also to male and female, as well as creation and man.

### Conclusion

It was the Pope's controversial words on condom use outside of marriage that reignited the public dimension of the Gormally-Rhonheimer debate. A much needed clarification was published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 21 December. Crucially it maintained the basis for regarding as immoral any cooperation with condom use in the context of promiscuous sexual activity even with the risk of passing on of the HIV virus. Yet it did not seem to rule out calling such use a ‘lesser evil’ – a matter of on-going discussion amongst Natural Law theorists.

“We need to follow the pattern  
of Mary's fiat”

It is increasingly obvious that our culture, and the Church along with it, is at a crossroads – and we can't see the road signs very clearly. As ever at such moments, we need to allow the light of Christ, the Word made flesh, to shine more brightly upon our minds and hearts. We need a new and authentic development of doctrine that will allow us to see the mysteries of human sexuality and its sacred meanings more clearly so we can proclaim it to the world with greater clarity. We need to follow the pattern of Mary's *fiat*, which is the foundation and inspiration of our own ability to say yes to God at every stage of her life. The Word made flesh for us in the womb of Mary must be the context in which we understand every aspect of the knowing and loving of the embodied spirit that is man.



# Fasting, the Soul of Prayer – in the Saints and in the 21st Century *by James Tolhurst*

Fr Tolhurst weaves together strands of perennial wisdom for today's Christians. His book *Climbing the Mountain – The Journey of Prayer* was published by Gracewing in 2009.

There is a fairly general admission by people that they do not pray enough, or that they find it hard to pray in the first place. This may always have been true, but it is worth considering whether nowadays we have tended to link prayer in our minds with external activity, and have largely forgotten its connection with fasting.

In previous generations there was no question that, especially during Lent, you prayed and you fasted (on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and later on Fridays alone). This also applied to Ember Days and eves of feasts. Nowadays we are *encouraged* to prolong the Paschal fast “throughout Holy Saturday, so that (we) may attain the joys of Easter”<sup>1</sup>. We are also told during Lent “to unite ourselves to the mysteries of Jesus in the desert” and that “penance should be not only internal and individual but also *external and social*”<sup>2</sup>.

## Fasting

Fasting (and abstinence from meat) became ‘awkward’ in the sixties. When Cardinal Heenan, as President of the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales, announced the ending of Friday abstinence in 1967 he said, “It is questioned whether it is advisable in our mixed society for a Catholic to appear singular in this matter.” Dame Mary Douglas, the renowned anthropologist, took him to task and said that its abolition “did away with a vital symbol of Catholic identity and solidarity. Dispensing with such shared symbols would not make self-denying acts more likely or more intelligible.”<sup>3</sup> Fasting in Cardinal Heenan’s eyes had plainly become a matter of cultural etiquette. The sixties ushered in that option for social ethics at the expense of deeper theological symbolism. The early Christian Gnostics had gone further and said, “If you fast, you bring sin upon yourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

In Orthodoxy, fasting is part of the notion of *Spiritual Combat*. St. Gregory Nazianzen, Patriarch of Constantinople in the fourth century, in one of his *Orations* says, “May Jesus himself convince you, with his fasts, his submission to temptation and his victory over the tempter.”<sup>5</sup> In this spirit the disciple of Christ was urged to ‘go into the desert’ after the example of Abbot Anthony of Egypt (251-356) and engage in the struggle in union with Christ. Do we consider that we are above such things living in the twenty-first century, where the devil and the evil spirits who wander the world have been relegated to film and TV scripts and video games, along with vampires and were-wolves?

But the spiritual authors persist in their message. Fasting is necessary if we are to be victorious. But victorious over what? Not to lose weight and increase energy. Orthodox writers in particular are quite specific: it is our human weaknesses on one hand, and our spiritual weakness on another, deeper level. John Climacus says, “Fasting ends lust, roots out bad thoughts, frees one from evil desires.”<sup>6</sup> But this is no Manichean contempt of the body. Metropolitan Theoleptos writes, “The vanquishing of the flesh secures the victory of the soul and the

reasonable distress of the body can bring forth an outpouring of joy for the spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

In Western Christianity, there is the same message. St. Leo the Great says, “Through fasting the concupiscence of the flesh is extinguished.”<sup>8</sup> We tend to smile at such forthrightness but is it because we have dismissed the whole idea of concupiscence, and shrink from the concept of the flesh having to be brought into subjection; and this, despite the clear teaching of St. Paul (I Corinthians 9:27; Ephesians 6:10ff)?

The victory sought by the spiritual combat is not some sort of boost for the ego, even though the literature for St. Patrick’s Purgatory in County Donegal can talk of “the cleansing value” of the fast “giving opportunities for prioritising values and being physically and spiritually renewed”<sup>9</sup>. The Pharisees, however, in their ostentatious fasting “had their reward” (Matthew 6:16). Instead St. Augustine preached, “No one fasts for human praise but for the pardon of his sins.”<sup>10</sup> The early Christian writers considered that fasting was an essential element in discipleship. If we were to be faithful to Christ, then we must not lose sight of the fact that we are both body and spirit and the body is peculiarly weak. The Metropolitan of Philadelphia goes on to say, “Train yourself by reducing comfort little by little, that you may both weaken the strength of the flesh and fortify the soul.”<sup>11</sup>

Many of the writers on spirituality were directing their thoughts to monks and nuns, but we notice a surprising moderation in their remarks (“reasonable distress”, “little by little”). St. Leo makes the point, “It is not much good if the body’s strength is weakened but the soul’s vigour is not increased. Let us mortify our exterior humanity a little to restore the inner humanity. Let us deprive the flesh of its nourishment and acquire the strength of soul with spiritual food....Not only reducing our food intake but principally abstaining from sin.”<sup>12</sup> The idea that the Church in general encouraged extreme penance for all is largely a myth: “Let your fasts be moderate,” says St. Jerome;<sup>13</sup> “use discretion in undertaking bodily penances,” says *The Imitation*.<sup>14</sup> Also, in a light-hearted letter to her brother, enclosing a hair shirt, St. Teresa of Avila writes, “I send you this hair shirt to use when you find it difficult to recollect yourself at times of prayer or when you are anxious to do something for the Lord...Even a mere nothing like this makes one so happy when it is done for God out of love for him.”<sup>15</sup> In recent years, Padre Pio took up the same point, “Our body is like a donkey which we must beat, but not too much, because otherwise it will collapse and won’t carry us any more.”<sup>16</sup>

It is not the physical mortification *per se* that matters. Fasting should be part of a total attitude of mind not an isolated ingredient. St. Francis de Sales is quite definite: “Fasting is only virtue when it is accompanied by conditions which render it pleasing to God...without humility it is worth nothing.”<sup>17</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, commenting on the repentance of the people of Nineveh in the book of Jonah, says that,

# Fasting, the Soul of Prayer – in the Saints and in the 21st Century

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“sackcloth is the grief of repentance and ashes represent humility”.<sup>18</sup>

St. John Cassian goes further, in what is almost a commentary on Matthew 6, when he says, “it is very clear proof of the fact that a soul has not yet cut loose from the corruption of sin when it feels no sympathetic pity for the wrongdoing of others but holds instead to the strict censoriousness of a judge.” At another time he adds, “What we gain from fasting does not compensate for what we lose through anger.”<sup>19</sup> There has to be that *interior* fast from our faults and our sins. This, in the opinion of many authors, should be part of that stripping away of all that belongs to human weakness, that circumcision of the heart, which is accomplished “by the Spirit’s immediate presence... Bodily fasting alone is not enough to bring about self-restraint and true purity; it must be accompanied by contrition, intense prayer to God, frequent meditation on the Scriptures, toil, and manual labour.”<sup>20</sup> Unless the two kinds of fasting go together there is the danger either of increased pride (coming before a fall) or of relapsing into the very faults which we condemn in others.<sup>21</sup>

But the danger of hypocrisy does not undermine the value of fasting itself. The *Imitation of Christ*, commenting on the early Fathers of the Church, notes “how scrupulously they kept the fasts” having called attention to “the long and arduous temptations they had to suffer.”<sup>22</sup> St. Benedict says simply: “Discipline your body: do not pamper yourself but love fasting.”<sup>23</sup>

In the two great religions “of the Book” there is a prominent place given to fasting. The Jewish fast days (*tannic*, *tzorn*) which are always penitential are either public, like *Yom Kippur*; or are a remembrance of past sad events such as a parent’s anniversary of death (*yahrzeit*) or the assassination of the last Governor of Judah (*fast of Gedaliah*). The book of Samuel records that at Mizpah the whole people “fasted, confessing we have sinned against the Lord” (I Samuel 7:6). Many rabbis interpret fasting as a sacrificial offering to God, of the flesh of one’s own body.<sup>24</sup>

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast (*sawn*) of Ramadan as a reflection upon the human dependence on God and on spiritual goals. It is a considerable test of endurance since the ninth Moslem month lasts a full thirty days and demands abstinence from food, drink and sexual relations from dawn to dusk. While we may consider such abstinence excessive, it ought to make us reflect. Are we so minimising our idea of fasting that it becomes a vague idea to cut down? The Curé of Ars (no stranger to mortification) says, “Fasting does not consist solely of privations in the way of eating and drinking but of *denying ourselves what pleases us most*.”<sup>25</sup> The holy pastor did not in any way ask people to imitate him, but to an exceedingly overweight penitent who asked him what she should do, he replied, half in jest, “Three Lents”. We all know our peculiar addictions, and Lent is an excellent time to deny ourselves their indulgence.

### Prayer

Those who complain that they find it hard to pray may be making the mistake of divorcing prayer from any idea of fasting.

Metropolitan Peter Chrysologus preached, “Let prayer, mercy, and fasting be one petition for us before God ... fasting is the soul of prayer.”<sup>26</sup> We need to join prayer to fasting especially if we want to emphasise the seriousness of our intention. This is very much a part of some Pentecostal and Fellowship Churches, who talk in terms of the gifts of fasting brought about “through the enabling of the Spirit” (including the *Daniel fast* – Daniel 1:12). It was also part of St. John Vianney’s views. He said to a priest who complained about his parishioners, “Have you fasted for them?” If we accept that fasting is not only an attempt to discipline the body, but above all an attempt to eradicate the weaknesses (which St. John Damascene calls *passions*<sup>27</sup>) of the soul, then what we practise in fasting will naturally have an effect on our prayer.

Our common definition says that prayer is the ascent of the mind to God. This means, says Isaac of Nineveh, “the mind detached from earthly things and the whole heart pointed to that on which it hopes”.<sup>28</sup> Just as fasting involves that struggle to undermine our attachments to our weaknesses, so prayer is part of a spiritual combat. One of the desert fathers tells us, “To my mind there is no labour so great as prayer to God: for when one wishes to pray to God, the hostile demons make haste to interrupt the prayer, knowing that their sole hindrance is in this, a prayer poured out to God ... Prayer is the burden of a mighty conflict to one’s last breath.”<sup>29</sup> We cannot avoid the need to struggle against our faults. Indeed St. Benedict says, “Every day with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer and change from these evil ways in the future.”<sup>30</sup>

We must set against this rather daunting prospect Teresa of Avila’s seemingly casual description of prayer as “simply a friendly and frequently solitary conversation with him who, as we know, loves us.”<sup>31</sup> The two are not mutually exclusive. St. John of the Cross – her spiritual director – states, “the soul *finds its joy* in spending lengthy periods in prayer, perhaps even entire nights...”<sup>32</sup> But we delude ourselves if we think that prayer is simply achieved without any effort on our part.

If fasting is an offering to God, so also is prayer. Tertullian maintains that it belongs to God and so is acceptable to him<sup>33</sup>. It is pleasing to him because of the effort we make.

Padre Pio used to talk of the mortification of the clock – to be punctilious in the matter of time dedicated to prayer. St. Jerome maintains “we ought to have fixed hours for prayer.”<sup>34</sup>

### Humility

Fasting breeds humility, which is also the bedrock of prayer. The tax collector went home justified because he prayed, “Be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). St. Mark, the fifth century monk says, “He who wants to cross the spiritual sea is long-suffering, humble, vigilant and self-controlled.”<sup>35</sup>

Rather than shrugging off an awareness of our sinfulness, and regarding our temptations as tiresome distractions, we should face up to both. The *Imitation* maintains that “it is better for us not to be wholly free of temptation (and) most earnestly pray to God, asking him to support us in our every trial”<sup>36</sup>. St. Paul relates: “Because of the abundance of the revelations and *that I might not become too elated*, a thorn in the flesh was given to



## “Those who complain that they find it hard to pray may be making the mistake of divorcing prayer from any idea of fasting”

me, an angel of Satan to beat me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7). The time of prayer is the time when we are brought face to face with our own demons.

It is pointless to go to extremes in prayer, as in fasting. We pray as we can, and not as we can't. St. Teresa advises, “we must shorten our time of prayer, *however much joy it gives us*, if we see our bodily strength waning or find our head aches: discretion is most necessary in everything.”<sup>37</sup> This in no way panders to hypochondria, because Teresa insisted on the value of fixed times for prayer.

But just as we must resolve to set aside time, so we must also prepare. St. John Cassian advises, “Before the time of prayer we must put ourselves in the state of mind we would wish to have in us when we actually pray...The Soul will rise to the heights of heaven or plunge into the things of earth depending upon where it lingered before the time of prayer.”<sup>38</sup> We need to quiet our mind and centre our heart on God. Jesus has told us. “When you pray, *go to your inner room, close the door*” (Matthew 6:6). We close the door by trying to shut out all the rubbish we have accumulated so that we can direct our prayer to God. St. Hugh of Lincoln (d. 1255) used to take off his cloak and hang it up before entering choir, saying, “I leave with you all my episcopal cares”. Yes, we can bring our worries into our prayer but we should *start* by entering into that *stillness* which is not possible unless we close the door. Orthodox writers mention in the same breath, “Prayer, deep stillness and complete detachment”.<sup>39</sup>

St. Gregory of Sinai stresses that this stillness is the fruit of prayer and its reward: “Stillness gives birth to contemplation, contemplation to spiritual knowledge and knowledge to apprehension of the mysteries.”<sup>40</sup> St. John of the Cross talks in terms of “a secret and peaceful inflow of God, which, if not unhampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love.”<sup>41</sup> This searching for God and his transforming love ends with God taking all the initiative and we, in our humility, being overwhelmed by his presence. But from the start we should be prepared to present ourselves so as to hear God and listen to him, instead of bombarding heaven with our thoughts and needs to the exclusion of everything else. We should have as our aim “to pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) because our mind and heart are constantly attuned to God in that state of complete trust and awareness, “as a friend speaks to his friend”. (Exodus 33:11). It was because of his loving confidence and his humility (cf. Numbers 12:3.7-8) that Moses was called to the summit of the mountain to be with his God and hear his word.

Sincere prayer and honest penance are as necessary in the twenty-first century as they were in the first centuries. It was only after *fasting* and *prayer* that the Church in Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas and sent them off for the work to which God had called them (Acts 13:2-3). All this in no way disparages acts of charity, or almsgiving, but in our own time, everyone believes in their merits, even governments. It is not the same with prayer and fasting. Yet these should be as much part of our lives as our charitable giving. Prayer should be the soul of fasting, but fasting, understood in its deepest sense, should be at the heart of our prayer.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Constitution on the Liturgy n. 110.

<sup>2</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 840 and Constitution on the Liturgy n. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Dame Mary Douglas : *Natural Symbols* Collins 1966 pp 43.42. Cardinal Heenan's statement was on July 21, 1967. The Lenten fast was discontinued during World War II and not re-instated.

<sup>4</sup>*Gospel of Thomas* 14. It goes on to say, “If you pray you will be condemned”.

<sup>5</sup>Gregory Nazianzen (329-389) *Oratio* 14 *On Love of the Poor*.

<sup>6</sup>John Climacus (570-649) Abbot of Sinai *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Step 14.

<sup>7</sup>Metropolitan of Philadelphia (1250-1322) *Letter 1 to Princess Irene The Life & Letters of Theoleptos of Philadelphia* (ed. Angela Hero. Brookline Mass. Hellenic College Press 1994 p. 37.

<sup>8</sup>Leo I (d. 461) *Homily 12 On the Fast of the Tenth Month* (for Winter Ember Days).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Web site for Lough Derg. It was visited in 445 by St. Patrick. The three-day fast starts on midnight the day before the arrival at the island.

<sup>10</sup>Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430) *Homily 60 On the Season*.

<sup>11</sup>*Letter I to Princess Irene The Life & Letters of Theoleptos* p. 37.

<sup>12</sup>Leo I *Homily 44 for Lent*.

<sup>13</sup>Jerome (341-420) *Letter 125 to Rusticus AD 411*.

<sup>14</sup>*The Imitation of Christ* of Thomas a Kempis. Book 1 Chapter 19.

<sup>15</sup>Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) *Letter 31 to her brother Lorenzo de Cepeda, 1577*.

<sup>16</sup>Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968) Capuchin friar and stigmatist. *In my Own Words* Anthony Chiffole. Liguori. Liguori Publications 2000. Cf. Numbers 22:22.

<sup>17</sup>Bishop of Geneva (1567-1622) *Introduction to the Devout Life* Book 3, ch 23.

<sup>18</sup>Jonah 3:5. St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) *4th Century of Various Texts* n. 95.

<sup>19</sup>St. John Cassian (360-433) Conference 11 n.10 & 1 n. 7. *Conferences New York*. Newman Press 1997.

<sup>20</sup>St. John Cassian *On the Eight Vices* Philokalia vol 1 (ed. Palmer, Sherrard and Ware) London. Faber 1979 p. 75.

<sup>21</sup>“When you overcome one of the grosser passions, such as gluttony, unchastity or greed, the thought of self-esteem at once assails you. If you defeat this thought, the thought of pride succeeds it.” St. Maximus the Confessor. *Third Century On the Vices* n. 59. Anthony Trollope more recently remarked, “Till we become divine we must be content to be human, lest in our hurry we sink to something lower.”

<sup>22</sup>Book 1 Chapter 18.

<sup>23</sup>*Rule of St. Benedict* Ch. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Alan Unterman : *Dictionary of Jewish Law and Legend*. London Thames & Hudson 1991 p. 78. Rabbis record that it was the custom to fast on Mondays and Thursdays cf. Geza Vermes. *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*. London Penguin 2004 p. 43. Note Matthew 9:14; Mark 2:18 and Luke 5:33. In his decree *Paenitemini* (1966) Paul VI points out that penance is “a religious act which has as its aim, love, and surrender to God.”

<sup>25</sup>Jean Baptiste Vianney (1786-1859) *Homily*. In a Gospel variant Jesus tells the disciples that exorcising demons requires prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29).

<sup>26</sup>Bishop of Ravenna (400-450) *Homily 43*.

<sup>27</sup>John Damascene or of Damascus (657-749) monk and theologian, 2 *On the Virtues and the Vices*. (in *The Philokalia*). His passions of the soul are envy, rancour, malice, insensitivity and avarice “and all vices of a similar nature.”

<sup>28</sup>Isaac, bishop of Nineveh (7th century) *The Philokalia*.vol. 3 p. 212.

<sup>29</sup>Abbot Agatho *The Desert Fathers : Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (ed. Benedicta Ward. Penguin 2003 -composed in the fifth century). St. Leo I adds, “There are no virtuous actions without temptations, no faith without trials, no assaults without an enemy, no victory without a battle.” *Homily I for Lent*.

<sup>30</sup>*The Rule of St. Benedict* ch. 4.

<sup>31</sup>*The Book of Her Life* Chapter 8,5.

<sup>32</sup>John of the Cross (1542-1591) *Dark Night of the Soul* 1.1.

<sup>33</sup>Tertullian (155-) *De Oratione* 28. Also “This prayer we should bring to the altar of God with good works”.

<sup>34</sup>St. Jerome (341-420) *Letter*, AD 384.

<sup>35</sup>St. Mark the Ascetic (5th century) 1, *On Those Who Think They are Made Righteous by Works*. n. 29.

<sup>36</sup>Book I chapter 20.

<sup>37</sup>*Way of Perfection* 26,9.

<sup>38</sup>Conference 9. *Conferences New York*. Newman Press 1997.

<sup>39</sup>St. Diadochus, Bishop of Photiki (400-485) 1 *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 9.

<sup>40</sup>St. Gregory of Sinai (d.450) monk of Thrace, 4 *Further Texts*, 5.

<sup>41</sup>John of the Cross *Dark Night of the Soul* 1.10.

# Bringing Catholic Culture Back into the English Curriculum *by Roy Peachey*

Mr Peachey convincingly argues that there are worrying lacunae in the school curriculum. His piece is also a masterly and succinct guide to the unbalanced development of post-Reformation literature. He is an English teacher at Woldingham School, Surrey, and maintains a blog – [www.catholicenglishteacher.blogspot.com](http://www.catholicenglishteacher.blogspot.com) – where some of the books mentioned in this article are discussed in greater depth.

## The *Via Pulchritudinis*

On 21st November 2009 Pope Benedict XVI addressed 250 artists, both believers and non-believers, in the Sistine Chapel. Following in the footsteps of Paul VI and John Paul II, he took as his theme the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty, and sought to draw inspiration from artists while simultaneously challenging them to work with the Church. For any educator wanting to examine ways of bringing Catholic culture back into the school curriculum, this magisterial theme is worth close consideration.

The theme builds on the insights of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, in which the Fathers of Vatican II had affirmed that:

“Literature and arts are also, in their own way, of great importance to the life of the Church. They strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems and his experiences ... revealing man’s place in history and in the world, ... illustrating the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths of man, ... foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus they are able to elevate human life” [*Gaudium et Spes* 1965, para. 62]

In 1965 Paul VI developed upon this by referring to artists as people “who are taken up with beauty and work for it”. John Paul II in 1999 called them “ingenious creators of beauty” and Benedict XVI, in 2009, “the custodians of beauty”.

## Sin

In tune with *Gaudium et Spes* these three popes discussed the importance of beauty in art only in the context of a fallen world. For example John Paul II wrote:

“In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.”

Similarly, before he became pope, Joseph Ratzinger argued that the Church’s emphasis on beauty needed to be counterbalanced by a coherent analysis of what beauty means in a wounded world. He argued, for example, that in the face of the evil seen at Auschwitz “a purely harmonious concept of beauty is not enough. It cannot stand up to the confrontation with the gravity of the questioning about God, truth and beauty.” [Ratzinger 2002, 6] Instead a deeper understanding of beauty was required:

“Whoever believes in God, in the God who manifested himself, precisely in the altered appearance of Christ crucified as love “to the end” (John 13:1), knows that beauty is truth and truth beauty; but in the suffering Christ he also

learns that the beauty of truth also embraces offence, pain, and even the dark mystery of death, and that this can only be found in accepting suffering, not in ignoring it.”

As Pope he further argued that “the expression of beauty does not remove us from reality, on the contrary, it leads to a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives, liberating it from darkness, transfiguring it, making it radiant and beautiful.” [2009]

## Creativity

The post-conciliar popes were not just interested in the final artistic product but in the creative act itself. John Paul II, for example, who was himself a poet and playwright, argued that, as well as being a creator of beauty, the artist is a craftsman who mirrors the work of the creator God:

“The opening page of the Bible presents God as a kind of exemplar of everyone who produces a work: the human craftsman mirrors the image of God as Creator. This relationship is particularly clear in the Polish language because of the lexical link between the words *stwórca* (creator) and *twórca* (craftsman).”

In so doing he perhaps had in mind the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which reminds us that, “Created ‘in the image of God’, man also expresses the truth of his relationship with God the Creator by the beauty of his artistic works” before further explaining that, “To the extent that it is inspired by truth and love of beings, art bears a certain likeness to God’s activity in what he has created. Like any other human activity, art is not an absolute end in itself, but is ordered to and ennobled by the ultimate end of man.” [1994, 2501]

These recent papal comments reveal a deep vein of Catholic thought on the role of art in the world and yet the sad truth is that most English lessons in most British Catholic schools are all but untouched by such ideas. Where Catholicism impinges upon the English curriculum, if it does so at all, it is by and large in the work of novelists who are more interested in sin than beauty and in doubt than faith. Nevertheless, signs of hope for a revival of Catholic culture in the school curriculum have emerged in recent times from some unexpected quarters. The so-called God Debate and recent educational changes have combined to change the environment in English Catholic schools. In particular, changes to A Level English Literature specifications, giving students the chance to study linked texts of their own choosing, have allowed Catholic schools to introduce a broader range of Catholic texts into the curriculum than has recently been possible, thereby creating an opportunity for teachers and students to respond to papal and conciliar insights into the role of Catholic culture.



**“Where Catholicism impinges upon the English curriculum it is in the work of novelists who are more interested in sin than beauty and in doubt than faith.”**

### Faith in the Syllabus Today

In its 2009 support materials for AS Level English Literature, the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) board suggested that one possible topic for the compulsory coursework essay on post-1900 linked texts could be “Faith in the world – how the spiritual is made real”. In their explanation of the thinking behind this suggestion, the unnamed authors of the support materials claimed that “much modern literature has explored the place of belief systems in the modern world. Religion is a subject which can arouse strong feelings and give rise to interesting classroom debates. Students enjoy engaging with this topic in the light of contemporary political and secular debate as in the current controversies stimulated by Richard Dawkins for example.” [OCR 2009]

That a major examination board should regard faith in the world as a topic worthy of study is encouraging even if the grounds on which such a topic seems to have been chosen might be questioned by Catholic educators. It is significant that the terms of the debate about faith in the world are deemed to have been set by people like Richards Dawkins, just as it is significant that the debate is seen as a “political and secular”, rather than a religious, one. The rich tradition of Catholic thought on how the spiritual is made real rarely makes its way into either the English classroom or the offices of examination boards.

OCR’s suggested set texts are also informative in this regard: the main suggested texts are the poetry of T.S. Eliot, Jill Paton Walsh’s *Knowledge of Angels*, and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Other suggested texts include Antonia White’s *Frost in May*, Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* and Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*. It would be difficult to argue against the presence of Waugh and Greene on any list of twentieth century religious writers but more significant are the absences. Why, Catholic teachers might be entitled to ask, are the novels of Muriel Spark, the short stories of Flannery O’Connor, or the poetry of Les Murray not included on the list? Why, for that matter, is the work of Mauriac and Bernanos not recommended given that texts in translation may be studied in this unit? One can understand why a list of recommended A Level English texts should be anglocentric but the complete lack of texts in translation inevitably creates an unbalanced view of what faith in the world might actually be like in the twentieth century. With the exception of Arundhati Roy’s novel there is nothing written from outside a largely post-Protestant, Anglo-American world.

Perhaps the inclusion of Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* and White’s *Frost in May*, written before her return to the Catholic faith, provides the answer to these questions. Examination boards (and publishers and booksellers) are still more at ease with literature that dwells on doubt rather than faith. Nevertheless, despite the misgivings educators might have about the basis on which such literary choices have been made, it is clear that the new A Level specifications have at least created an opportunity for Catholic culture to be brought back into the curriculum.

It is possible, of course, to argue that Catholic culture has never been lost from the classroom. The National Curriculum

for England claims to be, and in many ways is, comprehensive and non-discriminatory. Among the authors deemed “appropriate for study” at Key Stage 3 (11-14 year olds), for example, are the Catholics Frank Cottrell Boyce, Geoffrey Chaucer, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Jennings and Siegfried Sassoon (though he converted to Catholicism long after his war poetry was written). At Key Stage 4 (the GCSE syllabus) the names of John Dryden (another late convert), Gerard Manley Hopkins, Muriel Spark and Evelyn Waugh are added to the list. However, the presence of a few Catholics on a list of approved authors is in itself no guarantee of the presence of Catholic culture in the classroom.

Even though the creators of the National Curriculum are keen to emphasise the importance of what they call “the English literary heritage”, by which they mean “authors with an enduring appeal that transcends the period in which they were writing, and who have played a significant role in the development of literature in English” [Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2007, 71], their choice of recommended authors reveals a set of post-Protestant secular assumptions which need to be challenged if Catholic culture is to flourish in Catholic schools. We would need to ask why Chaucer is the first (and only pre-Reformation) English author to be deemed appropriate for study, for example. The complete absence of Old English, and the almost complete absence of Middle English (Catholic) classics, reveals a stunning neglect of the English literary heritage rather than a statutory protection of it. What is more, the post-Reformation list of authors is not much more balanced. It appears from the list of suggested authors that there were no Catholics writing in English after the death of Geoffrey Chaucer (with the notable but limited exception of Dryden) until Gerard Manley Hopkins took up his pen in the late nineteenth century. No less a figure than John Henry Newman may once have argued that “English Literature will ever *have been* Protestant” [Newman 1852, 314] but, as authors from G.K. Chesterton [1928, 236-242] to Ian Ker [2003, 1-12] have argued since, the literary outlook was never quite so bleak for Catholics.

### The Post-Reformation Development of Literature

It is less easy to agree with Newman’s analysis of literary history given what we now know about the ideological factors that went into the creation of the English literary canon. As Professor Alison Shell of Durham University, for example, has demonstrated “the unmasking of prejudice, and the dissection of its imaginative complexities, have been central to post-war study within the humanities; and many of the best scholars have also tried to go outside the literary canon, respecting and recovering cultural traditions, texts and histories which earlier generations, influenced by prejudiced hierarchies of taste and importance, have buried, forgotten or despised.” [Shell 1999, 17] What has only recently begun to take place, however, is the inclusion of Catholicism in this list of lost traditions, texts and histories. As Shell, who has led the way in this area, puts it: “There would be a good case for including the Elizabethan or Stuart Catholic alongside women, racial minorities, Jews, homosexuals and the common sort in lists of the historically downtrodden.” She then specifically demonstrates the factors

# Bringing Catholic Culture Back into the English Curriculum

## continued

which have lain behind the suppression of the poetry of Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw, two great Catholic poets from the Early Modern Period.

If the 16th and 17th centuries produced their own particular brand of anti-Catholic prejudice, which has continued to affect literary judgments up to the present day, the age of the novel was scarcely any better. Georg Lukács, for instance, famously argued that “the novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God” [Lukács 1971, 88] while Peter Faulkner claimed that it was the “one secular literary form” [Faulkner 1976, 11], following the argument of Ian Watt’s classic *The Rise of the Novel* [Watts 1957]. Valentine Cunningham took the argument one step further, the novel being, in his view, not merely a product of a newly secular age but one which emerged from a specifically non-Catholic world.

“‘Novels’, I would allege, have rights to that designation only insofar as they display their origins in and their debt to the Northern European Protestant matrix; they have, as it were, the matching DNA.” [Knight & Woodman 2006, 39]

### The Novel

Cunningham is not alone in holding this view: influential novelists from Sir Hugh Walpole to George Orwell have agreed with him, seeing in Catholicism a fundamental threat to the supposed twin foundations of Protestantism and the novel: freedom and the value of the individual.

Mired as some of this analysis is in an anti-Catholic tradition that stretches back long before the rise of the novel, there is some truth in the link between the novel and the post-Protestant secular consensus, a link which might throw into question the elevated status of the novel in Catholic English curricula. It is well known, for example, that the Gothic (a staple diet of A Level syllabi) was grounded in anti-Catholicism. Novels like *The Castle of Otranto* and, more famously, *Dracula* are characterised not just by their sensational plots and their use of the macabre but also by their deep-rooted and, sometimes explicit, opposition to the Catholic Church. As one recent critic has pointed out, “in its ideological structure, the English Gothic novel, though it typically represents Catholicism, is fundamentally a Protestant genre.” [O’Malley, 2006] This writer is not complaining but describing the Victorian crisis in British Protestant identity. This crisis arose from the development of the Oxford Movement, the high-profile conversions to Catholicism and the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, which ensured that Catholicism, far from being a relic of the past, instead “erupted into the present”.

Clearly Catholic educators would not wish to remove the Gothic, the detective story (which W. H. Auden claimed was part of a Protestant tradition) or the novel from their school curricula, not least because redemption is a central Catholic concept and even the novel can be redeemed. There may not be much in the way of traditional Catholic Gothic fiction but the short stories of the impeccably orthodox Flannery O’Connor, for example, are often discussed as representatives of the Southern Gothic, and the role of Catholics in the development of detective fiction is even more difficult to deny. Auden himself wrote admiringly of Chesterton’s Father Brown

but Father Brown was only the first in a very long line of fictional Catholic detectives, and Chesterton the first in a long line of Catholic authors of detective fiction that stretches from Ronald Knox to Graham Greene to Ralph McInerney and William Brodrick.

However, the mere presence of Catholic authors is not in itself enough to undermine post-Protestant, secular understandings of the novel. Where so-called “realism” continues to flourish in Catholic schools, the Catholic teacher needs to be wary. It was only in the nineteenth century that the real became synonymous with unidealised treatments of contemporary life and the deliberate rejection of the supernatural, and yet the Realist Novel soon swept all before it. Rather than accept the post-Protestant secular assumptions that are part and parcel of this realist tradition, teachers should ensure that the recognition in recent literary criticism that “‘realism’ itself has come to be seen as a convention, a selective version of reality” [Knight & Woodman 2006, 4] is taken more seriously when curricula are drawn up.

J.R.R. Tolkien, who was both a Professor of English and an author, knew this full well, which is why “the basic structural mode of *The Lord of the Rings* [is] the ancient and pre-novelistic device of *entrelacement*.” [Shippey 1992, 143] According to Tom Shippey, it was precisely Tolkien’s use of *entrelacement*, or “chronological leap-frogging”, which enabled him to create a book in which the necessarily limited perspectives of individual characters pointed, albeit obliquely, to a larger reality which could only be understood from a perspective outside the fiction itself. In fact, what Tolkien strongly suggested was that ultimately only God could understand that reality.

However, looking back to pre-novelistic devices is not the only option for the Catholic author. As Thomas Woodman points out: “In recent years the rise of postmodernist fiction and of such modes as ‘magic realism’ [as exemplified most obviously by Latin American authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez] have called into question the whole privileging of realism in the novel genre.” [Woodman 1991, 4]

Literary postmodernism, with its deliberate mixing of different styles and media, its playfulness and frequent use of popular modes of representation, is highly popular in schools. Novels like Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* and John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* are staple elements of many A Level syllabi. However, the rise of postmodernism in particular has also enabled Catholics to challenge some of the fundamentally un-Catholic assumptions which lie embedded at the heart of the genre.

Muriel Spark, for example, used her newly acquired Catholic understanding of the world to breathe new life into the novel, most notably in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Here, as in many of her novels, the relationship between the omniscient narrator and the characters mimics the relationship between God and his creatures. There is free will but the characters often fail to realise either how free they are or in what ways their freedom is bound up in the greater freedom of the novelist herself. Spark was not the only Catholic to have



**“What has only recently begun to take place is the inclusion of Catholicism in this list of lost traditions.”**

challenged secular understandings of the novel: Evelyn Waugh's oft-repeated assertion that *Helena* was his best novel has irritated a long line of critics who were expecting another *Brideshead Revisited* and instead got aspects of the postmodern as early as 1940.

In *Helena*, Waugh's narrator plays around with the whole notion of storytelling, as in many postmodern novels. He starts his story twice, firstly as legend and then as history. He also skates over events of apparently huge historical significance and focuses on the life of a clearly anachronistic figure, a horsey girl from the British provinces who becomes Empress Dowager and a modern seeker after truth.

It is this search for truth and, more importantly, the solid reality of the cross which holds the novel together. The postmodern trickery is not designed, as in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, to cast doubt on the Church's understanding of the world, or even on the very nature of truth itself, but to tease the reader into asking the right questions, into becoming a pilgrim.

The image of the pilgrim is perhaps the most important in the book. Helena is a traveller – from Colchester to Rome to Jerusalem – who begins her travels not knowing where she is going or why, but who ends the novel by being led, we assume, by a greater author who works through and with the narrator and his characters. This is postmodernism as written by a Catholic.

Indeed it is only if we take this postmodern mixture of playfulness and hardheadedness seriously that we will be able to appreciate *Helena*. What Waugh gives us is not history and certainly not hagiography but a carefully constructed (and funny) novel about a piece of “wood which has endured”. As Helena herself put it: “Just at this moment when everyone is forgetting it and chattering about the hypostatic union, there's a solid chunk of wood waiting for them to have their silly heads knocked against.”

The rise of the postmodern novel has also thrown English insularity into sharp relief. Umberto Eco may have made more of an impact outside his own country, but in Italy itself he is rivalled by the postmodern Catholic author Antonio Tabucchi. Other Catholics, such as Hungary's Peter Esterházy, have also written from a postmodern perspective, though I would not necessarily recommend his *The Book of Hrabal*, in which two angels in the guise of secret policemen stake out a Hungarian household during the Stalinist 1950s and communicate with God by walkie-talkie.

It is true that Woodman cautions against an overreliance on either postmodernism or magic realism as the critical means by which to escape the constraints of secular realism, arguing instead with Muriel Spark's priest in *Mandelbaum Gate* that “a supernatural process is going on under the surface and within the substance of all things”. [Woodman 1991, 113] Nonetheless, it is also clear that the Catholic English teacher needs to challenge the dominance of the nineteenth century realist novel in the classroom if he is to remain true to his Catholic principles. This does not mean that realism is wholly unimportant but it does mean taking the views of Flannery O'Connor, who thought more deeply about these matters

than most novelists, seriously: “All novelists are fundamentally seekers and describers of the real,” she wrote, “but the realism of each novelist will depend on his view of the ultimate reaches of reality.” [O'Connor 1970, 40-4]

## Conclusion

The post-conciliar popes remind us is that there is much more to Catholic literature than doubt and dissent. As O'Connor once memorably put it: “The question of what effect the Church has on the fiction writer who is a Catholic cannot always be answered by pointing to the presence of Graham Greene among us.” [1970, 143] The individually tortured, dissenting tradition that Greene represents is not the only, or even the main, tradition in Catholic literature, but reading some commentators you would be hard pressed to know it.

We have more resources already at our disposal than we often appreciate. What we lack is a sustained educational movement to help us make use of them. Nonetheless, even without this movement we can begin to work on helping our students to develop a Catholic imagination, as several very different books have recently suggested. [Whitehead 2003; Boyle 2004; Murphy 2008]. And for that to happen the Catholic school needs to take on board Benedict XVI's reminder to Catholic educators in the USA in 2008 that there is much more to Catholic education than the nature of the curriculum: “Catholic identity,” he said, “is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith.”

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# C.S. Lewis and Tolkien on Myth and Knowledge *by Roger Peck*

Fr Roger Peck, assistant priest in Leamington Spa, offers a fascinating overview of some of the key thoughts of the Inklings discussion group. He shows how they adopted what our November 2010 editorial depicted as the Indo-Greek epistemological affirmation of tension between physical sensation and spiritual reflection. However, they did not feel that this “incurably abstract” manner of knowing was how “we were meant” to know. Myth points the way to a proper harmony between the two, and Incarnation, the foundation and fulfilment of myth (and, for *Faith* movement, of everything else), enables this “recovery”.

J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were members of a literary discussion group known as the *Inklings*. According to another of its members, Owen Barfield, the *Inklings* shared a *Weltanschauung* – a world outlook<sup>1</sup>. The members of this literary association were all Christian and their common worldview was what C.S. Lewis might have described as “supernaturalist”.

Ever since men were able to think, they have been wondering about what this universe really is and how it came to be there. And, very roughly, two views have been held. First, there is what is called the materialist view. People who take that view think that matter and space just happen to exist, and always have existed, nobody knows why; and that the matter, behaving in certain fixed ways, has just happened, by a sort of fluke, to produce creatures like ourselves who are able to think... The other view is the religious view. According to it, what is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know. That is to say, it is conscious, and has purposes, and prefers one thing to another. And on this view it made the universe... to produce creatures like itself – I mean, like itself to the extent of having minds.<sup>2</sup>

## The Need for a Third Eye

Although this mind “behind the universe” is not something that can be seen, touched, heard or smelt, according to Aquinas all human knowledge originates in sense-perception<sup>3</sup>. Knowledge of the imperceptible must, therefore, originate in the perceptible. The material universe must somehow be able to point beyond itself and we must develop a “third-eye” that enables us to see what it is pointing to. This “third-eye” is not the eye of the senses or the eye of the mind; it is the eye of the heart<sup>4</sup>.

Originally intended simply as a pun on the word “Ink”<sup>5</sup>, *Inklings* is an apt name for a group of writers who saw in the written word an important vehicle for communicating *inklings* of the truth. In particular the Inklings recognised and understood the important role that myth and fairy-story<sup>6</sup> had to play. Lewis was particularly influenced in this by the authors George MacDonald<sup>7</sup> and G.K. Chesterton.

Chesterton said of fairy-stories (or “nursery-tales”) that:

These tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water.<sup>8</sup>

## Recovery of Wonder

This is the essence of what Tolkien, in his essay *On Fairy-Stories*<sup>9</sup>, calls recovery. By placing the familiar (or over-familiar) in an unfamiliar setting we see it, as it were, for the first time. We see it afresh. Tolkien, in the same essay, provides his own example:

We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves.<sup>10</sup>

Tolkien’s reference to “ancient shepherds” seems to carry with it an implicit criticism of “modern” and “urban”; that modern man, surrounded by concrete and reliant on mechanical devices, has lost touch with nature. In *On Fairy-Stories* Tolkien likens the way we take things for granted to hoarding. We have appropriated those very things which once attracted us “by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape” and locked them away in our hoard; and having acquired them we have ceased to look at them. Having gained them we have lost them; but creative fantasy can help us recover them. Creative fantasy can open up our hoard so that the locked things may fly away, so that in losing them we can regain them.

Recovery enables us to see things anew; or, as Tolkien puts it, “as we are (or were) meant to see them – as things apart from ourselves”.<sup>11</sup> An example from Tolkien’s own great work of mythology, his Middle Earth Literature<sup>12</sup>, would be the decision made by the elven princess, Arwen, to forgo the immortal life in order to cleave to Aragorn (a man)<sup>13</sup>. This motif casts in a new light the precious gift of self that we bestow on the other when we utter those words “I do” at the altar. Through Arwen’s sacrifice we perceive “anew” within our hearts the nobility and beauty of the gift. Aragorn’s relationship with Arwen is pure and chaste and her sacrifice is very real. She must “renounce the twilight” of her people; condemned to wandering the woods of Lothlórien in grief at the passing of Aragorn until the end of her days. This sacrifice speaks of the nobility and permanence of her choice; for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

## Myth as Recovery

In his book *An Experiment in Criticism* C.S. Lewis considers the case of the Greek myth Orpheus. Lewis summarises the story:



## “Recovery enables us to see things anew”

There was a man who sang and played the harp so well that even beasts and trees crowded to hear him. And when his wife died he went down alive into the land of the dead and made music before the King of the Dead till even he had compassion and gave him back his wife, on condition that he led her up out of that land without once looking back to see her until they came into the light. But when they were nearly out, one moment too soon, the man looked back, and she vanished from him forever.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis suggests that there is an extra-literary quality about the above outline “set down in the first words that came to hand” that transcends the particular presentation. The fact that Virgil’s account of this myth is framed in words far more poetic than Lewis’, detracts little if anything from this. A synopsis of, say, an Alistair McLean novel, on the other hand, would not translate in the same way. Reading a synopsis of *Where Eagles Dare* would not have the same impact as reading the book itself.

“This ‘third-eye’ is the eye of the heart”

That aspect of the *Orpheus* story that we perceive and feel in the summary just as much as in the original is its mythological character. A myth, contrary to popular usage, is not simply a story that isn’t true. A myth is truth communicated in story-form. Furthermore, the truth that the *Orpheus* myth communicates is, according to Lewis, a truth about the nature of myths. *Orpheus* is self-referential; it is a myth about myths! Lewis explains this in his essay *Myth Became Fact*.<sup>15</sup>

In *Myth Became Fact*<sup>16</sup> Lewis examines the difference between knowledge and experience. Whilst the human intellect is “incurably abstract” our experience is always of the concrete and the real.

While we are loving the man, bearing pain, enjoying pleasure, we are not intellectually apprehending Pleasure, Pain or Personality. When we begin to do so, on the other hand, the concrete realities sink to the level of mere instances or examples: we are no longer dealing with them, but with that which they exemplify. This is our dilemma – either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste – or, more strictly, to lack one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or to lack another kind because we are outside it ... You cannot *study* Pleasure in the moment of nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyse the nature of humour while roaring with laughter. But when else can you really know these things? ‘If only my toothache would stop, I could write another chapter about Pain.’ But once it stops, what do I know about pain?<sup>17</sup>

To taste and not to know, or to know and not to taste, this was the dilemma facing Orpheus; for he could be assured of his wife’s presence only so long as he didn’t cast his loving gaze upon her. As soon as he looked, he lost. But for Lewis myth provides a partial solution to the dilemma. “In the enjoyment of a great myth”, he says, “we come

nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction.”<sup>18</sup> When, for example, we read of Arwen’s great gift and sacrifice to (and for) Aragorn we are moved by it. We experience it rather than think it or know it. We taste it. But the thing that we taste is not a concrete reality but a universal principle. We can, of course name it but when we do so the myth collapses into allegory.<sup>19</sup> “It is only”, says Lewis, “while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely”.<sup>20</sup> This is perhaps why Tolkien, as he admits in a letter to Milton Waldman,<sup>21</sup> dislikes allegory. Allegory appeals to the intellect and the head, but myth appeals to the heart.

Although Tolkien identifies myths and fairy stories as means of recovery he makes the interesting observation, almost in passing, that they are not the only means of recovery but that “humility is enough”.<sup>22</sup>

### Incarnation as Founding and Fulfilling Recovery

In his essay *Bluspels and Flanasferes* Lewis makes the distinction between meaning and truth. He writes:

Meaning... is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth but its condition.<sup>23</sup>

“Allegory appeals to the intellect and the head, but myth appeals to the heart”

An idea is either true or false but both true ideas and false ideas must be meaningful, and it is imagination that makes them meaningful before reason makes them either true or false. For Lewis the imagination is the organ of meaning as reason is the organ of truth. But myth lives in that middle ground between truth and meaning, experience and knowledge, abstract thought and concrete reality, reason and imagination, head and heart. And as myth transcends thought, says Lewis, “Incarnation transcends myth”.

He writes:

Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens – at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Orsis, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) *under Pontius Pilate*. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.<sup>24</sup>

Salvation History is not so much history as His Story – God’s story. The Gospel is a story just as surely as God is its author. Myth truly did become fact without ceasing to be myth. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. The Gospel is a myth that we

# C.S. Lewis and Tolkien on Myth and Knowledge continued

can both know (as truth) and experience (as life) because we can both know *of* God and know Him. We can experience truth as well as know it because truth is a person. St. Jerome said that “ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ”.<sup>25</sup> Lewis puts it slightly differently:

To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other.<sup>26</sup>

The Gospel is a myth; but it is the myth that became fact. It is not just a story to be read or a fact to be learned, it is also a drama to be enacted. Jesus is the way because we are part of the story, characters in the divine drama. We don't just know it and experience it, we also live it.

“Meaning requires a mind”

C.S. Lewis's essay *Myth Became Fact* concludes:

[T]his is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.<sup>27</sup>

## Recognising the Creator

A universe that is the result of random forces of nature is not purposed; and meaning requires a mind in which to inhere. When God called Abraham, a people were given a future; and somewhere along the way those people would inevitably look back to discover that they also had a past. Looking back they could see God's hand at work in the events of history. God places us in the cleft of the rock and covers us with his hand until his glory has passed by. Only then can we see Him (cf. Ex 33:22). The mythological character of this passage is clear. We live life forwards but understand life backwards. Day unto day takes up the story but night unto night makes known the message. (cf. Ps 19:2-3) We cannot see God face to face but we can see His back (cf. Ex 33:23). The wheel of life has been straightened out and become a story. Choices matter, things serve a purpose and life has meaning; and it is the *logos*, the mind of God, the creator of all that is and the author of history, who provides the necessary context.

But to understand (to *stand under*) the *logos* requires imagination. Instead of feeling things psychically or observing them scientifically we need to appreciate them poetically.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Colin Duriez, *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*, (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003), 83.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 29-30.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae*, trans. McDermott, 547, ST 3a 60 4.

<sup>4</sup>This idea of a “Third-Eye” is from Peter Kreeft's audio talks available online down [www.peterkreeft.com](http://www.peterkreeft.com)

<sup>5</sup>Duriez, *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis*, 79.

<sup>6</sup>Tolkien saw no essential difference between Fairy Story and Myth (“the higher and lower mythologies”) for “the inhabitants of Olympus and Faërie live by the same life just as in the mortal world do kings and peasants”, and this life is breathed into them by their author. “The gods may derive their colour and beauty from the high splendours of nature, but it was man who obtained these for them, abstracted them from sun and moon and cloud; their personality they get direct from him; the shadow or flicker of divinity that is upon them they receive through him from the invisible world, the Supernatural” Tolkien, *The Monsters*, 123.

<sup>7</sup>Indeed Lewis said of MacDonald's *Phantastes* that it had “baptised his imagination”. C.S. Lewis, *George MacDonald An Anthology*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), xxxviii.

<sup>8</sup>Chesterton, G.K., *Orthodoxy*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 59.

<sup>9</sup>Tolkien, J.R.R. On *Fairy-Stories*. In *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien. HarperCollins, (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 109-161.

<sup>10</sup>Tolkien, *The Monsters*, 146.

<sup>11</sup>Tolkien, *The Monsters*, 146.

<sup>12</sup>The Silmarillion, *The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>13</sup>cf. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 306-309.

<sup>14</sup>Lewis, C.S. *An Experiment in Criticism*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1961; 21992) p 40.

<sup>15</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Myth Became Fact*, in *Essay Collection: Faith Christianity and the Church*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 138-142.

<sup>16</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Myth Became Fact*, in *Essay Collection: Faith Christianity and the Church*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 138-142.

<sup>17</sup>Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 140.

<sup>18</sup>Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 140.

<sup>19</sup>Barfield makes the distinction between Allegory, the hypostatization (ascribing material existence to) of ideas, and myth; “the true child of Meaning, begotten on imagination.” (cf. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973, 201).

<sup>20</sup>Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 141.

<sup>21</sup>Tolkien, *The Letters*, 145, no. 131.

<sup>22</sup>Tolkien, *The Monsters*, 146.

<sup>23</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Bluspels and Flanasferes*, in *Rehabilitations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 157-158 cited in Charlie W. Starr, *Meaning, meanings and epistemology in C.S. Lewis*, available from [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-30887538\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-30887538_ITM); accessed on 12th February 2009.

<sup>24</sup>Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 141.

<sup>25</sup>Jerome, *Prologue of the commentaries of St. Jerome on the prophet Isaiah in The Divine Office: The Liturgy of the Hours to the Roman Rite*, (London: Collins, 1974) vol. III, The Second Reading for the Feast of St. Jerome, 30 September, p 301\*.

<sup>26</sup>Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 141.

<sup>27</sup>Lewis, *Essay Collection*, 142.



# Pascal's Wager: Insurance for Agnostics

By Robert Kurland, retired Professor of Chemistry, Pennsylvania

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls who, on finding one pearl of great value, sold all that he had and bought it." (Matt 13:45,46, RSV).*

Among the pile of Pascal's papers that were to be the "Pensées" was a proposition that has kept philosophers and theologians occupied for the last 350 years, Pascal's wager: betting on God is the prudent option.<sup>1-6</sup> A new way to understand the wager, which is outlined below, is that of contemporary decision analysis (strategies for winning).

First, some background: Pascal believed it was impossible to show from reason alone that God exists:

"If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, since having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is."<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand we can know God by faith:

"But by faith we know His existence; in glory we shall know His nature."

This is what Pascal wants us to believe: that there is an afterlife, and its benefits are infinite. Whatever is lost by believing, even if there were no God, is finite, whereas that which is gained, if there is a God, is infinite:

"But there is here an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain, a chance of gain against a finite number of chances of loss, and what you stake is finite."

There is a problem with his analysis. Positing an infinite reward introduces paradoxes.<sup>8</sup> These, however, can be circumvented by contemporary decision analysis, by use of the principle of "mini-max regret".<sup>9,10</sup> Expressed qualitatively,<sup>11</sup> the idea is that you choose the option that will give rise to the mildest "I wish I had done that" feeling. Here's an example: you have a choice between investing in a savings account (at a low interest rate), a "conservative" mutual stock fund (at a somewhat higher expected return rate, but with some risk), and a speculative North Sea oil exploration venture (very risky, but with a high return). You quantify "regret" as the expected return from an investment less the best return from the investment you didn't choose. The mini-max regret principle would have you choose the option with the least negative regret, as an optimistic choice (for reasonable numbers, the North Sea Oil venture). For Pascal's wager, it would lead you to act as if God and an afterlife did exist.

The argument of Pascal's wager is thus addressed to the prudent optimist – the agnostic who believes in the *possibility* of an afterlife (and God) – and is willing to act so as to gain that reward, even in the midst of doubts. Is belief then a matter of will? The agnostic accepts the premise of the wager, but says

"I am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?"

Pascal responds:

"Endeavour then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. You would like to attain faith and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it... There are people... who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they *began* (emphasis added); by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc."

Now, can one "fake it until you make it" as Pascal suggests? Or will the sacraments be ineffective, because the motive of the recipient is mercenary? Which of these Catechism dicta is appropriate?:

(1131) "The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace.... They bear fruit in those who receive them with *the required dispositions*." (emphasis added)

or

(1128) "The sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the *recipient*, but by the power of God." (emphasis added)

The second suggests that if one prays for faith, then the "top-down" approach will work, starting from the head and eventually through to the heart, or, as Pascal suggests:

"...at each step you take on this road you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognise that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing." ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Rescher, *Pascal's Wager – a study of practical reasoning in philosophical theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>A good summary on the web, with additional references (including other web sites) is given by Alan Hajek: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/>

<sup>3</sup>Daniel Garber, *What Happens after Pascal's Wager – living faith and rational belief* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>Itzhak Gilboa, *Theory of Decision under Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 38-40.

<sup>5</sup>Bas C. van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1989), pp.52-53.

<sup>6</sup>James A. Connor, *Pascal's Wager – the man who played dice with God* (San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 2006).

<sup>7</sup>All quotations are from Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* tr.by W.E. Trotter (Mineola, NY: Dove Philosophical Classics, 2003), #233, pp. 65-69.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Bartha, "Taking stock of infinite value: Pascal's wager and relative utilities." *Synthese* 154 (2007), 5-52.

<sup>9</sup>James O. Berger, *Statistical Decision Theory and Bayesian Analysis* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985) p.18.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 377, 387.

<sup>11</sup>The decision analysis is given in more detail at [http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=171231979581598](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=171231979581598)



# Letters to the Editor

The Editor, St. Mary Magdalen's Clergy House, Peter Avenue,  
Willesden Green, London NW10 2DD [editor@faith.org.uk](mailto:editor@faith.org.uk)

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST'S SUFFERING

Dear Father Editor,

Many thanks for your September issue on the Primacy of Christ. In Richard Conrad's piece, "Christ's Primacy in Creation as Resource for the New Evangelisation", he states that "The concept of a transferred punishment is alive and well (if not always expressed bluntly) despite having little (I should say no) basis in Scripture, Liturgy or Tradition".

I agree that this is a topic that is very often misunderstood. For many people whom I know, this "substitution" theory is the only way they have heard the central mystery of Christianity explained. I was wondering if *Faith* magazine could examine the reason for Christ's suffering. Why it was so brutal? Was Christ's bloody death demanded by God as reparation for sin? This is the crucial question, but an answer could also look at the problem that suffering presents to the modern mindset. You could look at wider questions like the value of suffering in Christian spirituality, and the role of the devil in Christ's own suffering.

You could explore for us how the suffering of Christ is not because God demanded punishment, but because Man rejected the Messiah. No matter whether they do this with deliberate malice or through ignorance and weakness because "they know not what they do", the effect was to crucify the Lord.

Yours faithfully  
Luke O'Sullivan  
Beverley Close  
Fforestfach  
Swansea

Dear Father Editor,

Thank you for inviting me to respond to Mr. O'Sullivan's letter. He points out that "for many people" the "substitution" theory is the only way they have heard the Redemption explained, and he urges us to explain why "Christ's suffering... was so brutal."

Mr. O'Sullivan is right to say "the suffering of Christ is not because God demanded punishment, but because Man rejected the Messiah." Christ's Crucifixion is the "exemplar" of human wickedness and weakness: it brings together cruelty, fear of truth, fear of standing by our friends, the sacrifice of justice to expediency, and many other faults – and shows that human sin is ultimately the rejection of *God*.

Christ's Blood is the Blood of the new and eternal *Covenant*. God-become-man endured what humanity threw at Him, not with anger or retaliation, but with forgiveness. Hence Our Lord's Passion is God's final and irrevocable *Pledge of Loyalty* towards us, come what may. Mysteriously, we can resist; but when Jesus opened His arms on the Cross it was an expression of love that was made with enough power to draw all ages to Himself (cf. John 12:32) – "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (II Cor. 5:18-19).

Having committed Himself to His Sacrifice by instituting the Holy Eucharist, that is, having entered upon His Passion, Jesus could say, about God the Father, "Henceforth you know him and have seen him" (John 14:7). Christ Crucified is *the* Revelation of God, the Father's Word spoken with an eloquence that cannot be surpassed, an eloquence that powerfully draws our response.

That is why Christ's Sacrifice is *the* channel of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is symbolised by the Blood-and-Water, that is, the *living* water, as Jesus had predicted (John 7:37-39, cf. 4:10). If the Holy Spirit is

the Divine Love in Person, He fittingly comes through the great revelation of God's Love. And He comes to replace our hatred and pride by love, to conform us to Christ, to re-form us as the Father's beloved children, destined to inherit a share in Christ's glory (cf. Rom. 8:17).

Jesus' "journey" through suffering and death to Resurrection is the pattern and the power for our journey – both our journey through death to a share in Christ's Resurrection, and (in a more subtle way) our dying to sin and rising to the new life of grace (cf. Rom. 6:2-11) which is a journey often only completed in Purgatory where we "joy to undergo the shadow of Thy Cross sublime." The Holy Spirit, sent into the world for the forgiveness of sins through Christ's Death and Resurrection, is the Paraclete, the "Friend for the campaign", who leads us on this journey.

So Christ's suffering reveals the "Love of God" even more than it reveals the "sin of man. In this dread act" their "strength is tried; and victory remains with Love." True, we cannot fathom Christ's pain, nor His love, nor the power of His Sacrifice. We need a whole range of ways if we are to begin to explore this Mystery, and Scripture, Liturgy and Tradition offer us a whole range of ways. But it seems to me that, if we want a "core" around which to build our understanding of the Redemption, we cannot do better than to start with Jesus' own teaching as recorded by St. John, and see the Cross as the revelation of God's love, a revelation powerful enough to bring us the re-creating Love it reveals, a revelation that is applied to us in the Sacraments and especially in the Holy Eucharist.

Yours faithfully  
Richard Conrad, O.P.  
Blackfriars  
Oxford



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## THE AUTHOR OF JOHN’S GOSPEL

*Dear Father Editor,*

Many of us sympathise with Fr Andrew Byrne’s critical comments about “unbalanced conclusions” in his review of The new CTS Catholic Bible (*Faith*, Nov/Dec 2010, pp 21/22) – in particular the authorship of St. John’s Gospel.

After years preparing forensic reports for international courts (and being cross-examined under oath), I have the greatest respect for the factual quality of St. John’s Gospel.

To me, the narratives in that gospel indicate a writer who focused on facts, either experienced by himself or obtained by searching for and interviewing eye witnesses. Also, his omissions indicate a writer who restrained himself from describing any event where witnesses were not available to him. These are rare qualities in any writer.

I am familiar with the works of Fr Brown, C K Barrett etc who assume the Fourth Gospel is non-factual and written 60-70 years after the crucifixion. Against such works, I believe there is much objective evidence, and would be happy to make this available to interested readers.

*Yours faithfully*  
*John Leonard*  
*Totnes Walk*  
*London*

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## OUR DISCUSSIONS OF THE RISE OF HOMOSEXUAL CULTURE

*Dear Father Editor,*

Jane Vitale is concerned at “how much homosexuality gets coverage in your magazine” (January/February 2011) and suggests you should not make it your “main focus”. Over a twelve month period your coverage amounted to approximately 2.65% of your print output; hardly a “main focus”, and since the subject relates both to Faith and Morals and to Faith and Reason it is surely entirely within your remit.

“Horror and Hope” (*Faith* March/April 2010) along with “Contextualising abuse reporting” (*Faith* May/June 2010) and the ensuing correspondence, drawing on events as far back as the 1970s, contributed to the breaking of the taboo on reasoned challenge to a Lobby intolerant of any questioning of its assumptions. This Lobby had brought about the closure of Faith-based Adoption agencies, aggravating the crisis in placing children for adoption, and was poised to put on the Statute Book laws which would have imposed its own opinions on Faith-based schools and anyone else who disagreed.

Pope Benedict confirmed the importance of “contextualising”. In his Christmas greeting to the College of Cardinals. (*L’Osservatore Romano* 22-29 December 2010). He said that to resist the destructive forces currently at work in the Church and the World we must put them in the context of their ideological foundations. He too referred back to the 1970s and the “fundamental perversion of the concept of ethos”. He recalled, “It was maintained – even within the realm of Catholic theology

- that there was no such thing as evil in itself or good in itself”. Daphne Mcleod’s experience (*Faith* January/February 2011) shows the practical outcomes of this drift with the young being misled even within the Church by attempts to set aside Judeo-Christian history scripture tradition and teaching.

This topic has never been nor could be Faith magazine’s “main focus” but it is not peripheral and the era when a fractional and manipulative minority could demand those who differ from it remain silent are over.

*Yours faithfully*  
*Kenneth Kavanagh*  
*Byron Crescent*  
*Bedford*

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## THE NEED FOR A UNIVERSAL SPECIFIER

*Dear Father Editor,*

I understand that sub-atomic particles (all of them or only some?) have given life-spans. Who tells a given particle that its time for existence is now at an end?!

*Yours faithfully*  
*Damian Goldie*  
*Church Hill*  
*Totland Bay*



# Comment on the Comments

by William Oddie

## A Popular Acclamation of Sanctity

The speed of Pope John Paul's beatification (as well as other, I suppose predictable, criticisms) led, when it was announced in January, to a wave of opposition to it which I have to admit I found deeply depressing, predictable or not. This is not a subject on which I can speak dispassionately, since the late pope's pontificate had a great deal to do with my own conversion and that of many others: I didn't cross the Tiber because I was all that impressed by the English Catholic bishops: I came for papal authority, out of a Church which had no means of coming to a mind about what it believed about anything.

The late Pope did more than any pope of the last century to defend and reassert beyond any doubt the stable and objective character of Catholic teaching – more even than Pius X with his great encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, since modernist incursions had become very much more powerfully established during the pontificate of the unhappy Pope Paul than they had been in the early years of the century. Pope John Paul firmly re-established the fact that the Magisterium was given by God and not invented by theologians, after a period of utter doctrinal chaos. He saw off once and for all the so-called “alternative magisterium” of Küng, Schillebeeckx and their ilk: and as a result he made it possible for hundreds of thousands of non-Catholics like myself, tired of the uncertainties of secularised versions of Christianity, to come into full communion with the Holy See.

We have short memories; we take our recent history too easily for granted. If you doubt me when I say that he made it possible for many to become Catholics, despite their own perception of the deep attractions of the Catholic tradition, consider the case of Malcolm Muggeridge. In *Something Beautiful for God*, in explanation of why he resisted becoming a Catholic, despite even the urging of Mother Teresa, he pointed to the circumstance

...that the Church, for inscrutable reasons of its own, has decided to have a reformation just when the previous one – Luther's – is finally running into the sand.

I make no judgement about something which, as a non-member, is no concern of mine; but if I were a member, then I should be forced to say that, in my opinion, if men were to be stationed at the doors of churches with whips to drive worshippers away, or inside the religious orders specifically to discourage vocations, or among the clergy to spread alarm and despondency, they could not hope to be as effective in achieving these ends as are trends and policies seemingly now dominant within the Church.

Feeling so, it would be preposterous to seek admission, more particularly as, if the ecumenical course is fully run, luminaries of the Church to which I nominally belong, like the former Bishop of Woolwich, for whom – putting it mildly – I have little regard, will in due course take their place in the Roman Catholic hierarchy among the heirs of St. Peter.

But then, Karol Wojtyla became pope: and within a very few years, Muggeridge became a Catholic at last. So did many others, including myself. That is why I was elated at the news of his beatification: because of this great pope, I had been enabled at last to come home; it is also why I was at first so depressed by the widespread hostility to the announcement, even within the Church. I thought, in the pope's final years, that we had moved beyond all that. Now, it seemed almost as though we were back to the days of Peter Hebblethwaite.

Opposition to the beatification of Pope John Paul came from three main sources: from secular anti-Catholics; from “liberal” Catholics; and from those who generally follow the line of members of the SSPX, who persistently dismiss the late pope as a “liberal” or a “modernist”.

To take them in order. Secular anti-Catholic opposition may be exemplified by *USA Today* [<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/Religion/post/2011/01/saint-pope-john-paul-sex-abuse-crisis/1>], which contemptuously characterised the process of canonisation itself as being a recognition, in the words of one Cathy Lynn Grossman, “that someone who has lived a life of exemplary holiness is now in heaven, whispering on humans' behalf in the ear of a miracle-working God”.

During the five years since his death, she insisted, a lot more had been happening than the Vatican's due process and the approval of the necessary miracle:

... what else happened in those five years? The deep and ugly reaches of clergy sexual abuse, once treated by the Vatican as a uniquely American trouble, were revealed to be a global scourge. And the failures of various Vatican leaders, appointees of John Paul, to address and resolve the crisis were examined in headline after headline.

She drew her readers' attention to *We Are Church*, summarising their objections approvingly: “Their case”, wrote Ms Grossman, “is that he failed to confront the abuse scandal, that he squashed the Liberation Theology movement, that he shut off discussion on gender equality and that he did not recognise.... that use of condoms can be a moral choice for preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS.” Her final sentence was set in bold, making clear enough her own personal view of all this religious mumbo-jumbo: “Do you pray to saints to take your cause to God? Or do you see miracles as great human accomplishments of science, strength or personal will?”

Let's look at the objections of *We Are Church* ([www.we-are-church.org/joomla](http://www.we-are-church.org/joomla)) at greater length (and since they



## “Opposition to the beatification of Pope John Paul came from ... anti-Catholics, ‘liberal’ Catholics and those who ... dismiss the late pope as a ‘liberal’”.

are virtually identical to the secular objections, this will do as an elaboration of the anti-Catholic view as well). The group said this:

It was John Paul II's ... need for hierarchical control that ... lead [sic] to the constriction of theology with scarring impact on people's lives. His attempt to discredit liberation theology left thousands working for liberation without the full theological and ecclesial support they deserved while suffering under brutal political regimes.

Spiritual authoritarianism was also seen in John Paul II's attempt to suppress discourse on gender equality which, in turn, deprived the Catholic world of the gifts women would bring to church leadership. His stance against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people places him in complicity with local churches and governments who continue to deny the civil and moral equality of LGBT persons. Additionally, his repeated denouncements of condom use complicated the moral choice of millions around the world attempting to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and promote sexual health.

On top of that, said John L Allen, [<http://nronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/vatican-announces-may-1-beatification-john-paul-ii>],

...some Catholic liberals who saw John Paul II as overly conservative have suggested that his cause is being fast-tracked in order to score political points in internal Catholic debates.

“Overly conservative”, however, is not what the followers of Archbishop Lefebvre (who strenuously object, I'm not sure why, to being called Lefebvrists) think he was. As George Weigel noted, the SSPX sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, unprompted, “a thick dossier charging John Paul with jettisoning the idea of personal sin for ‘social sin’, preaching a worldly rather than eschatological hope, and promoting inter-religious dialogue”. This hostility to the late Pope was virulently reflected at the SSPX grass roots: I quote just one of them briefly (this is from the copious comments of one correspondent after

I had written about the announcement of Pope John Paul's beatification in my *Catholic Herald* blog): “Pope Benedict is bringing the Church into disrepute by beatifying a Pope who presided over the almost total collapse of the Church on his watch. Far from being a great pope, history will show him to have been one of the worst popes in the entire history of the Church.”

History, I believe, will show on the contrary that he was one of the greatest (incidentally, “on his watch”, membership of the church world-wide grew from around 700 million to 1.2 billion: there was no collapse, despite the doctrinal chaos in Europe and America that he did so much to overcome).

This is how George Weigel, amazingly in the pages of *The Tablet* [<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/15794>], summed up his achievement:

In 1978, no one expected that the defining figure of the last quarter of the twentieth century would be a Polish priest and bishop. Christianity was finished as a world-shaping force, according to the opinion-leaders of the time; it might endure as a vehicle of personal piety, but Christian conviction would play no role in shaping the twenty-first-century world. Yet within six months of his election, John Paul II had demonstrated the dramatic capacity of Christian conviction to create a revolution of conscience that, in turn, created a new and powerful form of politics – the politics that eventually led to the revolutions of 1989 and the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe.

Then there was his evangelism. John Paul II made Catholicism compelling and interesting in a world that imagined that humanity had “outgrown” its need for God, Christ and the Church. In virtually every part of the world, the late Pope's unapologetic preaching of Jesus Christ as the answer to the question that is every human life drew a positive response, and millions of lives were changed as a result. This was not supposed to happen, in late modernity. But it did, through the

“miraculous” preaching of a gospel of compassion, but a gospel without compromise, that engaged the world while challenging it to live its aspiration to freedom more nobly.

And then there was John Paul's social doctrine, which, again against all expectations, put the Catholic Church at the centre of the world's conversation about the politics, economics and public culture of the post-Communist future. In 1978, did anyone really expect that papal social encyclicals would be debated in the pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, or that a pope would rivet the world's attention in two dramatic defences of the universality of human rights before the General Assembly of the United Nations? No one expected that, including the cardinals who elected Karol Wojtya as Pope. But it happened.

A man's achievements, of course, aren't what his beatification is about. And a beatification doesn't mean that someone never made mistakes. Pope John Paul clearly did (think of his trust in Cardinal Sodano and all that led to, including his support for Fr Maciel and his appointment – on the advice of nuncios appointed by Sodano – of a whole raft of weak and liberal bishops most of whom are still in place and still weakening the Church). It is still surely the case, nevertheless, that on any reasonable view his mistakes were massively less significant than his achievements.

But Pope John Paul is being beatified because of his heroic sanctity, a sanctity so evident (especially to those close to him) that it led to a popular eruption of demands that he be canonised, not after a five or ten year waiting period, but immediately: *Santo Subito*. The five year waiting period to begin the cause was waived on account of what the Congregation for the Causes of Saints described as the “imposing fame for holiness” enjoyed by John Paul II during his lifetime: in all other respects, the usual procedures ran their course.

I believe that he was a great, as well as a holy, man: but holiness is always more important. Everyone can surely agree about that: and perhaps we should all focus on it a little more.

# Notes From Across the Atlantic

by Peter Mitchell



## YOUNG AMERICAN CATHOLICS: RETURNING TO ORTHODOXY?

In an ironic twist, part of the campus of the Catholic University of America (CUA), namely the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, has become the focal point for a generation of young American Catholics who are passionately committed to speaking out in defence of the right to life for the unborn. The annual National March for Life, held each year on January 22, the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision legalising abortion, regularly sees upwards of 400,000 Catholics, Evangelicals, and others proceed down Washington D.C.'s Pennsylvania Avenue to the steps of the Supreme Court to pray and witness in defence of life. The march has arguably become one of the most inspiring and uplifting days on the American Catholic calendar, especially in recent years as the event has become more and more overtly a rally composed predominantly of young people. It seems that any young American Catholic who wants to be where the action is tries to attend. The irony lies in the fact that some 45 years ago, CUA was the centre of a very different sort of youth rally supported by a very different generation of young American Catholics.

Nowadays, the annual Mass and Prayer Vigil for Life, held the night before the march in the vast basilica, has become such a crammed and cramped experience that youth groups who wish to attend must arrive four to six hours early if they want so much as merely a space to sit on the floor. Additional Masses are held around the clock to accommodate the thousands of school groups, parish youth groups, families, and others who find whatever way they

can to make it to Washington from all over the country for the march. The crypt of the basilica becomes a giant dormitory for the night, with sleeping bags and inflatable air mattresses filling every available nook and cranny. Meanwhile, Eucharistic adoration throughout the night is always filled with young people offering up an unceasing litany of Rosaries, Chaplets of Divine Mercy, songs, and silent prayer, while any priest who sits down and puts on a stole to offer the Sacrament of Penance will quickly find a line of young people forming for confession and could easily spend several hours dispensing the healing power of Christ's sacramental grace to his children.

Here in Nebraska we are a mere 1,200 miles from Washington, which translates into a 24-hour overnight ride on chartered buses for those who wish to participate in the march. This year over 400 students from our Catholic high schools as well as the University of Nebraska made the trek, willingly enduring a total of 48 hours sandwiched together without showers or beds for the sake of just two full days at the march and connected events. When I asked the 21-year-old student leader of the trip what was the chief motivation behind him and his fellow undergraduates making the journey, he replied that it was primarily a spiritual motivation: "Because it is an overwhelming experience to be united with so many other young people in praying together and witnessing to the joy of being pro-life." Another young man, wearing a Divine Mercy T-shirt and sporting a Rosary wrapped around his wrist, also acknowledged that their sacrifice had a partly political motivation: "We want to show our President and our government that we are a pro-life nation." He and his friends meet weekly at 8 a.m. outside

the local abortion mill to pray the Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy as Planned Parenthood opens for its gruesome business. The young priest who accompanied the students, the chaplain at the Newman Center student parish, said that while he would perhaps not have been motivated to put in the time and effort to go to the March for Life on his own, the enthusiasm and desire of his students convinced him that he needed to attend with them personally. "They realise that someone has to stand up and say that abortion is wrong," he said. The generation that has lost one out of five of its members to abortion in this country seems to be more poignantly aware than any other of the tragic cost of the culture of death as well as the ever-present urgency of the need to confront its lies courageously. Yet at the same time, one of the most overwhelming and evident aspects of the March for Life is the contagious joy which pervades the entire gathering, the exuberant and spontaneous display of belonging and being committed together to the cause of goodness and right. The march is no dour or mournful gathering of angry political activists. It is rather a convincingly joyful witness to the beauty and truth of the Gospel of Life.

Yet, and here is the irony, back in the spring of 1967 American Catholic youth gathered in the very same National Shrine to rally in support of Father Charles Curran, the then-youthful leader of a generation of theologians who dissented against the moral teaching of the Magisterium. Less than fifty years ago nearly the entire student body of CUA went on strike to protest the dismissal of Curran from his post as assistant professor of theology by the CUA Board of Trustees – composed entirely of American bishops. Curran had come under investigation by the



bishops for his controversial teaching in the area of sexual morality. The youthful protesters who demonstrated on CUA's campus, supported by faculty and students at Catholic universities across the United States, demanded – in the name of academic freedom – that Curran be reinstated. The passion and enthusiasm with which that generation of youth rallied led to Curran's reinstatement, with tenure, as a full professor of theology at the nation's sole Pontifical university. From that unassailable platform, in the name of steering the Church to a place where its teaching would be “relevant,” Curran was able to lead theologians across the United States in their definitive Statement of Dissent from Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in the following summer of 1968. The long term result of that youthful movement of dissent has been that an entire generation of American Catholics still exists that by and large knows very little of the beautiful vision of Catholic moral teaching on marriage and family.

Curran's moment of appearing to embody the future of the American Catholic Church came and went. While the presence of dissent in the theology faculties of America's Catholic colleges and universities has had and continues to have a remarkable half-life, it is apparent today that such dissent is only “relevant” to those who are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the life of the American Catholic Church. The theology of dissent certainly does not have any significant foothold among the under-30 generation who form the backbone of the pro-life movement in this country. Their lived experience of the effects of contraception, abortion, divorce, and infidelity on their generation has made them passionate about the need for our entire culture – not only Catholics – to embrace the challenge and authentic freedom embodied in the fullness of the Church's teaching on marriage, family, and sexuality. The proverbial tide has turned in favour of the truth of the Gospel of Life among today's generation of young Catholic witnesses.

What was the turning point in this cultural and ecclesiological shift? It is always dangerous to try and pinpoint

exact decisive moments in such massive changes, but surely one of the more dramatic ones was Pope John Paul II's 1993 pilgrimage to Denver, Colorado for the sole World Youth Day to date to have been held in these United States. In that historic and transforming encounter, John Paul the Great (soon to be declared Blessed!) challenged the youth of America to proclaim the Gospel without shame or fear from the rooftops of America. Ignoring the warnings of American bishops that American teenagers would not likely be very interested in listening to what the Church had to say, John Paul called down an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the 800,000 youth who gathered with him in the Mile High City, taking as his theme the words of Our Lord in John 10:10, “I came that they might have life.” His memorable words issued a resounding challenge to the youth of America to become missionaries to their own people: “This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel. It is the time to preach it from the rooftops. Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living, in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern ‘metropolis’.” World Youth Day 1993 remains to this day a common point of reference for many thirty- and forty-something American Catholics, a moment where we realised that we were not alone. With the courage that John Paul II brought us, we found we could witness to other Americans and especially to other Catholics about the beauty and excitement of being totally committed to our faith. Twenty-five years after the summer of dissent that was 1968, John Paul II ignited a fire in the hearts of young American Catholics, an ardent passion for the Gospel of Life that has only increased in intensity in the nearly two decades since 1993.

Many of the tens of thousands of members of “Generation Y” who now descend on CUA's campus each January were not even born when John Paul II issued his challenging call to the youth of America at Denver. Remarkably, however, they are no less corporately passionate about the same beautiful gift: the fullness of the truth of the Church's teaching about life. They wear T-shirts

sporting pictures of Pope John Paul II or broadcasting quips such as “I love my German shepherd,” an affectionate term for their Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. Few of them, if any, would have any idea of who Father Charles Curran is. Dissent and rebellion is out, orthodox and holiness is in. Living in the midst of a culture of death, the only teaching that these witnesses of the Third Millennium find “relevant” is dynamic fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. As a result, the future looks bright for the pro-life movement on these shores. Asked when he intends to stop making the annual trek to Washington for the march for Life, my young friend replied without hesitation, “I won't stop going until abortion is outlawed...and even then we will all continue to pray and witness to the sanctity of life until the whole world sees the beauty of the truth.” It just might be a great millennium.

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*by Joseph Bottum*

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#### **RANTS OF NEW CHAIR**

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Stop us the next time we complain about Fr. Richard McBrien. Here's Robert Orsi, holder of the Grace Craddock Nagle Chair in Catholic Studies at Northwestern University, holding forth on the Catholic Church:

Catholicism has long stood fiercely against the protections and rights offered by secular modernity, including women's equality, the freedom of sexual identity, respect for children's autonomy and reproductive choice. The Church objected to democracy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, aligning itself with repressive political regimes around the world. Better the torture cells of a pious dictator than a condom! The current papacy stands firmly and explicitly in opposition to virtually everything those of us who call ourselves liberal moderns cherish.

“Women's equality”, “the freedom of sexual identity” and “reproductive choice” – the usual litany of the Church's

*(continued overleaf)*

## Notes From Across the Atlantic continued

crimes against the spirit of our age. (We're not entirely sure what to make of "respect for children's autonomy".) We don't expect a cheerleader in the chair, but we would think a professor of Catholic studies might have some respect for his subject. We can't imagine a chair of, oh, Islamic studies or German studies or African studies or, heck, any other studies, offering such a rant.

### **FALSE NOTIONS**

Some notable percentage of Americans still believe that Barack Obama is a Muslim (the number was 18 percent last August). His supporters are enraged, his opponents (excluding the 18 percent)

suitably embarrassed. But consider the following:

A CNN/*Time* Magazine poll in 1997 reported that 80 percent of Americans believed the U.S. government was hiding evidence of extraterrestrial life.

A Gallup Poll in 1999 showed that 6 percent of Americans believed the moon landings were a hoax.

A study of African-Americans conducted in 2005 by the Rand Corporation and Oregon State University showed that about 25 percent believed AIDS was produced in a government laboratory, and 12 percent believed the CIA created the virus.

In a 2006 Scripps Howard/Ohio University poll, 36 percent said it was "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that "federal officials either participated in the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon or took no action to stop them because 'they wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East'."

As many people have noted, this is the price we pay for a free society. It's also the price we pay for neglecting the commandment against bearing false witness (it's the ninth one, if you're keeping count), which implies the responsibility to get the facts right. Culture-warring Christians might remember that.



## The Truth Will Set You Free

### Catholic Doctrine for the Pastoral Context

### **THE MOTHER OF GOD AND THE ANNUNCIATION**

As the source of all being, God, in his divinity, does not have a mother. If he did she would be God, (and we're not going down that avenue here!). In his humanity however he does have a mother. Mary has been called "Mother of God" from the Council of Ephesus in 431AD onwards. This title emphasises that her son, Jesus, who has two ways of being (two *natures*: divine and human), is just one person, the eternal divine, Son of God.

The title then is shorthand for: Jesus is God and Mary is Jesus's true human mother. The Council of Ephesus was condemning the opinion of a powerful bishop of Constantinople, Nestorius, who felt that there were two persons in Jesus and would only call Mary "Mother of Christ". This seemed to undermine whether 'Christ' was really divine, which had been defined by the Council of Nicea (325 AD) against the Arian heresy. So the Council of Ephesus defined with the full authority of Christ in His Church, that he was "born of the Father before the ages according to divinity, but in the latest days he was born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the humanity".

The title had already been in use for two hundred years. One hundred years before (c. 339AD). St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, had had to defend the divinity of Christ against

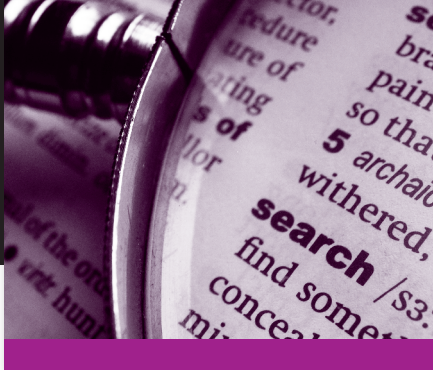
the extremely widespread Arian heresy that saw Jesus as just the highest human being. Athanasius wrote:

"The Word 'took to himself descent from Abraham', as the Apostle says, 'and therefore it was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers', and take a body similar to us. That is why Mary is really part of his plan, so that he may take his body from her and offer it up as something that is his own. Accordingly scripture mentions his birth, and says: 'She wrapped him up in swaddling clothes; the breasts that suckled him were called blessed'."

God needs the womb in Mary to complete his plan of creation and salvation. The feminine indeed has an exalted place in God's plan. Through and with Mary womanhood enables God to give us the fullness of life. The catechism tells us that "to prepare a body for [His Son, God] wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee." So fundamental is the cooperation of her whole person, womb and will, that she was "predestined".

St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, also of the fourth century, saw Mary as a sign and image of the Church, in that in giving birth to Christ she also brought forth Christians who were formed in her womb with Him. After the Council of Ephesus these thoughts of the two earlier Bishops Athanasius and Ambrose gained much impetus to become the great Catholic tradition of Marian reflection and piety.





# The Road From Regensburg

Papal-inspired thought in search  
of a new apologetic

## From Pope Benedict's Epiphany Homily 6th Jan 2011

"[The Magi] were people certain that something we might describe as the 'signature' of God exists in creation, a signature that man can and must endeavour to discover and decipher ... We cannot but perceive in the beauty of the world, its mystery, its greatness and its rationality, we cannot fail to read the eternal rationality; and we cannot help but be guided by this to the one God, Creator of Heaven and of earth.

"If we acquire this perception we shall see that the One who created the world and the One who was born in a grotto in Bethlehem and who continues to dwell among us in the Eucharist, is the same living God who calls us, who loves us and who wants to lead us to eternal life."

## From Pope Benedict's preface to the new youth version of the Catechism (for 14-20 year olds).

In "the 1980s ... many people no longer knew correctly what Christians should really believe, what the Church taught, if it could teach anything *tout court*, and how all this could be adapted to the new cultural climate. Isn't Christianity as such outdated? Can one still reasonably be a believer today? These are questions that many Christians still ask themselves today. So Pope John Paul II ... decided that the bishops of the whole world should write a book responding to these questions ... and ... be something absolutely stimulating and new

... Since then, at the World Youth Days (Rome, Toronto, Cologne, Sydney), young people from all over the world have met who want to believe, who are seeking God, who love Christ and desire common paths. In this context, we asked ourselves if we must not seek to translate the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" into the language of the young, and make its words penetrate into their world.

... Some people tell me that today's young people are not interested in the catechism; but I do not believe in this statement, and I am sure that I am right. They are not as superficial as they are accused of being; young people want to know what life is really about. ...

You must know what you believe; you must know your faith with the same precision with which a programming specialist knows the operating system of a computer; you must know it like a musician knows his piece. Yes, you must be much more deeply rooted in the faith than the generation of your parents, in order to be able to resist forcefully and decisively against the temptations of this time ... if you do not want to succumb to the temptations of consumerism, if you do not want your love to drown in pornography, if you do not want to betray the weak and the victims of abuse and violence."

## Pope's Initiative Sees Light Of Day

"On 24 and 25 March, the Pontifical Council for Culture ... will launch ... the 'Courtyard of the Gentiles', the aim of which is to promote dialogue and encounter between believers and non-believers. ... the launch will involve three colloquia on the themes of 'religion, enlightenment and common reason'. They will be held on 24 March at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, on the morning of 25 March at the Sorbonne University and on the afternoon of the same day at the 'Institut de France'. The colloquia will be followed by a round table discussion at the 'Collège des Bernardins'. On the evening of 25 March there will be a celebration ... open to everyone. especially young people, and will involve artistic creations, music, drama, lights, meeting and reflection. Exceptionally, the cathedral will remain open for those who wish to participate in a prayer vigil and shared meditation."

*From the Vatican Information service: 27 Jan 2011*

## Prominent Call For Papally Encouraged Islamic Reform

During the recent 17-day revolution in Egypt there was an extraordinary call for Islamic reform by 23 prominent Egyptian academics. Sandro Magister suggests that this charter "marks a small step in the very direction hoped for by the Pope" as expressed "in the same year as the lecture in Regensburg and the voyage to Turkey".

In his Christmas talk to his curia the Pope had argued that Islam needs to respond constructively to the Enlightenment, as Catholicism did at the Second Vatican Council. That means opposing the self-contradictory "dictatorship of positivist reasoning that excludes God from the life of the community and from the public order, as well as acknowledging ... human rights, and especially the freedom of faith and its exercise".

The charter which has been widely discussed and largely rejected in Islamic cyber-space, contains the following recommendations:

"Purify [the Hadith]; ... Find a new practice of the concept of interaction between the sexes; ... Separate religion from the state; ... Give guidelines on Western customs, and eliminate incorrect behaviours; ... Invite the people to go to God through gratitude and wisdom, and not with threats; ... Recognise the right of Christians to occupy important positions [including] the presidency of the republic; ... Separate religious discourse from power, and reestablish its connection with the needs of society."

This document also challenged aspects of the *status quo* at Cairo's al-Azhar mosque and university, a key representative of Shi'ite Islam. The university has been caught in the battle between President Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood. Whereas the leader of al-Azhar felt the need recently to break off dialogue with the Vatican following Pope Benedict's highlighting of the persecution of Coptic Christians, this latest charter unequivocally condemns the recent bombings of Coptic churches.



# Book Reviews

## Augustine of Hippo: His Philosophy in a Historical and Contemporary Perspective

by Virgilio Pacioni, OSA, Gracewing,  
348 pp, £14.99

Virgilio Pacioni OSA, Visiting Professor at the *Augustinianum*, Patristic Institute of the Pontifical Lateran University, is to be congratulated for this remarkable work, first published in Italian in 2004. The translators are also to be congratulated for what is mostly an easily readable text. I am particularly grateful to Pacioni for exposing my superficial (and frequently mistaken) understanding of St. Augustine's thought, whilst at the same time granting me a greater appreciation of the North African Father's abiding contribution to the Church and contemporary culture.

Although over 300 pages long, this book's abundant quotations and references manifest Pacioni's encyclopedic and in-depth knowledge of all of St. Augustine's 120 works; so too Pacioni's impressive familiarity with the history of the critical study of these works and the diverse interpretations of them right up to the present.

The book is divided into nine thematic chapters covering St. Augustine's: route to conversion; hermeneutical circle between faith and reason; initial speculations; anthropology; theory of knowledge; understanding of free will and morality; doctrine of the nature and existence of God; conception of time and history; and political philosophy. The enlightening appendix of critical interpretations of Augustinian

philosophy ought not to be overlooked. The extensive bibliography offers an excellent guide for further reading.

Pacioni himself tells us that throughout his book he has "tried to reconstruct the framework of Augustine's speculation in all of its most original philosophical traits, following philosophical and logical-linguistic suggestions performing a point by point analysis of the texts not only from a philological but also a historiographical, cultural and logical-formal point of view" (p. xix).

Particularly noteworthy is that, although recognising St. Augustine's indebtedness to Platonism and Neo-Platonism, Pacioni convincingly demonstrates the limits of labelling St. Augustine a Platonist or Neo-Platonist. "This is what those who do not have a knowledge of the Augustinian historiography of the last few decades or a first-hand knowledge of the *opera omnia* of the African Father of the Church do" (p. xvii).

At the risk of doing a grave disservice to the richness of Pacioni's comprehensive study, I wish to focus solely on what it reveals to us of St. Augustine's anthropology. Augustine's anthropology is frequently deemed Platonic, hence dualist, whereby soul and body are conceived as two loosely associated substances – even that the soul is the man. However, drawing significantly on the research of Nello Cipriani, Pacioni persuasively argues for an alternative interpretation. Pacioni reads St. Augustine as conceiving of the soul and body in a relationship of reciprocal influence whereby the soul, though superior to the body, enjoys a natural and intrinsic appetite toward the body as an essential condition of its being. Hence, far from conceiving of body and soul as dualistically opposed, St. Augustine considers soul and body as dimensions of man which integrate with each other, forming a bond which is not merely accidental. For St. Augustine body and soul,

although distinct metaphysically, are two principles that constitute one necessary unit – even to the extent that he can hold that there is no such thing as man without the body and without the soul.

According to Pacioni, it was the philosophy not of Plato but of Terentius Varro, including some of its Aristotelian elements, which inspired St. Augustine's positive view of the relationship between soul and body. So too, though, was it the Christian Faith that shaped St. Augustine's vision of humanity. To say that the whole human nature is not composed of soul and flesh – *good* flesh, whose union with the body is *not* the cause of sin – insults the Creator!

St. Augustine's appreciation of friendship and community also reflects his Christianity. He defends, against the Neoplatonists, the Christian understanding of human nature as intrinsically open to sociability such that the life of virtue should be a social life. For the Bishop of Hippo, the capacity for friendship and the social dimension of man's existence are goods written into his very nature.

Pacioni's impressive challenge to those who judge Augustinian anthropology to be a dualistic individualism is alone enough to recommend this book enthusiastically. However, there are many other reasons for so doing; but I invite you the reader, be you a relative newcomer to St. Augustine's thought or an accomplished scholar – to discover these for yourself.

**Fr. John O'Leary**

Our Lady & St. Joseph  
Kingsland

## “For St. Augustine body and soul are two principles that constitute one necessary unit”

### Climbing the Mountain: The Journey of Prayer

by James Tolhurst, *Gracewing*, 150 pp, £7.99

Blessed John Henry Newman, who reputedly prayed for four hours each day, spoke of the difficulty of getting down to this vital task. Lamenting that there was almost any amusement he would rather take up than dwelling on God he cried out “Give me grace, my Father to be utterly ashamed of my own reluctance.”

For those of us familiar with Newman’s anxiety, our immediate ambition should be to pray more often. Time spent reading about prayer can often be a means of avoiding prayer itself. But in this book Fr James Tolhurst has produced a useful guide to getting started. And even those who have been on the journey for some time will find plenty here to sustain them.

Tolhurst begins with practicalities. He suggests set times and places for praying and encourages us to stick to them. Like the Church Fathers he sees the spiritual life as being a battle with ourselves. Part of this is learning detachment from sin – not just serious sin, but the little comforts and indulgences which weaken our capacity for God. There is a place for mortification in life – the “resolution to say ‘No’ from time to time when we are inclined to say ‘Yes’”. He also raises the problem of distractions in prayer and suggests ejaculatory prayers or “spear-thrusts” as a remedy.

The central section of the book is dedicated to saints and spiritual writers. The two giants of spirituality, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, are well presented along with other guides both familiar and less well-known. The no nonsense wisdom of St. Josemaria Escriva is wonderfully captured in the phrase “You have an obligation to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you!” Escriva then admonishes those tempted to slacken with the devastating words “Be a man”.

Just as powerful is the advice of Abbot Columba Marmion suggesting our prayer must not “degenerate into vague reverie, without depth or fruit”.

Although the author is wary of appearing technical, he does outline some methods of prayer. There is a useful appendix which lists some traditional forms of meditation. He also gives a high priority to the use of Scripture and in the manner of St. Teresa encourages reflective reading to guide and direct wayward thoughts. There is a sense of meditation being the “spadework” of prayer which should naturally lead to a conversation with Christ and true contemplation. None of this can be rushed, and the daily task of constant prayer involves a faithful embracing of dryness and aridity.

The final chapters deal with the journey as it starts to develop. We are given an indication of what to expect if we persevere in this great challenge. Good use is made of St. John of the Cross who speaks of the three “nights” through which we must pass. Prayer now becomes a stripping away of the senses. Needless to say it is painful, and although consolations may occur along the way, the real work is done in darkness. Finally we are given a glimpse of the summit – the union of the soul with God. We are presented with the experiences of those blessed souls who have tasted such sweetness.

“Climbing the Mountain” is a solid guide for those attempting the journey of prayer. It is a treasure chest of spiritual wisdom which draws on the practical experience of those who have travelled ahead of us. The real guides in this book are the saints themselves and Tolhurst reveals a deep respect both for them and for the Catholic spiritual tradition. The extracts from their writings, although brief, are well selected, and if anything we are left eager for more. An impressive bibliography is included for those who want to delve more deeply. In a sense

this book is a spiritual appetiser. It tickles our taste buds and tantalises us with rich pickings. But rather like a map it can only point us in the right direction. Beginning the journey is eventually down to us. If we persevere in this task then “Climbing the Mountain” will have served its purpose.

**William Johnstone**

Westerham  
Kent

### Making Sense of Evolution

by John F. Haught (Edinburgh: Westminster John Knox Press/Alban Press, 2010), 144pp, £12.99

Jon Haught does not agree with the creationists, nor with the related American theory of Intelligent Design. He totally accepts modern science and the theory of evolution. He wishes to debate with the likes of Professor Dawkins who believe that science disproves God. Such foundations place him so far in the same camp as this magazine. But like so many Catholic thinkers today who share these premises he departs massively from our classical Christian doctrine.

This is a book inspired by the visions of Paul Tillich, Alfred Whitehead, Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Rahner. I would humbly refer the reader to the Faith pamphlet series, *Reasons for Believing*, to show where we and this school of thought diverge.

As the pamphlet “Can we be sure God exists?” puts it: “Modern cosmology, the study of the universe as a whole, and the biology of evolution have given us amazing proof of God”. Haught totally disagrees: “Analysis alone leaves the world incoherent, scattered about in unconnected bits. Scientific reduction can lead to a clear sense of the world’s elemental units, but not to any inkling of its possible coherence” (p.79).

This is a constant theme of the book. He uses the analogy of ink on the





## Book Reviews continued

printed page. He compares natural selection's production of adaptive design to the printing press that produces the page. The divine influence in creation is comparable to the words on the page. As you find no evidence of the will of the writer at the level of chemistry that bonds the ink to the paper, so you will find no evidence of divine influence in science. "Science is not wired to pick up any signals of divine transcendence, nor could it express such awareness in a measurable way." Haught accepts a scientific standpoint that there is only incoherence in creation, evolution is blind and aimless.

And yet: Scientists are coming up with theological questions because science has led them there. They can do science precisely because it is an ordered universe. And the various levels of science from physics through biology and zoology to psychology are surely enough to show that science is not reductionist. And Haught even gets the science wrong, because an increasing number of scientists, not least Dawkins himself, acknowledge that natural selection is a profoundly ordered process.

Another area of disagreement concerns the "First Cause". A heading in the above-mentioned *Faith* pamphlet is "The need for a first cause". Haught is not interested in arguments for design. He sees the argument of 'first cause' as theologically misguided and leading only to a misunderstanding of God's relationship to the world. If our pamphlet is right, such denial will lead to fideism. The whole point of such arguments is to make sure that we do not invent God.

The pamphlet "What makes Man Unique" comments that nature, from its own internal laws, should not produce an animal which is beyond environmental control, as it in fact does in the case of man. This forms the basis for the argument for the soul, which was well presented by Kevin

Douglas in the January issue of this magazine. Haught believes it beyond the capacity of science to reach such a conclusion. He does not see the existence of the soul as the solution to the question of the uniquely creative behaviour of man. He feels such a view diminishes the importance of the human body.

In contrast the pamphlet proposes that far from diminishing the relevance of the human body, matter-energy has its fullest meaning and highest dignity in its relation to the soul. Haught speaks of animals having souls, and sees the soul as "emerging horizontally from an evolutionary past that only gradually changes into living and thinking tissue". Evolution leads to the human capacity for self-awareness. Nature gradually evolves from matter to mind. Thus the soul does not come directly from God, nor is it a distinct principle in man in relation to matter.

It has been argued many times in this magazine that such a view leads to monism. For a coherent, not to say doctrinally faithful, Christian understanding of man, the soul must be a principle distinct from the body. Haught cannot explain what happens at death, nor the meaning of the sacraments as taught by the Church, nor the human need for true interior life.

In the *Faith* pamphlet "The Disaster of Sin", the existence of suffering and evil is confronted, and the doctrine of original sin outlined. The pamphlet deals with a fundamental issue of human experience and human history. Haught does not confront the real evil of sin in our world. This is a significant omission.

Haught deals with the issue of suffering, but in a very disquieting way. Evil is downplayed as simply related to the fact that things perish and die. Death and suffering are seen as a natural consequence of creation. Victory over death has been won for us by Christ on the cross: "In the context of Christian faith, the drama

of evolution merges inseparably with the (abysmal) death and (grounding) resurrection of Jesus and, in him, with the eternal drama that is the Trinitarian life of God." Haught clearly sees Jesus' death on the cross as a natural event in the order of creation.

It is difficult to conceive of a God whose horrific death is simply an inherent part of the development of creation. One viewing of the film *The Passion of the Christ* should be enough to show that God's death was the ultimate blasphemy, the ultimate opposition to God. Real evil is fundamentally opposed to goodness, not a necessary part of God's plan, let alone part of his life.

At the root of the difficulties with this book is Haught's view of the relation between God and creation. He sees a drama being acted out in the world which is not visible on the scientific level. To see this drama we need a more refined kind of "seeing". God is the ground of all being. As such, creation is in constant contact with the divine. Creation is drawn towards an infinite and uncomprehended goodness, which is the world's ultimate environment, God. It is a God of promise, as we can never find full meaning to this drama. Creation has the freedom to go in many diverse ways, intensifying its freedom, consciousness and beauty, but all within the life of God.

I am sure Fr Holloway, the founder of the Faith movement, would immediately have pointed out that there is real confusion here about what is matter and what is mind in creation. We can also see the root of why Haught finds it difficult to account for moral evil. If God is the ground of all being, everything is graced. Nothing can be fundamentally evil. While Scripture is quoted and Jesus Christ plays a part in this system, Haught seems to deny that in Him we have found the fullest meaning to our universe. Contrary to what Haught believes, we are no longer a people

**“It is difficult to conceive of a God whose horrific death is simply an inherent part of the development of creation.”**

of hope. God has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and we find full meaning in Him.

Fundamentally Haught agrees with Dawkins that science cannot lead us to find meaning and purpose in the universe. Given this, Dawkins would rightly have little time for someone telling him that he needs a more refined kind of seeing, to see that God does exist and is part of our world. This book does not take science seriously, and it made me even more appreciative of the *Faith* pamphlets. There we can truly make sense of evolution from a theological point of view.

**Fr Stephen Boyle**

The Good Shepherd  
New Addington

### **The Heresy of Formlessness – The Roman Liturgy and its Enemy**

*by Martin Mosebach, Ignatius Press,  
210pp, £12.50*

I could not wait to read a book of literary essays on the liturgy which, one was told, “had taken Germany by storm”. The author is a German award-winning novelist, poet, librettist, dramatist and essay writer. The collection should carry a warning: “Careful: this book could change for ever the way you regard the liturgy.”

Since the book demonstrates so powerfully the case for the return to the pre-Conciliar liturgy, Fr Joseph Fessio, S.J., Editor-in-Chief, Ignatius Press has to temper his own enthusiastic *Forward* by putting the position of “those who advocate a rereading and restructuring of the liturgical renewal intended by the Second Vatican Council, but in light of the Church’s two-thousand-year tradition.”

Yet the book is not polemical. A polemic advances an argument and then produces evidence why it is true. These essays provide insights and illustrations and, at the end, one finds

that it all amounts to a most convincing argument. The style is that of the author, with the various essays (ten altogether) adopting different approaches, almost different *genres*: one is a chapter of a novel. Mosebach applies the eye and language of a great author to looking at the liturgy – what it has been over the centuries, what it ought to be and what it has become. One whole appendix of 17 pages is devoted just to the words, “This is My Body.” He can match from Germany the incidents we know in Britain, Ireland and America of the wilful destruction of great and beautiful works of art, acts of iconoclasm and vandalism. It is appropriate for a German to be profound on Church music, and, like many of us, he cannot explain why the clear order of the Second Vatican Council on music has been turned on its head: “Gregorian chant should be given pride of place in liturgical services.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 116). As we know, in most Catholic churches in Europe this has become, “Gregorian Chant will never be heard; the most common will be pop music of the 1960s.”

Mosebach deals with the canard, that to be active at Mass we must be physically moving around, by a thoughtful essay that poses the simple but cutting question, “What active role did the apostles play at the Last Supper?” He is good at putting a simple point that demolishes the whole edifice of an argument. This is how he disposes of Holy Communion in the hand: it is “inappropriate, not because the hands are less worthy to receive the Host than the tongue, or because they might be dirty, but because it would be impossible to rinse every participant’s hands after Communion (that is, to make sure no particles of the Host are lost).”

He finds the idea of the priest’s facing the people a most disedifying factor of the modern liturgy: “How wise the old liturgy was when it prescribed that the congregation should not see the

priest’s face – his distractedness or coldness or (even more importantly) his devotion and emotion.” He stresses the importance of posture and, especially, kneeling which signifies adoration and which is why it was attacked by the reformers, of the actual reformation and of 1968, and why many kneelers have actually been removed from churches.

He sees the new liturgy as a fracture, quoting the then Cardinal Ratzinger (a friend, apparently) in 1992: “a liturgy that had grown organically had been pushed aside in favour of a fabricated liturgy.” He regrets the omitting from the new Mass of the orations – “the Collects, Secrets and Postcommunions – particularly those of Sunday. It seems that only secular philologists are in a position to see the literary and artistic value of these prayer formularies, which are certainly among the oldest constituent elements of the liturgical heritage.” Do read this wonderful book. I fear that I have not done it justice, rather as if I had said, “There are some interesting facets of English and Roman history, and many details of world geography,” when writing of the plays of Shakespeare.

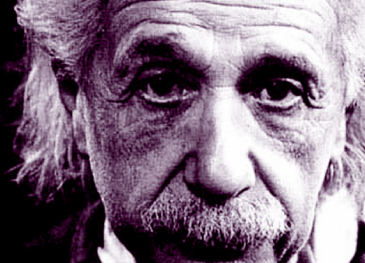
**Eric Hester**

Bolton



# Cutting Edge

## Science and Religion News



### E.T. OK?

It is hardly unknown for scientists to hold opposing views. But when two prominent institutions almost simultaneously publish contradictory reports on a hotly disputed topic, we can look forward to an interesting debate. One such topic is the existence of extra-terrestrial life, and the two institutions in question are Harvard University and the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

In September 2010, Dr Paul Butler, an astrophysicist at the Carnegie Institution, and Professor Stephen Vogt of the Lick Observatory, University of California, published a paper in *The Astrophysical Journal* reporting the detection of an “exoplanet” (a planet orbiting a star outside the solar system) that they believe may have just the right conditions to support life.

Known as Gliese 581g, the planet orbits a star named Gliese 581, which is about 20 light years away (the nearest star to the Sun is 4.3 light years away). It is one of six planets discovered around this star, all of which have near-circular orbits. Calculations indicate that in several ways it is quite an Earth-like planet: its radius is 1.2 to 2.5 times that of Earth; its mass is 3.1 to 4.3 times greater; and, crucially, its orbit lies within its star’s “Goldilocks zone”, which means its surface temperature is neither too hot nor too cold for liquid water – and therefore potentially life – to exist on its surface.

Unlike Earth, Gliese 581g is “tidally locked”. This means that, like the planet Mercury and our own moon, one side constantly faces its star while the other side is constantly in the dark. As a result the surface is much hotter on the near side than on the far side, and the most habitable zone would be the intermediate area between the light and dark sides of the planet. Yet we know that life on Earth can thrive in extreme conditions: from the Antarctic (where temperatures can drop to almost -90°C) to hydrothermal vents on the ocean floor (where temperatures can exceed 460°C). So there is no reason why life

should not exist on another planet where temperatures vary greatly.

Gliese 581 is a red dwarf star, which means its expected lifetime is far longer than our Sun’s: it could well last hundreds of billions of years, which is much longer than the present age of the universe. Red dwarfs (or M dwarfs as they are also known) are by far the most common stars around, comprising some 70 per cent of all the stars in our galaxy. They are much smaller, dimmer and cooler than stars like our Sun, and for a long time scientists searching for life on other worlds paid little attention to them; the general feeling was that they gave out so little heat and light, compared with the Sun, that they were unlikely to host habitable planets.

That consensus has changed in the last few years, and astronomers are now focusing their efforts on these diminutive stars. Because red dwarfs have such long lifetimes, there’s far more time for the chemicals and reactions necessary to support life to develop on one of their planets. The Carnegie website ([www.carnegiescience.edu](http://www.carnegiescience.edu)) has the text of the research team’s announcement; it also has a link to a “video press release” which gives a clear visual impression of the findings. The authors are convinced that given enough time we will discover life elsewhere in the universe.

In January of this year, however, a different research group, led by Harvard astrophysicist Dr Howard Smith, reached quite the opposite conclusion. His analysis of some 500 exoplanets led him to believe that none of these planets had the right conditions for life, and he plays down the chances of finding any extra-terrestrial life. Of course, 500 exoplanets are barely a drop in the ocean compared with all the planets thought likely to exist even in our own galaxy, let alone in the universe, so Dr Smith’s conclusion could be deemed premature and statistically irrelevant. Yet he has at least reminded us just how remarkable our own planet really is.

So, who do we believe – Dr Smith, who thinks all the exoplanets discovered so far are “very hostile to life as we know it”, or the Carnegie team, for whom the chances of aliens existing on an Earth-like planet are “100 per cent”? As a comment on *The Daily Telegraph* website (24 January 2011) put it: “It is hard to tell which of these two categorical declarations is the more worrying.”

Of course, plenty of other scientists are in the hunt for life-supporting worlds outside our solar system. In March 2009 Nasa launched its Kepler Space Telescope, which was specifically designed, as its mission statement says, to “search for habitable planets”. Its website ([www.kepler.nasa.gov](http://www.kepler.nasa.gov)) provides the latest updates on this programme. So far Nasa has detected nine confirmed exoplanets, though none that would be in their star’s habitable zone. The programme’s latest confirmed planetary find is Kepler-10b, whose discovery was announced on 10 January this year; the planet is rocky and similar in size to Earth, but its orbit is too close to its star for it to be able to support life.

And what if astronomers did eventually discover intelligent life? What would be the theological implications? Would those alien creatures need baptism? Fr Stephen Wang raises the question here: <http://bridgesandtangents.wordpress.com/2010/04/11/the-search-for-extra-terrestrial-intelligence/>. Answers on a postcard.

### Everyday Cosmology

The Carnegie Institution of Washington has recently created a website detailing a 400-year history of cosmology from Galileo (c. 1610) to the present day (<http://cosmology.carnegiescience.edu>). The site analyses the achievements of 20 scientists, or collaborations of scientists, over the past four centuries, and has a timeline that is well worth seeing.



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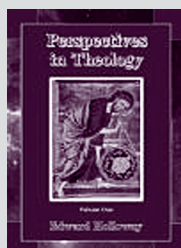
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