

faith

November and December 2008
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OF FAITH AND REASON

Mysterium Fidei: Towards a Liturgical Synthesis

Editorial

The Incarnation and Hierarchy

John Gavin

The Incarnation and Priestly Loving

William Massie

The Sinful Priest as Minister of the Church's Faithfulness

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Accepting Mercy, Withholding Absolution and Undermining Celibacy

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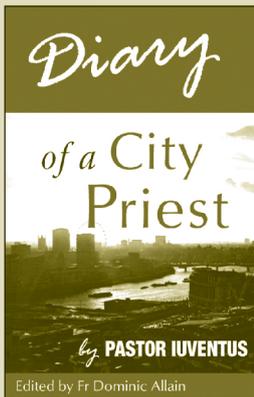
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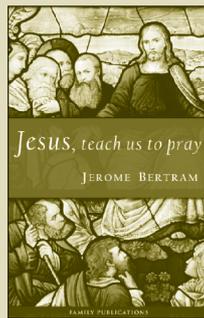


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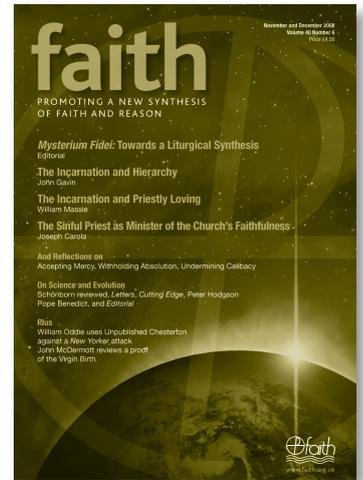
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Mysterium Fidei – Towards a New Liturgical Synthesis *Editorial*

“Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” Matt.: 13:52

Two Liturgies, Two Theologies?

By issuing *Summorum Pontificum*, Pope Benedict has confirmed that Latin Rite Catholicism currently has two liturgical forms for offering the Holy Eucharist: the *Novus Ordo* as the ordinary form and the *Usus Antiquior*, the older Roman Rite, as the extraordinary form of celebration. There is no real reason why this should be controversial. The Eastern churches regularly use various distinctive rites for the Sacred Mysteries without a problem.

Unfortunately, in the West these two liturgical forms have, in the minds of many people, become linked to two opposing ideological camps. There are those on both sides of this divide who claim that the *Novus Ordo* and the Missal of 1962 are based on incompatible theologies. Some even assert that they express mutually exclusive models of the Eucharist and of the Church itself, despite the Holy Father making it clear in the *Motu Propriu* that this is not so (cf. Art 1).

Nonetheless, it is true that there are incompatible theological ideologies abroad in the Church at the moment, which have often become, falsely, attached to particular liturgical movements with their attendant catechesis and parochial practice.

On the one hand we find the idea that the Eucharist is the self expression of the believing community; that Christ’s presence arises from the people as they celebrate and remember Jesus’ supreme act of self giving. Frankly, it is erroneous thinking like this that has led to so many of the abuses that have distorted the *Novus Ordo* in practice.

For example, there is a widely used English setting for the *Agnus Dei* which says “Hear our prayer, hear our prayer, in this bread and wine we share may we be your sign of peace everywhere”. Although this is false doctrine as well as a forbidden interpolation of texts, it is this kind of thing that leads some to see the *Novus Ordo* as inextricably bound up with theological liberalism and subjective worship, sometimes indistinguishable from secular entertainment.

On the other hand, we have those who reject the Second Vatican Council altogether and see no need for any development in the Church’s doctrinal, catechetical or pastoral approach to the world. For them the Tridentine liturgy has become a totem of this wider rejection of the modern Church. Others again love the *Usus Antiquior* because it is, quite rightly, perceived to express the nature of the Mass as the Sacrifice of Redemption with a highly developed sense of ordered reverence and humble adoration.

Transcendence and Immanence: The Need For Development

Perhaps not surprisingly, enthusiasm for the older liturgical form often goes hand in hand with an older kind of catechesis; although there is no intrinsic reason why that should be so.

The philosophy that underpins the older (although undoubtedly orthodox) catechesis, tends to be formalist, abstract and somewhat formulaic. The understanding that Christ fulfills all that is good in human nature and in creation can be lacking in these theological circles (with notable exceptions, of course), so there is not always a strong emphasis on the link between liturgy and the rest of life. This has led to a corresponding fear among some that the “return” of the “old Mass” (although, as Pope Benedict points out in *Summorum Pontificum*, it was never actually abrogated), signals a turning away from the attempt to understand and reach out to the modern world.

At heart these are false contradictions. The Holy Father certainly appears to hope that a new liturgical synthesis may emerge over time from the “mutual learning” of the two forms. Any such development will also need to be based on a new theological synthesis that refocuses our understanding of transcendence and immanence in the works of God. We must retain the objectivity of Catholic doctrine and devotion while embracing the modern need for a more existential and personalist approach to faith. The outlines of the approach we propose will be familiar to regular readers. But here we want to approach it from a slightly different angle.

“The Mystery of Faith”: A Point of Connection

At the climax of the Sacred Liturgy of the Latin Rite in both Ordinary and Extraordinary forms we find the words “*mysterium fidei*”. In the Tridentine liturgy this phrase is part of the formula of consecration spoken over the chalice. In the *Novus Ordo* these words are proclaimed by the priest immediately after the consecration of the chalice, marking the completed transubstantiation of both Eucharistic species, announcing the presence of Christ upon the altar. The people respond with an acclamation of their own addressed directly to the crucified and risen Lord: “*Mortem tuam annuntiamus, Domine, et tuam resurrectionem confitemur, donec venias*”.

The 1973 ICEL translation gave these words a rather different spin. They changed the concise priestly proclamation of the Eucharistic Sacrifice – the Mystery of mysteries accomplished on earth as it is in heaven – into an invitation to the congregation to make a collective affirmation of faith in the central beliefs of Christianity. “*Let us proclaim the mystery of faith*”. The first of the three alternative responses given for the congregation in English is, accordingly, couched in the third person: “*Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again*”. It has become more of a mini creed than a liturgical cry of adoration.

With more faithful texts currently in the process of being approved, the authentic interpretation is very likely to be restored in the near future. Nonetheless, the mindset that led the original ICEL ‘translators’ to interpret “*Mysterium Fidei*”

“The Eucharist is the Living Christ [...] substantially and actively present in his ministry of redemptive love [...] the ‘Existential of existentials’ one might say.”

in terms of a theological narrative to be recited, rather than as an acclamation addressed to a living person, does touch on some deeper theological and philosophical issues which have wider relevance and more far reaching implications.

Mystery As Sacrament Not Conundrum

The expression “*Mysterium Fidei*” could also be translated as “*The Sacrament of Faith*”. For to the Greek Fathers the sacraments are “the mysteries”, because they are the presence and actions of God in Person through the Word Incarnate who lives and ministers in his Church by the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments embody and activate in particular times and places the “mystery of God’s purpose set forth in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1.1).

The Eucharist is the Mystery of Faith *par excellence* because it is the whole Christ offering himself as Sacrifice of Reconciliation and Sacrament of Communion, on earth as he is in heaven. To the Greek mind a mystery is not something ethereal and unreal, it is a Reality that encompasses us. It is not something remote and intangible, but something revealed and active, something so overwhelmingly actual and present that we cannot fully grasp it with our created minds. It is something that we can truly encounter, come to know and grow to love, but never fully comprehend or exhaust as a source of consolation and joy.

On the other hand, for minds deeply influenced by Nominalist traditions of philosophy in the West, a “mystery” means an intellectual conundrum, something one step removed from worldly experience and therefore not quite real in its psychological impact. So the “mystery of faith” is interpreted as a subjective attitude of conviction towards the unknown.

The Pope On Objective and Subjective Faith

In *Spe Salvi* Pope Benedict touches on this topic in a fascinating and illuminating passage:

“In the eleventh chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* (v.1) we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope. Ever since the Reformation there has been a dispute among exegetes over the central word of this phrase, but today a way towards a common interpretation seems to be opening up once more [...]: ‘Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen’. For the Fathers and for the theologians of the Middle Ages, it was clear that the Greek word *hypostasis* was to be rendered in Latin with the term *substantia* [...] faith is the ‘substance’ of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen.

“Saint Thomas Aquinas, using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see. The concept of ‘substance’ is therefore modified in the sense that through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say ‘in embryo’ [...] there are already present in us the things

that are hoped for: the whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, this [...] creates certainty. This ‘thing’ which must come is not yet visible in the external world [...] but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence.

“To Luther, who was not particularly fond of the *Letter to the Hebrews*, the concept of ‘substance’, in the context of his view of faith, meant nothing. For this reason he understood the term *hypostasis/substance* not in the objective sense (of a reality present within us), but in the subjective sense, as an expression of an interior attitude [...] In the twentieth century this interpretation became prevalent [...] but [...] Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent [...] It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a ‘proof’ of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a ‘not yet’. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.” (*Spe Salvi* para 7, see also Pope on St Peter on p. 24 of this issue)

The Knowledge Which Is Faith

Long standing readers of *Faith* may recognise a parallel thread of thought here with the writings of our own founding editor Fr. Edward Holloway. In the editorial for November-December 1979¹ he wrote:

“Faith is a knowing which is conditioned by the relationship of dependence for fulfilment between us and God [...] This knowledge, which implies an inbuilt dependence in us towards some outside principle which perfects and fulfils us beyond our own personal capacity, can be a very dim knowledge in the beginning. In fact it must be a dim and partial beginning or it would not be ‘faith’. It is built upon a certain natural power and need to seek, to seek in the order of our spiritual nature, which means to seek through the mind and the heart, through knowing and through loving. But although this seeking arises within our nature, the fulfilment we seek is not one with us [...] Faith is that activation of the spirit, through the intellectual powers of the soul, which springs to life when God touches and draws the spirit to recreate it and to redeem it. In that order there can be an immense growth. [...] It is the milk which alone answers our new-born cravings, and once it is given it becomes the principle of our growth in the likeness of God, in that divine order which is eventually to know and love him as he is in himself”.

For Holloway, knowing of any kind is not only objective, but is an existential insight rather than an abstraction from ‘non-essential’ reality. He was wont to remark that “abstracts don’t exist, only existentials exist!” Knowledge of the real is not by abstraction of the form from the material substrate, but by the recognition of the true – and also the good, the meaningful and the joyful – embedded and embodied in the material existence. Holloway went on:

“There are many sorts of knowing from nature around us which give us clues and analogies to the nature of faith in God [...] Even a bird will migrate year after year to one precise spot, from some inborn power to orientate itself. It is a ‘know-how’ built into its very being [...] whatever guides and focuses the will can be called in some sense ‘knowledge’”.

Reassessing the Philosophy of Knowledge

Faith is different from routine knowledge not because it is a different *kind* of knowing – a unique or irrational act of the mind – but precisely because it is knowledge within a supernatural relationship. It cannot, therefore, be arrived at by natural insight, but is the response evoked by divine revelation. It is objective and real, but elevates the mind as far above intra-mundane reasoning as its Object is greater than our reason can grasp. It is truly a personal knowing, but is not simply grounded in our subjective experience, because its Subject, the initiator of the relationship, is the source of our own Being. God is the measure of our minds, not the other way round.

For the Nominalist, knowledge is always subjective, the categories of our own minds projected onto the inchoate phenomena of experience. For the existentialist, truth is a story we tell ourselves to try to make some sense of our lives. Religious doctrine is interpreted as a kind of pooled subjectivity within a particular cultural and spiritual tradition. This is precisely the central paradigm used by Paddy Purnell SJ in his book, *Our Faith Story, It's Telling And It's Sharing*, which is still being put forward as the catechetical blue print for Britain.

In order to answer this we need to move beyond the static, a *priori* formalism of Aristotelean metaphysics, at least as it came to be expressed in the late neo-scholastic schools. The account of knowing by abstraction left us unable to respond to the great insights of contemporary scientific discovery, because all matter is dismissed as belonging only to the ‘accidental’ order. Our intellectual framework for apologetics became inflexible and unable to respond to the new insights of the day.

In our theology and pastoral catechesis, we did and we still do need a more existential and personalist outlook. However, losing philosophical abstractionism does not have to mean accepting Nominalism or Existentialism. Similarly, accepting the serial interdependency and inter-relativity of all material being – what some call “evolution” in the material order – does not have to mean accepting historic relativism or a random account of Nature.

Knowledge and Relationship Embedded In Nature

The inter-relativity of life forms on earth is anything but random. Material beings are unities of action and reaction. Each thing forms part of the environment in which other entities find their place and from which they take their direction, their limits and possibilities, their very identity as meaningful units within the system. There is a mutual “ministry” of meaning of one thing toward the other in terms

of cause and effect. Animals do recognise meaningful entities in their experience and they ‘know’ the natures of what they encounter, but only in so far as they impact on their own survival.

As human beings we are not, therefore, trapped behind the glass wall of our own subjectivity, because our brains are part of this same fabric of meaningful and interconnected reality that is the universe we live in. And as spiritual minds we also perceive the universal relationships which define the objective nature of the things within our experience. Yet we only approximate to the mind of God in this. Our knowledge is experimental and developmental. We can and do deepen our understanding of the natures in Nature as we make new discoveries and gain new insights.

But can we know God objectively? And with what sort of ‘knowledge’ could we know him? The purely material creature has no need to know God directly. Its ‘knowing’ is entirely written into the mathematical relationships which define the valencies of its atoms and molecules, the law-bound reactions of its biochemistry and its biological survival instincts. But with Man it is otherwise. With our superabundant brain power, we cannot be controlled or contained within the material environment alone. Human nature is integrated through the directly and individually created spiritual soul.

‘we still do need a more existential and personalist outlook.’

There is that in us, therefore, which is truly transcendental, and yet we are not the Transcendent as such. We are not the meaning and measure of creation nor the answer to the enigma of our own existence. Aware of our contingency, we too seek beyond ourselves for our identity. We can know that God exists from the evidence of creation, but we cannot truly ‘know’ the God from whom our fulfillment must come unless he reveals himself to us. And when he is revealed, the impact must necessarily be that of mystery – not something discovered by the light of reason, but a Reality that illuminates our minds with its own incandescent Light.

Human Nature Created Into The Order of Divine Charity

Man is therefore a paradox, a creature with no natural end or fulfillment, only a Supernatural one that is intrinsically beyond his nature. For the categories of ancient Greek philosophy with its vision of self-contained spheres of existence revolving below the Unmoved Mover, this is a problem. But need it be a problem for a world view built on native Christian principles? We can happily say that Man exists in the order of Divine charity; our identity and our destiny are defined through Love alone.

However, the Love that defines us is not arbitrary. It is love focused through supreme Wisdom. The meaning of human nature and human history is set out as a loving plan that makes sense uniquely in Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh. Our mixed nature of matter and spirit is created

“accepting the serial interdependency and inter-relativity of all material being – what some call ‘evolution’ in the material order – does not have to mean accepting historic relativism or a random account of Nature.”

for life with God through the gift of the Incarnation. We have no other identity. Christ is the template on which human nature is conceived and destined. As St. Paul put it, “Adam is a type of the one to come” (Romans 5:14), and this is the foundational truth that makes redemption after sin possible (cf. Romans 5:15).

St. Paul is telling us that we were built on the model of Christ, but not the other way around. That which is contingent and developmental is predicated upon the coming of the Transcendent One, who unites Himself freely with his creatures. But God is not thereby co-defined with his creation as an aspect of its being and becoming. Christ is always the long expected One on whom the very foundations of the world are aligned. In that sense he is always immanent to the creation; he is indeed the “Son of Man” and “Heir of the Ages”. But he is not the emergent expression of Man becoming divine through cosmic evolution.

We are not, therefore, already “graced” in an a-thematic communion with the Godhead simply by existing. Yet God is truly for us what the Environment is for other creatures on earth – “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17,28). The Divine Being in Itself cannot be an intrinsic dimension of our own existential dynamic, but God’s grace is truly necessary to the realization of our created potential. So God always offers himself to every human being in the measure that they can receive from the first instant of their existence, and that offer is always a prompting towards Christ.

In the fallen world order, Original Sin blocks our primal integration into grace and the gift of divine faith is now given in the first nascent dawning of personal knowledge and love of God as we are drawn into the Life of the Trinity by the action of Christ through the Church at baptism. There cannot be “anonymous Christians” but there may be many anonymous catechumens whom God will not turn away if they do not turn away from him, even though they may not arrive at baptism in this life. For nothing is neutral to God and we are all made for communion with Christ.

Bringing Out Treasures, Both Old and New

So faith is not simply a subjective aspiration, our personal story understood in the light of the Story of Jesus. But it is also more than the formal affirmation of doctrinal facts, although it must come to include that, for faith is an assent of the whole person to God’s revelation in Christ, which therefore includes assent of the mind to the words of the Word made flesh. Likewise, the Mass is not simply the self expression of the community as “Spirit in The World”, but it does gather the lives and prayers of the faithful and the gifts of Nature and bring them to God at the altar. Just as Mary brought the created order to its perfection in her body and soul and became the vehicle for the Incarnation through her faith and obedience to God’s purposes, the people’s gifts are gathered at hands of the priest *in persona Christi* to be taken up to God in the Great Offering which is both Sacrifice and Communion.

“The Mystery of Faith” describes both an inner relationship with God that grows from dim but real beginnings in the individual soul at baptism towards to the fullness of vision, and it also describes the public revelation of the Word of God from Adam to Christ – and then deepens in the heart of the Church without change of content from the Incarnation to the Parousia. The inner word of faith is the substance of personal union of mind and heart with God in Christ, and the outer Word of Faith is the substance of God Incarnate speaking and acting in human history.

Both the inner and the outer substance of faith are brought together in the Eucharist. For the Eucharist *is* the Living Christ, abiding in risen glory to be adored, substantially and actively present in his ministry of redemptive love to be received with humble joy and gratitude. We hail him there as the “Existential of existentials” one might say– fully Divine and fully human – and we cleave to him as the “Mystery of Faith”.

We do not just proclaim doctrines about him in a cold and formal way. Neither do we merely remember him as stories to be admired and imitated. We are joined to him in living communion of spirit and a mystical union of body. Faith is indeed the substantial and embryonic reality of this communion which is not yet apparent to the bodily senses. Like the young of some animals that are born blind, we are in communion with the life giving nourishment that sustains and nourishes us, yet our eyes have not yet opened to see the face of the Beloved. The Mystery of Faith is nothing at all abstract, but neither is it subjective. It is the already present reality of the Father’s glory which Christ shares with us and confers upon us by the indwelling of Holy Spirit in the sacramental life.

It is along these lines that we must correct and answer the false immanentism that has distorted not just liturgy, but catechesis and Christian formation in so many places. Along these lines we can find a new development of orthodoxy which will bring out the full majesty of Christ as *Mysterium Fidei*. at the heart of our liturgy and of our lives.

Note

¹Republished in Theological Perspectives Volume 1: Christ The Sacrament of Creation (see inside back cover) available for download at <http://www.faith.org.uk/Shop/PersTheoDownload.htm> or as a bound volume from Family Publications <http://www.familypublications.co.uk/detail.cfm?ID=0000961&storeid=1>

Maximus on the Incarnation as Key to Hierarchy in Church and Creation *John Gavin S. J.*

With help of the 6th century Saint Maximus the Confessor, Fr John Gavin S.J. draws out how, in the light of Christ's incarnation and redemption, ecclesial hierarchy fulfills humanity. Fr Gavin, a Jesuit of the province of New Orleans, teaches Patristics at the Gregorian University in Rome.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy has become a much-maligned concept even within the Catholic Church herself. For many, the term smacks of an elitism that grates upon democratic sensibilities. The modern preference for fluidity and relativity finds it hard to accept an objective, never mind divinely established, order.

Two early Christian theologians – (pseudo-) Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor – offer us another perspective regarding this divinely established hierarchy. Their Neoplatonic cosmology, with its triads and ranks of celestial beings, may appear artificial to our contemporary mind; yet it is a vision deeply rooted in the scriptures and tradition. I would like briefly to consider the teachings of these two authors regarding the clerical orders and the significance of their teaching for today.

Dionysius and the Celebration of Rites

For centuries the Dionysian corpus – *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, and a collection of letters – has been attributed to the renowned convert Dionysius the Areopagite, mentioned in Acts 17: 31. Contemporary scholars, however, have demonstrated that the works more likely belong to an unknown fifth century Christian. The technical terms and, in particular, the structure of *The Divine Names IV*, betray a clear dependence upon the thought of the Neoplatonist Proclus, while other references within the corpus indicate a fifth century dating.¹ Dionysius the Areopagite has become (pseudo-) Dionysius for future generations.

The questions regarding authorship, however, do not belie the significance of Dionysius' Christocentric vision. The explanation of the orders of the clergy and the sacraments may reflect certain aspects of Dionysius' contemporary situation – e.g., emphasis upon the sacramental triad of baptism, the Eucharist, and the consecration of the sacred oil – but the basic principles of these orders remain valid.

Dionysius defines a hierarchy as “a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine ... It reaches out to grant every being, according to merit, a share of light and then through a divine sacrament, in harmony and in peace, it bestows on each of those being perfected its own form.”² Jesus is the head of this hierarchy, who purifies, illuminates, and divinises through the sacred orders: he desires to perfect all rational beings in “his own form.”³ Thus, the purpose of the hierarchy is not to establish ranks of power, but it exists to unite all things with God and conform them to Christ. “The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him.”⁴

The true actor in every hierarchy – celestial (the angels), ecclesiastical (the clergy), sacramental, and lay⁵ – is Jesus Christ, who reveals his presence and bestows the overflowing gifts of his grace through the established ranks. For the ecclesiastical hierarchy of deacons, priests and bishops, this means that no member may claim to act on his own authority or power. He must humbly recognise that he acts in the name of Jesus and that his vocation as celebrant of the sacraments comes only from the One who has chosen to act in them. Jesus continues to strengthen and sanctify his Church through his servants, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, “effected so as to achieve a proportion appropriate to sacred objectives and so as to bring all the elements together in order into a cohesive and harmonious communion.”⁶

As a reflection of the celestial hierarchy (the angels), the ecclesiastical hierarchy consisting of the bishop, priest and deacon, follows two main principles. First, the bishop (or, in Dionysius' term, the *hierarch*), who stands at the peak of the hierarchy, receives his authority and graces directly from Jesus. We can interpret this principle as being a reflection of Jesus' choice of the Apostles and the continuation of the Apostolic order in the Pope and the Bishops (*Mt. 16: 13-20*). The lower orders in turn receive their consecration from Jesus, but always through the *hierarch* appointed by Christ. There is therefore never any question regarding the true actor and source of the spiritual gifts distributed through this triad of bishop, priest and deacon: one can always climb the scale of orders to Jesus Christ himself.

Second, each level in the hierarchy both participates in the gifts of its superior and transmits its gifts to the inferior, always in proportion to the rank, i.e., the lower rank shares in the gifts of the superior, but not fully; the superior includes all of the gifts of the lower rank, in addition to other particular graces received from the rank above. Thus, the *hierarch* shares directly in the priesthood of Christ and therefore enjoys the fullness of the priesthood in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but he is infinitely far from encompassing the totality of Christ in himself. He receives the mission to *perfect* the body of Christ that it may acquire the divine likeness, particularly through the celebration of the Eucharist:

And just as we observe that every hierarchy ends in Jesus, so each individual hierarchy reaches its term in its own inspired *hierarch*. The power of the order of *hierarchs* spreads throughout the entire company and works the special mysteries of its own hierarchy through all the sacred orders. But it is to this order especially, rather than to other orders, that divine law has bestowed the more divine workings of the sacred ministry. The rites are images of the power of the divinity, by which the hierarchs perfect the holiest of symbols and all the sacred ranks.⁷

“...the hierarchy of the clergy is not to dominate, but to divinise all the members of the body of Christ.”

This doctrine of Dionysius is reflected in the teachings of *Lumen gentium* III:

The bishop, invested with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is “the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood,” above all in the Eucharist, which he himself offers, or ensures that it is offered, from which the Church ever derives its life and on which it thrives [...] For “the sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to accomplish our transformation into that which we receive.” Moreover, every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop, to whom is confided the duty of presenting to the divine majesty the cult of the Christian religion and of ordering it in accordance with the Lord’s injunctions and the Church’s regulations, as further defined for the diocese by his particular decision (48-49; 54-55).

The priest receives the mission of *illuminating* the Body of Christ. His celebration of the sacraments, instruction of the faithful, and personal example shine the divine light upon the faithful and draw them toward the Lord:

The light-bearing order of priests guides the initiates to the divine visions of the sacraments. It does so by the authority of the inspired hierarchs in fellowship with whom it exercises the functions of its own ministry. It makes known the works of God by way of the sacred symbols [the sacraments] and it prepares the postulants to contemplate and participate in the holy sacraments.⁸

Dionysius responds to those who observe that the priest in fact shares in the Bishop’s exclusive mission of *perfecting* through the celebration of the Mass: does the priest’s celebration of the Mass transgress the order of the ecclesiastical hierarchy?

Even if the priests can preside over some of the revered symbols [sacraments], a priest could not perform the sacred divine birth [baptism] without the divine ointment [the oils consecrated by the bishop], nor could he perform the mystery of Holy Communion without having first placed on the altar the symbols of that Communion. Furthermore, he would not even be a priest if the *hierarch* had not called him to this at his consecration.⁹

Once again we see Dionysius’ vision reflected in *Lumen gentium* III:

Whilst not having the supreme degree of the pontifical office, and notwithstanding the fact that they depend on the bishops in the exercise of their own proper power, the priests are for all that associated with them by reason of their sacerdotal dignity; and in virtue of the sacrament of Orders, after the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest (*Heb.* 5:1-10; 7:24; 9:11-28), they are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament. On the level of their own ministry sharing in the unique office of Christ, the mediator, (*1 Tim.* 2:5), they

announce to all the word of God. However, it is in the Eucharistic cult or in the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful (*synaxis*) that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred functions; there, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again and apply, until the coming of the Lord (cf. *1 Cor.* 11:26), the unique sacrifice of the New Testament, that namely of Christ offering himself once for all a spotless victim to the Father (cf. *Heb.* 9:11-28) (63-67).

Finally, the deacon has the responsibility of *purifying* the Body of Christ. This mission, for Dionysius, unfolds in the humble services that the deacon performed in the Church of the time, especially the preparation of the candidates before baptism. Some of these actions may appear surprising today:

The order of deacons purifies and discerns those who do not carry God’s likeness within themselves and it does so before they come to the sacred rites performed by the priests [...] That is why during the rite of divine birth [baptism] it is the deacons who take away the postulant’s old clothes. It is they who untie [his sandals]. It is they who turn him west for the abjuration and then to the east, since theirs is the order and theirs the power of purification. It is they who call on him to cast aside the garments of his old life.¹⁰

We can, of course, also include the deacon’s celebration of the baptismal rite itself and his responsibility of preaching the Word that cleanses man’s heart and enkindles the living flame of the Gospel. In the words of *Lumen gentium* III: “For, strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity” (74).

We can now make a few observations regarding the hierarchical vision of Dionysius. First, as already noted, the purpose of the hierarchy of the clergy is not to dominate, but to divinise all the members of the body of Christ. It reflects the harmonious structure of God’s universe – celestial and material – while establishing an objective order of service and transmission of grace. The deification through the hierarchy “means for Denys [Dionysius] that the deified creature becomes so united to God that its activity is the divine activity flowing through it”.¹¹

Second, the hierarchy humbles all of its members. Properly understood, every deacon, priest and bishop should see his place in the order as pure gift, a sharing in higher gifts in order that he might be at the service of others – clergy and lay. Furthermore, he acts in the name of Christ and through Christ’s grace, never through his own power. He must therefore comport himself as one who has received this great mission from the Lord, and empty himself on behalf of the Body of Christ.

Maximus on the Incarnation as Key to Hierarchy in Church and Creation

continued

Yet, despite the advantages of Dionysius' vision, two problems stand out in particular. First, his conception of the hierarchical transmission of grace, while certainly true, can also obfuscate the importance of *personal* participation in the Body of Christ. At times Dionysius seems to imply that grace flows from Christ through the ranks like an electric current, raising up all members to the divine likeness, willing or not. Second, the rigidity of his hierarchy as an ontological plan for creation might sometimes lend itself to the idea that the Incarnation of the eternal Word was superfluous – all grace flows naturally through the ranks, from the divine Word at the peak on down to the faithful: the Incarnation of the *Logos* does act as a *theophany* – a revelation of God – but it seems hardly necessary for salvation. The Areopagite's valuable contribution requires a corrective that recognises the value of the person and his relationship with Jesus. And we can find this in his great interpreter, Saint Maximus the Confessor.

St. Maximus and the Stages of the Spiritual Life

St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) devoted his life to witness for the truth of the fullness of the incarnation of the *Logos*. The incarnation of the *Logos*, according to Maximus, is the very reason for creation from the beginning and the source of all deification or union with God: "All things were created through him, all things were created for him" (Col. 1:16). In fact, the Incarnation would have taken place even if there had not been a fall, since the Incarnation – the union of the *logos* of human nature with the divine *Logos* – was God's intention *from the beginning*.¹² In the words of Maximus scholar Panayotis Christou: "Indeed, since man's purpose was *theosis*, which he was not able to achieve by his own means, the descent of God to man would be necessary under any circumstance, in order to facilitate man's ascent. Man's sin and fall were a fact which did not cause a new decision by God, but added a detail to the eternal design".¹³ Or better, in the words of Maximus himself: "This [the Incarnation] is the great and hidden mystery. This is the blessed end according to which all things are composed. This is the divine plan conceived before the beginning of all things ... Looking toward this end, God brought the essences of all things into existence."¹⁴

The concept of a divine "order" (*taksis* or *thesis*) in creation certainly plays a fundamental role within Maximus' portrayal of the cosmic drama. God ordered the universe with the intention of becoming incarnate and making creatures one with himself. The structure of creation depends upon the eternal *skopos*, the divine plan for the Incarnation. Creation – even in its distinctions – therefore reflects an order directed toward an end in the *Logos* himself. As L. Thunberg notes: "As a whole the terms *taksis* or *thesis* thus confirm Maximus' belief in creation as a result of a positive act of God, including as its purpose unity without violation [of the individual person]".¹⁵

On the one hand, within this conception of an ordered universe, Maximus clearly accepts the general teachings of Dionysius regarding the hierarchical structure and the transmission of grace and illumination. He speaks of the celestial ranks of the angels in Dionysian terms and acknowledges the importance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the clerical missions. The hierarchical structure of the universe reveals and, in part, effects the unity with God through the transmission of grace and knowledge.

On the other hand, Maximus appears to find fault in the Areopagite's strict representation of an order that tends to overrun the dignity of the person and the centrality of the Incarnation, rendering divinisation the inevitable outcome of a Neoplatonic "return to the source", that is, to the *Logos*. J. M. Garrigues correctly notes that Maximus does assume Dionysius' understanding of a cosmic order as a "vision of the communication of grace", while at the same time avoiding the Areopagite's "rigid, well-constructed hierarchy" as an ontological plan.¹⁶ Thus, Maximus assumes the general Dionysian structure, but it does not have the same significance that one would find in most Neoplatonist works. He enriches the ontology and epistemology involved. The divine order exists, but the centrality of the incarnation of the *Logos* puts this hierarchy at the service of the *person's* salvation and sanctification.

"the order of providence takes precedence over the Dionysian hierarchy of being."

Regarding the ontological order of the cosmos, the order of providence takes precedence over the Dionysian hierarchy of being and illumination. Maximus' emphasis upon the Incarnation highlights the order of the *logoi* – the divine *willings* or intentions for each created being united in the divine *Logos* – of providence, which directs creation toward its full expression as the likeness of God. The incarnate Word and the divine providence, which guides creation toward this *telos*, hold precedence in Maximus' manner of speaking of divine immanence in creation.¹⁷

Returning to the theme of the Ecclesiastical hierarchy, one sees that Maximus acknowledges its importance, but he strives to bring out its significance for the personal growth in sanctity and communion with Christ. In his interpretation of the liturgy, the *Mystagogia*, Maximus has little to say about clerical orders, noting only that his master, Dionysius, had already treated this subject. Yet, he does offer a remarkable interpretation of the orders of deacon, priest and Bishop in his *Chapters on Love*:

The one anointing the mind for holy contests, and driving away from himself passionate thoughts, has the *logos* of deacon. The one enlightening [the mind] for knowledge of essences, and making falsifying knowledge disappear, has the *logos* of the priest. And the one fulfilling the mind by the myrrh of the knowledge of the worshipper and of the Holy Trinity, has the *logos* of the bishop.¹⁸

“...the Incarnation [...] is the blessed end according to which all things are composed.”

Maximus' has given the Ecclesiastical hierarchy a new significance by fusing the Dionysian vision with the stages of the spiritual life described in the works of the fourth century monk, Evagrius Ponticus. Each clerical rank now represents not only a mission and a transmission of grace, but also a model for the person's growth in the divine likeness.

The deacon, the *purifier*, represents the *practical or ascetical stage*. This involves the separation from the passions and growth in the virtues.¹⁹ It requires a rational reorientation of the human person – in mind and body – toward the authentic *logos* of nature and the opening of the mind toward the action of God's grace in love.²⁰ The individual Christian ideally should find in the humble service of the deacon – especially in his role in the celebration of the Mass – an example of self-abnegation and the virtue-filled life. Through the ascetic struggle of prayer, penance, fasting, and sacrifice, the person spiritually becomes the deacon.

The priest, the *illuminator*, represents the stage of *natural contemplation*, when man looks past the material world to see the true *logoi* of things.²¹ “The mind arriving in the contemplation of visible things seeks either their natural reasons, or the things symbolised through them, or it seeks the cause itself of these things”. Through natural contemplation, man no longer falls into the deceptions of sensory experience, since he comes to the knowledge of the true unity of things in Christ.²² The world becomes a *theophany* for him, a revelation of God and God's providence. This takes place particularly through the celebration of the Eucharist, when the real presence of Jesus under the species of bread and wine reveal and effect the union for which the universe longs. Through the grace of the sacraments and a spiritual vision, the person becomes the priest.

Finally, the bishop, the *perfector*, represents the stage of *mystical theology*, the abandonment of all material and intellectual constraints that come between the mind and the ineffable experience of the Trinity. This represents the actual stage of divinization, a form of knowledge “beyond knowledge”: “*Theologia* recalls the knowledge-process and its content; *theosis* [divinisation] stresses the formal effect of this knowledge-process: likeness with God, unity with God”.²³ Such a union cannot occur through human striving, since it is pure gift. Only the graces received in Baptism, Confession, and the Eucharist – graces flowing from Jesus' abandonment of self to the Father on the Cross – transform and elevate the human person to the intimacy of divine unity. Through worthy participation in the sacraments the person spiritually becomes the Bishop.

St. Maximus and Suffering in Christ

It is now clear that, while accepting the divinely ordained hierarchy as an essential order of the transmission of Christ's grace, Maximus also transforms this hierarchy into models of personal participation in the power of grace. Each person depends upon Jesus for his salvation and union with God (reflected in the objective order of the ecclesiastical

hierarchy), but must also freely give himself over to the power of grace through growth in the spiritual life (the hierarchy of the stages of the spiritual life).²⁴

For Maximus, the ecclesiastical hierarchy reflects and effects the goal of the Incarnation. On the one hand, the incarnate Word, Jesus, gave his life in obedience to the Father, saving man from sin and, through his resurrection and ascension, elevated man to the perfect union with the Father. “He is our repose as the one freeing the law from the contingent slavery in the flesh during the present life; our healing, as the one healing [us] of the affliction of death and destruction through his Resurrection; our grace, as the distributor of sonship in the Spirit by God the Father through faith, and of the grace of divinisation for each one according to worthiness.”²⁵

The ecclesiastical hierarchy emerges from the divine communion as it is offered to man through the victorious Jesus, who now sits at the right hand of the Father, and renews itself and the Church through the celebration of the Eucharist. The bishop, priest, and deacon proclaim, reveal, and realise – through Christ – the hope of communion enabled and revealed by the Risen Lord.

On the other hand, the Incarnation restores man's personal participation in this objective sanctifying order. Jesus, through his perfect obedience to the Father unto death, restores man's capacity to suffer fruitfully or to concede freely to the action of grace – a capacity lost through the pride of Adam's rejection of God's will. Jesus restores, through his human will in union with the divine, the “willed concession”²⁶ or the “ecstatic power” of suffering²⁷ that allows the action of grace to elevate man “beyond nature” into the divine nature itself.

In and through Jesus, each individual believer strives to suffer or to concede to the transforming power of grace. He must struggle to liberate himself from sin through ascetical practice and acts of charity, suffering through his abandonment of the world; he must pass beyond the material illusions of this life to the spiritual realities through a loving participation in the sacraments; and, above all, he must welcome the gift of grace that transforms hearts of stone to hearts of flesh in the reception of the Eucharist, which is “the end of everything [...] the sharing in the mystery. This transforms the people into itself [...] through grace and participation – for the ones who have received it worthily.”²⁸ The ecclesiastical hierarchy reveals this transformative suffering in Christ to each and every believer, and makes this sanctification a work in progress.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy, therefore, is in no way a rigid order of suffocating power. On the contrary, it is an order of transformative *suffering*! Its ranks do not act in and of themselves, but serve as a theophany of the One who suffered for us and continues to act for us in the sacraments. And it calls each and every believer to abandon himself to Christ in love, to give himself daily over to the transforming power of grace. This truth is echoed in the words of Pope Benedict in his first homily:

If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? And once again the Pope [John Paul II] said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy is truly a manifestation of the activity of Jesus, the One who suffered for us and raises creation to the eternal divine union.

Notes

¹For a summary of the evidence cf. S. Lilla, *Dionigi l'Areopagite e il platonismo cristiano*, Brescia 2005, pp. 159-162; C. Steel, *Proclus et Denys: De l'existence du mal in Denys l'Areopagite et sa posterite en Orient et en Occident*, Paris 1997, pp. 89-116; H. D. Saffrey, *Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus in Studia Patristica IX*, ed. F. L. Cross, [TU 94], Berlin 1963, pp. 98-105. E. Corsini has some questions regarding certain points of the Koch-Stiglmayr hypothesis, and suggests that both Dionysius and Proclus could have been working with common sources, without any form of direct contact. Cf. E. Corsini, *Il Trattato "De divinis nominibus" dello Pseudo-Dionigi*, Tornino 1962, pp. 12-35.

²Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* (CH) III, 1, ed. G. Heil and A. M. Ritter, New York 1991 [PTS 36], p. 17. [English translation: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. C. Luibheid, New York 1987, pp. 153-154.] In subsequent notes I shall include the reference to the Greek critical edition and the translation by Luibheid.

³Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH) I, 1, ed. G. Heil and A.M. Ritter, [PTS 36] pp. 63-64. [Luibheid, pp. 195-196]

⁴CH III, 2, ed. Heil and Ritter, p. 17. [Luibheid, p. 154]

⁵For Dionysius, the triad of lay orders consists of monks, communicants and those being purified, i.e., the catechumens and the penitents.

⁶EH V, 3, ed. Heil and Ritter, pp. 105-106. [Luibheid, p. 235]

⁷EH V, 5, ed. Heil and Ritter, p. 107. [Luibheid, p. 236-237]

⁸EH V, 6, ed. Heil and Ritter, p. 108. [Luibheid, p. 237]

⁹EH V, 5, ed. Heil and Ritter, p. 107. [Luibheid, p. 237]

¹⁰EH V, 6, ed. Heil and Ritter, p. 109. [Luibheid, p. 239]

¹¹A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, Wilton, Ct., 1989.

¹²Maximus the Confessor, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, 60, CCSG 22, p. 75, 33-38. One also finds this assertion in other Fathers of the Church, in particular, St. Irenaeus. Cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 12, trans. J. Behr, New York 1997, p. 47.

¹³P. Christou, *Maximus Confessor on the Infinity of Man*, in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, ed. F. Heinzer and C. Schönborn, Fribourg 1982, p. 268.

¹⁴Maximus the Confessor, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, 60, CCSG 22, p. 75, 33-38.

¹⁵L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 63. Also cf. H. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁶J. M. Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur: La charite, avenir divin de l'homme*, Paris 1976, p. 86. Also cf. W. Völker, *Der Einfluß des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite auf Maximus Confessor*, in *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik: Festschrift Erich Klostermann*, [TU 77], Berlin 1961, pp. 339-342.

¹⁷Cf. *Ambigua ad Ioannem* (*Amb. Io.*) 10, PG 91, 1188 D-1189 A.

¹⁸*Capita de caritate* (*Car.*) II, 21, A. Ceresa-Gestaldo, Roma 1963, p. 100.

¹⁹Man does not "create" the virtues, but manifests the divine qualities that are innate to his being. Christ himself is the sum of all virtues and the "exegete" of all virtues, which means that growth in virtue is to grow in Jesus' likeness. Cf. *Amb. Io.* 10, PG 91, 1109 A.; *Amb. Io.* 7, PG 91, 1081 D; *Amb. Io.* 10, PG 91, 1133 D.

²⁰Reason (*logos*) serves as man's chief faculty in the practical life, being the "exegete" of the virtues and the guide toward the Good. *Amb. Io.* 10, PG 91, 1109 B.

²¹*Car.* I, 98, A. Ceresa-Gestaldo, p. 88.

²²In natural contemplation man possesses "the generative *Logos* of everything, revealed in faith through the order of visible things." *Ad Thalassium* (*Thal.*) 25, C. Laga and C. Steel, CCSG 7, p. 161, 35-37.

²³J. Loosen, *Logos und Pneuma in begnadeten Menschen bei Maximus Confessor*, Munster 1941, p. 81.

²⁴It should be noted that climbing the spiritual hierarchy is rarely a consistent process. Rather, in our daily struggle, we find ourselves stumbling and rising during our pilgrimage of hope toward the perfect union with God, which will only occur in the general resurrection.

²⁵*Thal.* 64, CCSG 22, pp. 195-197, 152-158.

²⁶Cf. *Amb. Io.*, 7, PG 91, 1076 C.

²⁷"Suffering is the ecstatic power that leads that which suffers toward that which acts" *Amb. Io.*, 7, PG 91, 1088 D.

²⁸*Mystagogia* (*Myst.*), XXI, PG 91, 697 A.

It is becoming increasingly recognised, at least within the Church, that science has developed only in the context of a Christian civilisation, and has deep Christian roots.

If we consider the great civilisations of the past such as those of Egypt and Greece, India and China, we find great achievements in art and architecture, philosophy and drama, but nothing remotely like our own civilisation. Undoubtedly they had many men and women of high intelligence who made notable advances in many fields, but they failed to develop science. Why was this?

We can begin to answer this question by asking ourselves what is necessary in a civilisation for science to develop. There must be a well-developed social structure so that some people can devote themselves to thinking about the world, without the necessity of worrying where the next meal is coming from. They must have a language so that they can discuss things and writing materials to record what they have found. Later on, as science becomes more quantitative, mathematics is also needed. These are what might be called the material conditions for the development of science.

The ancient civilisations possessed all these, but still science did not develop. They are necessary for science but not sufficient. What is missing?

The answer is to be found in their attitude of mind, in their beliefs about the world. To develop science they must be curious about the world and want to understand it. They must believe that the world is rational and orderly, so that if they find out something one day it will still be applicable on the next, and in other places. A more subtle requirement is that the order in nature is not necessary but contingent; it could be otherwise. The reason for this is that if we believed that the order is necessary we might try to find out about the world just by pure thought, as we do in mathematics. However if we believe the order to be contingent, the only way to find out about the world is to look at it, to make experiments. We must also believe that the whole enterprise is practicable, that the world is at least partly open to the human mind. We must believe that whatever we find out must be freely shared with other scientists and not jealously guarded as our special secret. If anything we discover has any practical applications this must be used for the general good.

This is a very special set of beliefs, and if we examine the ancient civilisations we find that these beliefs are not there. Some believed that the world is evil, or at the mercy of the whims of gods. Others believed that whatever they found out about the world must be kept secret. Perhaps a few individuals had some of the right ideas, especially in Greece, but they were not held by the whole community. We then understand why science did not develop in those civilisations. Even the Greek efforts to develop science failed, although they knew that it must be based on

experiment and reason, and had developed much of the mathematical knowledge that was to prove so important for science.

The ideas that eventually made science possible came from an unlikely source. The Israelites were a small tribe in the desert, surrounded by the mighty empires of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Unlike their neighbours, they believed in one supreme God, who made and sustains everything. When He had created the world, God looked on all He had made, and saw that it was good (Genesis, 1.31). He ordered the world 'in number, measure and weight' (Wisdom, 11.20). He was free to make the world as He chose, so it is not necessary but contingent on the Divine will. He commanded man to conquer the world and subdue it (Genesis, 1.28), and this implies that the enterprise of understanding the world is a practicable one. He emphasised that wisdom is a treasure above gold and silver that must be freely shared (Wisdom, 7.13).

These Jewish beliefs in the Old Testament were reinforced and extended by the Incarnation of Christ. This greatly ennobled matter, and destroyed the belief in cyclic time that is found in all ancient civilisations. The Incarnation happened only once and was the ultimate fulfilment and exemplar of the unique one-off salvific events in the history of the People of Israel. Time was confirmed as a linear sequence, with a beginning and an end. During the first few centuries of the Christian era the creeds formulated to clarify Christian beliefs contained many statements that further emphasised truths essential for science. Thus the Nicene creed starts with an affirmation that God created everything. Only Christ has the same nature as God, so matter is created. All things are created through Christ, and so all matter is good. Christ Himself tells us that we must feed the hungry and clothe the naked which is to apply our knowledge of matter, especially today from science and technology, to our material needs.

It took many centuries for these beliefs to be thoroughly absorbed, and social conditions were not favourable for the birth of science for a thousand years. Then gradually a new civilisation arose in the Middle Ages, a civilisation permeated by Christian beliefs.

The most fundamental part of physics is the theory of motion, and if science is to begin it must begin there. A philosopher in the fourteenth century university of Paris, John Buridan, was trying to understand motion. Why is it that when we throw a stone, it goes on moving after it has left our hand? The Greek philosophers never found a satisfactory explanation. The Greeks held that the world is eternal, but Buridan remembered the Christian belief that the world was created. God did not create a static world, but a world in motion. Buridan realised that at creation God must have given each particle an impetus whereby it continues in motion. This insight was eventually to develop into Newton's first law of motion. This idea of Buridan,

derived from Christian theology, is the beginning of modern science, in its discovery and description of intrinsic, ordered inter-relationship.

From that small beginning many other scientists in the Middle Ages developed new ideas of space and time. Then Brahe and Copernicus replaced the Greek geocentric cosmology theory by a new idea, that the sun is in the centre of the solar system with the earth going around it. Kepler's laws of planetary motion described accurately how the planets move. Galileo showed how motion on the earth could also be described mathematically.

All this new understanding was brought together by Newton's three laws of motion together with his theory of universal gravitation. From it the laws of Kepler and Galileo could be deduced, thus unifying celestial and terrestrial dynamics. The motions of the planets and of projectiles could be calculated to high accuracy. Eclipses and other celestial phenomena could be accurately predicted.

With the work of Newton physics came to maturity for the first time in history, and science was put into a condition of continuous growth. During the subsequent centuries the work of these pioneers was extended and applied to understand many features of the natural world. Electric and magnetic phenomena were described by Maxwell's theory and in the twentieth century came the discovery of the atomic and nuclear worlds and the quantum. This has increasingly unified knowledge of our cosmos, transformed our lives and given us cause for increasing wonder at the One Intelligence behind it.

Thus we see that modern science, far from being an alien threat, is a natural consequence of Christian beliefs about the world. Science has Christian roots and is the Christian way of understanding the world and using it for the benefit of mankind. ■

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The Incarnation and Priestly Loving in the Thought of Edward Holloway *William Massie*

Fr William Massie, the parish priest of three parishes in Hull, and Reviews editor of this magazine, recalls some of Fr Edward Holloway's insights into priest's ministering of Christ's love, which have helped to inspire numerous such vocations through the activities of *Faith* movement.

Introduction

It is notable how many vocations to the priesthood have been inspired and nurtured within the friendships and activities of *Faith* Movement. This has occurred at a time when there is acknowledged to be a crisis of priestly identity. Cardinal Stickler in his *The Case for Clerical Celibacy* (first published 1993, English edition Ignatius, 1995) summed up the crisis as not only priests renouncing their ministry and fewer vocations but also a "profound secularization" by many who stay in active ministry (p. 85). It might then be helpful to gather together those principles and ideas about priesthood that have been distinctive within the *Faith* Movement while being rooted in the theological tradition of priesthood and its practice within the Church.

The Priesthood as the Continuation of the Economy of the Incarnation.

Back in November 1977 the co-founder of *Faith* Movement wrote, as editor of this magazine,

"There will be no traditional priesthood left in Europe in ten years time, among the younger clergy, unless a start is urgently made to teach priests the full faith, the full spiritual heritage of the Church, and the full content of the life of Christ in the traditional image of the priest of the Western Patriarchate, the priesthood of the Latin rite, which is the priesthood of the fullness of Peter and Paul." *Faith* Editorial, November/December 1977

That the majority of the relatively few men coming forward for priesthood now want to be faithful to the magisterium is likely due in large part to the enormous efforts of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to teach the "full faith", the "full content of the life of Christ". In the long term, the Church only flourishes where the full faith is taught. It is not surviving where it is not.

Holloway suffered no crisis of understanding of the nature of the priesthood. It is rooted in the perspective of creation focussed on the Incarnation of Christ as its purpose and fulfilment. The whole material and spiritual creation is in view of Christ and for Christ. Christ is the primordial Sacrament of creation. Creation is only fulfilled when it comes into contact with the whole Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity. And so 'Christ our Eucharist' is the material and spiritual centre and meaning of creation. For this reason Holloway frequently defines the essence of the priest as the one who presides and has power over the Body and Blood of the Lord. He does not mean it in any merely functional sense of the 'one who can perform the magic'. For the identity of the priest is not simply functional but a *personal sharing* of one's whole being with Christ's whole being:

"We share with Christ first, the giving in ministry of our senses, hand, feet, voices especially for the continuation of the economy of the Incarnation, of the Word, made flesh. To minister our bodies to incarnate the Lord in word and work, we must minister also our spiritual souls, our minds and hearts, all that is in our person, to be even feebly adequate vessels of that ministering of Christ across the ages." *The Priest and His Loving* (TPL), Edward Holloway, 1985, p. 10

The priest is empowered through the sacrament of order to stand in for Christ. The sacred character of priesthood "confers a spiritual relationship to Christ" so that the faithful can see something of Christ in the priest. But the sacred character does not of course increase "the intrinsic likeness of God in ... [the priest's] soul" (TPL p.12). This marks one of the main differences between the New Testament priesthood and the Old Testament priesthood. In the Old Testament, the priest was from the priestly tribe, chosen from among men to do service on behalf of the whole of God's people before God. In the New Testament, the priest is not a priest by natural birth but by God's new and specific intervention in human history in the conferring of the sacrament of orders. "The root of the gift [of priesthood] does not come from below. The root is not of human nature but of the mediatorial and priestly office, from before the world was, of the Son of God and of Man" (*New Synthesis*, Edward Holloway, 1970, p.299).¹

The utter clarity of this vision of the priest as the one who makes present something real of the person of Christ throughout time and space was a gentle refreshing breeze for those considering a vocation who encountered the *Faith* Movement in the 1970s and '80s when the identity of the priest was so in dispute. "The people and emphatically the young, see the priest as mirroring to them the personality of Christ as Man." (TPL p.11) For Fr Holloway orthodox doctrine concerning priesthood was not just something one gleaned from teachers, but also through one's daily ministrations.

Holloway speaks of the "sacral action of Christ through men who are ministers". His ontological understanding of the priest as the one standing in for Christ who teaches, protects, leads and sanctifies led him to question many of the initiatives in the 1980s which sought to extend to the laity tasks traditionally the function of the priest. He questioned the introduction of communion 'under both species' on the grounds that it would necessarily require lay people to perform functions which were not properly theirs. The terminology of 'lay minister' which was then used sums up how the whole dynamic relationship of priesthood and faithful was being emptied out. "[The lay person does] not participate intrinsically in the Liturgy of the Eucharist as Sacrifice and Sacrament

“the priest is identified with Christ to the point of saying ‘my body... my blood’ in the Mass.”

and ministry *from* the persons of the sacred ministers to the People of God”. Because of the plentiful supply of priests at *Faith* movement activities use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is never appropriate, even by our local Church’s, creative interpretation of the relevant recently updated norms. It is interesting that over the years of my involvement in *Faith* movement I cannot recall any protests from those who attend that they have been deprived of exercising what they have sometimes been told in the parishes are their ‘rightful ministries’ as lay people. The ‘active participation of the faithful’ is encouraged as an *interior* participation through the joining of one’s life to Christ in the offering of the Mass. The experience of so many priests concelebrating at conferences has itself helped to inspire men to consider the priesthood. It has not generally inspired resentment of clerical/male patriarchy.

The Loving of the Priest is Closest to the Loving of Christ

When a draft copy of *The Priest and His Loving* first came out I remember a shared sense of keen interest, even excitement. To young men wrestling with the thoughts of priesthood over a long period, to young men just beginning to wonder at the possibility of priesthood, it came as a massive reassurance and encouragement to be told, in a nutshell, that following Christ’s call to priesthood did mean ‘no sex’ but it did not mean ‘no love’. It is a constant refrain in *The Priest and His Loving* that the love of a priest for the Kingdom of God within and for the people to whom he is sent is the “most close to the loving of Christ Himself ” (TPL p.1, p.5, p.8). Now *Presbyterorum ordinis* (PO, Vatican II) had already spoken of priestly celibacy as the imitation of Christ’s own celibacy. It also spoke of celibacy as expressing and increasing “pastoral charity” and helping the priest to cling to Christ with an “undivided heart” and be dedicated through Christ more freely to the service of God and men and be less encumbered for the task of “heavenly regeneration” (PO n.16). What was so refreshing and inspiring in Fr Holloway’s short pamphlet was that here these truths were expressed not merely in theological language but in the very personal and personalist language of this priest’s own experience of his priesthood. Given that time after time the discussion of priestly celibacy in the media and in many Catholic journals and books begins and ends with statements about the marriages of the apostles and the attempts to impose celibacy in the 12th century motivated by a desire to protect the Church’s property and by a dualist denigration of marriage, it was definitely good news to link priestly celibacy with Christ and his loving.

Holloway prefers ‘vowed chastity’ to ‘celibacy’ which he points out is the natural vocation of all the unmarried (TPL p.5). It is a way of living and *loving and being loved* with a love that is “warm, joyous and creative” (p. 1).

Holloway is in line with other theologians like Jean Galot, in grounding the vowed chastity of the priest in the priestly character of Christ that he is given in ordination.² However

for Galot, it was not “necessary” for Jesus to renounce marriage for he sees that as implying that there was something necessarily sinful about marriage (*The Theology of Priesthood*, Jean Galot, Ignatius, 1985, p.230). Rather the renunciation of marriage was “appropriate” for the furthering of the Kingdom and a more universal love. For Galot, these are the reasons why Christ imposed continence on the apostles and these are the enduring reasons for celibacy to remain absolutely “appropriate” for priests today.

For Holloway, Christ’s own celibacy is so important he could almost use the word ‘necessary’. This is absolutely not because there is anything necessarily sinful about marriage but because of Holloway’s firm grasp that there are *degrees of loving*. God became incarnate in Jesus Christ to bring us “a quite specific love”. The priest “sacrificially, sacramentally, magisterially *carries Christ* through the character of Order and its powers into the souls of men...”. “He [the priest] shares so much of the same specific type of love that it cannot flourish with its perfection unless he is chaste; i.e. alone but not lonely, given, but not taken, for the Kingdom of God’s sake” (TPL p. 4).

Holloway is saying in the strongest and clearest terms that vowed chastity is essential to the full living of the ordained priesthood of Christ without being an ontological necessity (as is the maleness of the priesthood). “[T]he perfection of priestly love and its true specific fullness cannot be achieved in the married state, any more than it could have been achieved in a married Christ.” (TPL p. 7) How does he explain these high and beautiful claims for the priest and his loving? By his claim that: “Vowed Chastity” is the giving of oneself to God in a special, higher and more perfect relationship of love for God and his people (TPL p.8).

This is rarely heard but is part of the Tradition of the Church. In the *New Synthesis* (p.418) Fr Holloway reminds us that it was actually defined by the Council of Trent (“*Vita ac melior ac beatior...*” DS 1810). Holloway considers it important not to forget this point for on this understanding stands or falls the case for *mandatory* celibacy.

It is this “higher relationship of love”, that is “so great, so intimate” that it can “knock on the most private doors of the human heart” (TPL p. 3). It was when the youngster Edward Holloway tried to encourage a ‘girl who was just a friend’ to go to daily Mass that he realised that what he truly desired was not the intimacy of a purely natural, human friendship but the supernatural friendship of Christ. He points out something obvious but often overlooked: marriage is an *equal* relationship in Christ. Priestly loving is not an equal relationship: it has “the unique challenge, the authority which enters the soul to prompt goodness, holiness and to release from sinful ways... [It is] a *Christ* relationship” (TPL p.7). A few years ago I wrote a letter to *The Tablet* in defence of priestly celibacy as a higher way of loving. Afterwards I had a number of emails including one from a convert married priest. He disagreed with me for implying he could not love God

The Incarnation and Priestly Loving in the Thought of Edward Holloway continued

as much as a celibate priest because he was married. This really is what the Trent teaching comes down to – whilst, it almost goes without saying, it is not judging the moral goodness and holiness of particular individuals. Another convert priest who had been married but was widowed before he was finally ordained, Fr Ronald Walls, admits in his autobiography that even as a Presbyterian minister he had felt torn between ‘giving himself’ totally to his wife and family and ‘giving himself’ to the people to whom God had sent him. He makes the insightful remark that many of the arguments in favour of allowing married priesthood put marriage in second place (*Love Strong as Death*, Ronald Walls, Gracewing, 2001, p. 290).

Over twenty years ago Fr Holloway was raising his voice against claims that we were moving to a brighter future where there would be fewer priests and religious but the laity would assume what was rightly their own. This would be “to canonise defeat and disaster” for it would among other things to undervalue the sign and gift of the *loving of vowed chastity* for the Church and society. In characteristically blunt language, Fr Holloway wrote in 1987:

“Chastity for the Kingdom of God’s sake, in the priest or in the nun, witnesses to the fact that love has many degrees of depth and perfection; that love, also as a warm fulfilling experience is independent of sexual orgasm, and that in marriage itself, sex as an experience as opposed to loving acceptance or desire of family, is the least important ingredient of human love. A world rotted with greed of every kind needs to know that what Jesus Christ never experienced is not, and cannot be essential to human fulfilment.” *Faith* Editorial March/April 1987

Holloway and John Paul II on Priestly Loving

It is interesting to see the similarities between Fr Holloway and the Servant of God John Paul II in speaking about the vocation of the priest to make present in his soul and in his flesh the loving of Christ. Holloway quotes some contemporary words of the then Holy Father in the foreword to his pamphlet, *The Priest and his Loving*:

“And we priests find ourselves particularly close to this redeeming love which the Son brought into the world – and which he brings continuously. Even if this fills us with a holy fear, we must recognise that together with the Eucharist, the mystery of this redeeming love is, in a sense in our hands. We must recognise that it returns each day upon our lips, that it is inscribed in our vocation and our ministry.” (Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Priests*, Holy Thursday 1983)

John Paul II frequently returned to this idea but it was magnificently addressed in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (1990). In developing the theological understanding for the Church’s law on celibacy, the Holy Father finds its ultimate motivation in the ontological configuration of the priest to Jesus Christ, Head and Spouse of the Church:

“The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest’s service to the Church in and with the Lord.” (n.29)

“Therefore, the priest’s life ought to radiate this spousal character which demands that he be a witness to Christ’s spousal love, and thus be capable of loving people with a heart which is new, generous and pure, with genuine self-detachment, with full, constant and faithful dedication and at the same time with a kind of ‘divine jealousy’ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2) – and even with a kind of maternal tenderness, capable of bearing the ‘pangs of birth’ until ‘Christ be formed’ in the faithful (cf. Gal 4:19).

The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest, inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the head and shepherd, is pastoral charity, as a participation in Jesus Christ’s own *pastoral charity*.” (*Pastores dabo vobis* nn. 22-23)

Others have written in such positive and beautiful language about priestly loving. It is remarkable however how often priestly celibacy is explained simply as ‘being free to serve’ rather than ‘being free to love’. Even official publications like the *Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* make no reference to priestly loving and the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* simply re-presents and comments briefly on the passages mentioned above from *Presbyterorum ordinis* and *Pastores dabo vobis* (cf. *Directory on the Life and Ministry of Priest* nn. 43-44)

It should be said that while Holloway did not, as far as I can discover, reflect upon the relationship between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful, he had a high view of the lay apostolate of the baptised. He insisted that the fundamental vocation in the Church is to *holiness* and constantly exhorted the lay men and women involved in *Faith* to sanctify and witness in those places where they rather than priests belong – the school, the college, the work place, the home. It seems that most of us, whose vocations to the priesthood have been fostered through *Faith* Movement would acknowledge that we were not badgered in any way to consider this call. Our witness is that there need be no shortage of labourers for the harvest if men will only listen attentively to the Lord’s voice calling them to service. The importance and dignity of the lay state also comes across in Holloway’s explanation of the complementary but distinct vocations of priesthood and marriage.

Vowed Chastity as Complementary to Marriage.

Priesthood and marriage are “mutually complementary loves and mutually exclusive loves. Neither can embrace the perfection of the other.” (TPL p.8) This is especially the case in the matter of the formation of children. Marriage is a vocation to build up the city of God and the city of man.

“We share with Christ first, the giving in ministry of our senses, hand, feet, voices, especially for the continuation of the economy of the Incarnation.”

“[The priest’s] vocation does not stand without theirs. [He] deepens and perfects the work the parents have begun but cannot well finish, especially from the age of ten.” He acts and speaks “with a further authority and a love which tries to enflesh again in a man the love of Christ for the ‘little ones’.” Priests can enter, when invited, the “inner sanctuary of mind and heart” where they say yes or no to God, where parents often cannot enter, because they “do embassy for Christ” (p. 9). The love of a priest is the love of Christ the redeemer.

The Priest’s Loving is Taken Up into the Eucharist

Numerous writers on priesthood note the historical connection between celibacy or the continence of priests who were married and the celebration of the sacraments. This connection has been present in the understanding and laws of celibacy from the first millennium, and is probably apostolic. One writer explains it as due to anxieties regarding “ritual impurity”, linked to the Church’s “ambivalence regarding sexual intercourse” and “boundary anxieties” regarding the Church’s relationship to “the world” which was maintained for 800 years until Vatican II.³ Cardinal Stickler offers an impressive and detailed explanation of the legislation concerning priestly continence and the teachings of the Fathers. He concludes that the reasons for priests being required to give up all conjugal relations with their wives on being ordained was not the “cultural purity of the minister of the altar, but rather the efficacy of mediatory prayer by the sacred minister”. He was to put aside things which were not in any way bad in themselves, but indeed good in themselves, so as to be completely dedicated to God in prayer and pastoral ministry (*The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, p. 99).

Holloway links priestly loving, chastity and the Eucharist in a manner which throws light upon this. He says that a priest’s loving “comes to a head” in the Mass. As he prays the Mass he can experience many things. His union and communion with Christ and with Christ’s own people is intense. He identifies with Christ in his pains, desolations and joys. He particularly mentions that he finds the “joy of Christ” in his own people. As he finds the self-oblation and self-immolation of Christ in the Mass, he knows that “in the likeness of Christ, he has to give himself, body and soul, to be ‘bread broken for you’ in the ministry of Christ.” He senses “the union and communion of soul of his people in the offering and feeding upon the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ”. And “Through all this the priest knows and feels his own union and communion with the people he loves...”. In other words, the active participation of a priest celebrating Mass means the taking up of “all aspects of a priest’s life, ministry, and love in chastity” into it. No wonder Holloway emphasises that it is in the celebration of Mass, in this “terrible power over the Body and the Blood of The Lord” that the priest knows “why he is alone, and he knows he is never lonely”. (TPL pp. 12-13) Fr Holloway seems to be saying that the priest’s loving, the priest’s gift of self to God and to his people, what Stickler calls his “mediatory prayer”, is most real, most expressed and most

justified and actually most strengthened, when the priest is identified with Christ to the point of saying ‘my body... my blood’ in the Mass. The ontological identification of the priest with Christ, Head and Spouse of the Church, is here described in penetrating spiritual and psychological detail.

Conclusion

Before the 1971 Synod of Bishops, the International Theological Commission issued a report in which it recommended that celibacy become optional for priesthood. While recognising that celibacy is the “better way” the members of the Commission felt that to ensure the “permanent, efficacious and universal” proclamation of the Gospel, both celibate and mature married men may be chosen for ordination (quoted in *The Theology of the Priesthood*, p. 249, fn. 51). In the Synod of Bishops that followed there were 87 votes cast for a position that would encourage the pope to allow the priestly ordination of “married men of mature age and proven life” (ibid p.250 fn.52). Just twenty more votes (107) were cast for the position that maintained the ban on the ordination of married men.⁴ During the pontificate of John Paul II the question of priestly identity and celibacy was raised although one senses with less ambivalence to the traditional position. He resoundingly explained and defended the case for mandatory celibacy in *Pastores dabo vobis*. Still the question of celibacy is often raised whenever the issues of the abuse of children by priests and homosexual scandals are discussed.

It will always be hard to defend the rule of compulsory celibacy in the face of scandals and confusion. The best defence will be a positive and beautiful vision well presented and well lived. The clear ideas about priestly identity expressed by Fr Holloway continue to inspire young men to seek to be *shepherds after the heart of Christ*. It seems important to hold fast to the vision.

Notes

¹Perhaps in this context it could be mentioned that Fr Holloway was of the opinion that as the priest would naturally face the people while celebrating at least six of the sacraments, for he stands in for Christ, so it is preferable for the priest to celebrate the Eucharist facing the people. Might the priest facing in the same direction as the faithful be more expressive in some ways of the meaning of the Old Testament priesthood rather than the priesthood of Christ?

²Two important consequences flow from this vocation to love Christ’s way: it is as essential to society as is marriage and it also will be crucified “to great depths of sorrow, often and often” (TPL p.1).

³*The Struggle for Celibacy* Paul Stanosz, Chapter 1, *Priestly Celibacy, a Brief History*. Stanosz cites the writers Paul Beaudette and Philip Sheldrake as his authorities.

⁴According to the Synod, candidates to the priesthood must, from the beginning of their formation, “give attention to the positive reasons for choosing celibacy, without letting themselves be disturbed by objections, the accumulation and continual pressure of which are rather a sign that the original value of celibacy itself has been called in question” – quoted in *The Theology of Priesthood*, p. 245.

The Sinful Priest: Minister of the Church's Faithfulness *Joseph Carola S. J.*

With the help of St Augustine of Hippo and *The Ratzinger Report* (1985) Fr Carola proposes a timely recovery of a traditional insight into Holy Mass. The efficacy of the Eucharist flows from the holiness of those incorporated into Christ, in contradistinction to the frailty of its indispensable priestly ministers. Fr Carola teaches patristic theology at the Gregorian university in Rome and is a Jesuit of the New Orleans province.

Before bidding peace to the congregation during the Communion rite at Mass celebrated according to the Roman Rite's Ordinary Form, the priest prays:

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church [*Ne respicias peccata nostra, sed fidem Ecclesiae tuae*], and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever.

This venerable prayer dates from the first Christian millennium. Until the late 1960's, it had formed part of the priest's private prayers said inaudibly to all but himself prior to his reception of Holy Communion. During the liturgical reform of the Mass in the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council, some proposed to delete this prayer altogether from the rite of Mass with a congregation. Initial schemata suggested leaving it in place only in those Masses which the priest said privately – that is, *sine populo*. In the end, at the direct insistence of Pope Paul VI, it was retained in the *Novus Ordo*, but not without modification. Three changes occurred: (1) the prayer and the accompanying exchange of peace, which had followed the *Agnus Dei*, now precede it; (2) the prayer itself is no longer said silently, but rather is recited aloud; and (3) the possessive adjective modifying 'sins' in the Latin text has been changed from the singular *mea* (my sins) to the plural *nostra* (our sins) – a change, which subsequently found its way into the vernacular translations.

While the *Novus Ordo* has retained the prayer, it has ceased to be the priest's private prayer. Therein lies the basic change. The prayer is now audible. This fact seems to account for the possessive adjective's change in number. There is no other obvious explanation. While this change of number may appear to be insignificant, it has, in fact, far-reaching – and it must be confessed, unfortunate – theological consequences. For, in its original form, the prayer had communicated through the supplication of the ordained minister, who acknowledged himself a sinner, the indispensable role of the baptismal priesthood in ecclesial reconciliation. The priest beseeched the Lord Jesus that in granting the reconciliatory fruits of unity and peace he look on the faith of the entire Church. Thus the prayer gave rise to an authentic voice of the faithful in relation to the sinful cleric within the Church. As we shall see, the possessive adjective's change in number not only obscures, but indeed threatens this rich theological heritage. In the project that lies before us, Augustine of Hippo and Pope Benedict XVI will aid our quest to recover what has been perhaps unreflectively yet nonetheless regrettably set aside.

The Church: Divine Yet Unfaithful

In 1985 Joseph Ratzinger, then the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, granted Italian journalist Vittorio Messori an exclusive interview on the state of the Church. *The Ratzinger Report* (RR), as it came to be known in English, covered a wide range of theological topics which were – and indeed have remained – particularly pressing since the Second Vatican Council. At the root of the post-conciliar crisis, Ratzinger explains, stands a pervasive misunderstanding of the nature of the Church. Many no longer believe that the Lord himself established the Church. Indeed, some theologians teach that the Church is merely a human construction which we can freely reorganise at will. They deny that in external human form she possesses fundamental, inviolable structures willed by God. Conceiving of the Church as a purely human project, they effectively dismiss the supernatural mystery which animates her being. In response to these ecclesiological misconceptions, Ratzinger re-emphasises the Church's Christological dimension. As Saint Paul teaches, the Church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is her Head. Just as Christ is both true God and true man, the Church, too, is both human and divine. No one denies that the Church is a human institution. But Catholics profess that she is fundamentally much more – in fact, infinitely more inasmuch as she is *Christ's Body* enlivened and brought together in unity as God's People by *his Spirit*.

The ecclesial Body of Christ, Ratzinger observes, is that reality which Catholic theology traditionally calls the *communio sanctorum* – the Communion of Saints. In this context, following the New Testament, one rightly understands 'saints' to include all the Church's baptised members. But the Latin word *sanctorum*, Ratzinger points out, means 'of holy things' as well. Therefore, the *communio sanctorum* also legitimately describes the Church as that community which shares 'holy things', that is, the Sacraments, in common. The Sacraments established by Christ are outward signs which give grace. By means of them, earthly matter communicates supernatural life in a manner analogous to the Incarnation itself. The Sacraments make the Church's members holy. This sanctifying grace comes from God, and it is by means of this sacramental grace that Christ forms the members of his ecclesial Body. On this account, the Church in the deepest sense is *his*, the Cardinal Prefect explains, and only *ours* in what "belongs to her human – hence secondary, transitory – aspect" (RR, p. 48).

In her human structures the Church is always in need of reform – *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. Not only saints but

“the prayer had communicated through the supplication of the ordained minister [...] the indispensable role of the baptismal priesthood.”

sinner as well comprise her membership. Indeed, even her saints are nothing other than sinners reconciled through Christ's grace. This mixed reality of saints and sinners accounts for the sins which plague the pilgrim Church from within as she makes her earthly way through the ages towards her heavenly homeland where one day she will be for all eternity without stain or wrinkle. In the meantime, sin continues to afflict her. As the council fathers at Vatican II taught: “By the power of the Holy Spirit the Church is the faithful spouse of the Lord and will never fail to be a sign of salvation in the world; but she is by no means unaware that down through the centuries there have been among her members, both clerical and lay, some who were disloyal to the Spirit of God” (*Gaudium et spes* 43). Such awareness found historic expression on the first Sunday of Lent during the Great Jubilee Year 2000. On that day Pope John Paul II solemnly begged the Lord's forgiveness for the sins of the Church's sons and daughters committed over her bi-millennial history.

Like the council fathers, the great Pontiff carefully distinguished between the Church and the sins of her members. Her members' sins do indeed mar the beauty of the Church's human face. At times woefully scandalous, they threaten to hinder the Church's evangelical mission. But they can never undermine the Church's inherent holiness. For the Church's holiness does not in some Pelagian sense directly depend upon her members' deeds – even though by their lives the saints among her do manifest her saintliness to the world and contribute through their graced cooperation to her growth in goodness. Rather, Christ himself guarantees the Church's inviolable sanctity. He is the source and foundation of her holiness. It is the Spirit of Christ the Head who sanctifies his ecclesial Body. The Church's holiness is rooted in God, not man. Thus, commenting in 1985 upon *Gaudium et spes* 43, Ratzinger rightly insists that the fidelity of the Bride of Christ is not called into question by the infidelities of her members. To illustrate his point, he refers to the Latin formula of the priest's prayer for peace in the *Novus Ordo*. In doing so, he critiques the revised formula as well.

Essential Place of Ecclesial Faithfulness

Noting the “great significance” of the possessive adjective's change in number, Ratzinger detects a potentially problematic shift from personal responsibility for sin to a collective form of responsibility which tends to diminish the former. Hiding personal fault in the anonymous mass of the collective ‘we’ undermines the call to personal conversion which requires a personal admission of guilt. A collective confession of sin effectively negates the individual's immediate sense of sin and impedes his true conversion. “Hence, in the end,” Ratzinger concludes, “where all have sinned, nobody seems to have sinned” (RR, p. 51). Ratzinger acknowledges that the ‘we’ can be legitimately understood in a manner such that the ‘I’ does not disappear. To that end he appeals to the *Our Father* wherein each Christian prays: “Forgive us *our* trespasses.” But the potential for misunderstanding in the

liturgical prayer remains. In fact, Ratzinger notes a further problem. As the priest names himself and the members of the gathered community sinners, one can easily lose sight that the Church herself is not a sinner, but rather “a reality that surpasses, mysteriously and infinitely, the sum of her members” (RR, p. 52). Ratzinger suggests that to receive the revised prayer properly we should insist before the Lord with particular emphasis: Look not on *our* sins but the faith of *your* Church. In doing so we are reminded that the Church is his, not ours, “and the bearer of faith does not sin” (RR, p. 52).

In his efforts to provide an acceptable theological understanding for the revised Latin formula, Ratzinger chooses to emphasise the possessive adjectives: *our* sins and *your* Church. Given the revised formula Ratzinger's suggestion does indeed help to receive a liturgical linguistic reform which proves theologically challenging. Such verbal emphasis compensates for the inherent ambiguities in the present Latin formula. But, quite frankly, it fails to address directly the present prayer's impoverished theology. The original juxtaposition – indeed, a far richer juxtaposition, I would argue – lies not in the possessive adjectives alone but also in the two substantives found in the Latin phrase: *peccata* (sins) and *fides* (faith). To be more precise, the original formula dating from the first Christian millennium specifically juxtaposes the *priest's* sins and the *Church's* faith. As Ratzinger himself observes, this prayer in its original form – Lord, look not on *my* sins – was the obligatory prayer of the priest “which liturgical wisdom inserted at the most solemn moment of the Mass” (RR, p. 51). As we shall see, the wisdom, which shines through this liturgical text, beneficially emphasises clerical sinfulness within the context of the ecclesial community of faith. For Christ guarantees the Church's holiness – a necessary note by which she is constituted. But the priest's personal holiness is not likewise guaranteed even though his sacramental ministrations within the Church is no less necessary.

In its original form, this venerable prayer had been the sinful priest's prayer for peace. The self-acknowledged sacerdotal sinner prayed that the Lord Jesus in granting peace and unity to the Church look not upon his sins but rather upon the Church's faith which Christ himself assures. The juxtaposition between clerical sin and ecclesial fidelity lies at the level of instrumentality. In confessing himself a sinner, the priest acknowledges that his moral status is not instrumental in obtaining reconciliatory fruit, that is, peace and unity, for the Church. The efficacy of the Sacraments in no way depends upon the purity of his conscience. Rather, the Lord Jesus is to gaze upon the faith of the entire ecclesial community. The true instrument of Christ's reconciliatory grace is the faithfulness of the saints present among the clergy and the laity alike. The holy faithful form the praying heart of the Church wherein dwells the Holy Spirit who forgives sins. Here one rightly beholds the broad ministry of the Church through which God grants pardon and peace. In sum, reciting the ancient text, the priest effectively prayed: “Lord, look

The Sinful Priest: Minister of the Church's Faithfulness

continued

not on my infidelities but on the fidelity of your holy people – your Body the Church whose fidelity you yourself assure by the indwelling of your Spirit in their hearts – and grant your people the reconciliatory fruits of peace and unity.” Praying thus the priest salutarily humbled himself before God, opposed any tendencies towards clericalism within himself, and recognised the *communio sanctorum*'s vital role in ecclesial reconciliation.

Augustine: Essential Place of Ecclesial Intercession

It would seem that no direct historical connection exists between this liturgical prayer and Saint Augustine of Hippo. Nonetheless, the prayer's theology unquestionably reflects the reconciliatory ecclesiology which the great Church Father elaborated during his early fifth century polemical exchanges with the schismatic Donatist community of North Africa. As we shall see, Augustine's theological vision is no less pertinent today, some sixteen centuries later.

The Donatists had insisted that a cleric guilty of grave ecclesiological sin – for example, of having surrendered the Scriptures to Roman officials during the Diocletian persecution – severed himself from the Church and therefore could no longer be a source of sanctity for her. According to the Donatists, maintaining ecclesial communion with such seriously sinful clerics contaminated the Church and her members. In rejecting communion with such bishops, the Donatists held that their community here and now was 'the Church of the saints' – 'the Church of the pure'. While Augustine disapproved of the ministry of notorious sinners among the clergy and attested to their legitimate degradation from the clerical state, he, nonetheless, dismissed the Donatist classification of ecclesiological sin as unscriptural. Like all actual sin, clerical sin is personal, the Bishop of Hippo maintained. It cannot spiritually contaminate others by association. Moreover, the priest's sins – no matter how grave – never impede the Church's holiness, for sacramental efficacy does not depend upon the cleric's uncompromised moral status within the ecclesial community. The Sacraments sanctify because Christ himself is their agent. When the Church's minister baptises, it is in fact Christ who baptises. The origin of the Church's holiness, therefore, is found in the Lord and not in the cleric's human merits.

Augustine accused the Donatists of usurping Christ Jesus' unique mediation between God and men. For Donatist bishops had envisioned their ministry in terms of a realised Levitical priesthood whose sinless members, while interceding before God on behalf of the sinful members of the community, had no need of prayer themselves. Consequently, it seems, the Donatist laity were never encouraged to pray for their clergy. Rather, the 'sinless' bishop singularly mediated between God and the people. Grave sin on the part of the bishop would nullify his mediatory mission and thus place in dire jeopardy the people's salvation. For God does not hear the prayers of sinners, the Donatist Primate Parmenian, appealing to John

9:31, had insisted (*Against the Letter of Parmenian* 2.8.15). Augustine retorted that the only sinless priest without need of prayer is Christ Jesus whom the Levitical priesthood prefigured. All other priests are sinners, and God, in fact, does not reject the contrite sinner's prayer. But even if the Donatist argument were correct – that is, even if the prayers of a sinful bishop are not heard – a good and faithful people would have no cause for concern, Augustine counselled (cf. *ibid.*, 2.8.15). For in opposition to the Donatists' erroneous notion of episcopal mediation, the Bishop of Hippo recognised in the Church's reconciliatory mission a broad ecclesial dimension.

“In their twofold anointing Christians receive the regal mission to bind the sinner through fraternal correction and the sacerdotal mission to loose him through intercessory prayer.”

As members of Christ's Body, all Christians, clergy and laity alike, are to pray for one another. Against Parmenian, Augustine instructed: “On this account [St. Paul the Apostle] commended himself to the Church's prayers and did not set himself up as a mediator between God and the people so that all the members of Christ's Body would pray for one another. ...and thus the reciprocal prayer of all the members still labouring on earth will ascend to the Head who preceded them into heaven, in whom we have forgiveness for our sins” (*ibid.*, 2.8.16). Augustine insisted that the clergy has no monopoly on intercessory prayer. Rather, in terms of their personal prayer, the clergy and the laity equally intercede for one another as baptised members of Christ's Body. Christ himself receives their prayers, and in him those prayers bear reconciliatory fruit. In light of this broadly ecclesial understanding of intercession, Augustine returned to Parmenian's argument.

Alluding to the non-Hebrew prophet Balaam whose requested curse became a blessing for Israel (cf. Numbers 24), Augustine explained: “It is no marvel, then, that in a similar fashion the good words which are said for the people in prayer, even if they be said by bad bishops, are nonetheless heard not on account of the prelates' perversity, but on account of the peoples' devotion” (*ibid.*, 2.8.17). In other words, when answering a sinful priest's prayers, the Lord looks not on the cleric's moral status but rather on the Church's faith. Not only, then, had the Donatists' conception usurped Christ's unique mediation, but it also undermined the prayerful efficacy of Christ's ecclesial Body. Within the ecclesial Body Augustine himself emphasised the laity's proper and indeed indispensable role in ecclesial reconciliation.

Preaching one Easter Saturday, Augustine explained to a lay congregation that, in entrusting the keys of the kingdom to Peter, Jesus entrusted them to the entire Church whom Peter uniquely personifies. In Peter Jesus bestowed upon

“the priest [...] opposed any tendencies towards clericalism within himself.”

the whole Church the spiritual reconciliatory authority to bind and loose sinners. In virtue of the Church's living Tradition, Augustine the Bishop acknowledged that he himself possessed those keys. But he did not stop there. He went on to instruct the lay faithful present in church that paschal morning that they, too, bind and loose the sinner. “Anybody who's bound, you see,” he explained, “is barred from your society; and when he's barred from your society, he's bound by you; and when he's reconciled he's loosed by you, because you too plead with God for him” (*Sermon* 229N.2). Thus Augustine taught the lay faithful that they rightly bind the sinner through fraternal correction and loose him by means of their intercessory prayer.

Among other things, such fraternal correction entailed keeping an eye on the public penitent and when necessary admonishing him within the community. In the case of serious sin which merited a sentence of excommunication (medicinally administered in view of an eventual reconciliation), not only did the bishop impede the penitent's access to the Eucharistic altar but the penitent's family denied him table-fellowship at home as well. In this way they, too, bound the excommunicate penitent. In terms of Matthew 18:18, Augustine noted that the one, whom the lay faithful bound on earth, was likewise bound in heaven (cf. *Sermon* 82.4.7). The lay faithful's intercessory prayer, moreover, was no less efficacious in loosing the sinner's bonds.

Identifying a penitent astrologer present one day in the congregation, Augustine exhorted the lay faithful: “Pray for him through Christ. Begin at once. Offer today's prayer for him to the Lord our God. We know with certainty that your prayer will blot out all his acts of impiety” (*Commentary on the Psalms* 61.23). Thus in the sinner's regard, the authentic voice of the faithful is one efficaciously raised in prayer. Indeed, the collective prayer of the holy faithful is, for Augustine, the principal instrument by means of which God forgives sins in the Church. Faithful to the North African exegetical tradition, Augustine saw in the unique dove of *Song of Songs* 6:9 a privileged symbol of the Church. But in contrast to the Donatists, he understood the dove's sighs to be the holy faithful's efficacious intercession for sinners. The sigh of the ecclesial dove is the voice of the faithful, and “the dove unbinds” (*Sermon* 295.2.2).

Sacramental Ministry: *In Persona Ecclesiae*

None of the preceding means to say, however, that Augustine denied the ordained ministry its proper role in ecclesial reconciliation. The bishop alone had the canonical authority to excommunicate. In the ancient Church, he alone determined the duration of the public penitent's penance. He alone imposed hands at the moment of reconciliation typically celebrated in the prayerful midst of the liturgical assembly on Holy Thursday. Without the clergy, Augustine insisted, there was no possibility of ecclesial reconciliation (cf. *Letter* 228.8). This remains equally true today. Only the priest in virtue of Holy Orders can speak the very ‘I’ of Jesus

and sacramentally absolve sins *in persona Christi capitis*. But, according to the Bishop of Hippo, neither did the ancient bishop nor, for that matter, does the priest today act independently of the ecclesial community's intercessory role. While the liturgical gesture of imposing hands exclusively pertained to the bishop in the ancient Church's reconciliatory rites, it incarnated the Church's saintly members' collective intercession by means of which the penitent's sins are forgiven. It would not be incorrect to say that for Augustine when the reconciling bishop imposed hands he was acting *in persona Ecclesiae*, and by this ministry of his Christ reconciled the sinner. The laity, neither individually nor collectively, can exercise such a ministerial role. Nonetheless, the lay faithful, always in unison with the clergy and never separated from them, do exercise a real spiritual authority which forms an integral part of the Church's reconciliatory mission.

Augustine grounds the lay faithful's spiritual authority in their baptismal vocation. At their baptism Christians receive a royal-sacerdotal anointing and become members of Christ's sacerdotal Body. On this account, Augustine, while acknowledging the distinct reality of the ordained priesthood, did not hesitate to call all baptised Christians priests (*sacerdotes*) (cf. *The City of God* 20.10). In their twofold anointing Christians receive the regal mission to bind the sinner through fraternal correction and the sacerdotal mission to loose him through intercessory prayer. The Christian faithful's intercessory prayer is efficacious because it is in the final analysis the prayer of Christ the Head whose bodily member each Christian is.

There is One Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ who mediates in his humanity. While his mediation is unique, it admits of participation. The holy faithful share with Christ a common human nature. Through the grace of Baptism and the Eucharist, they are sacramentally incorporated into his Body. Consequently, they are made one with Christ in his sacred humanity, that is, at the locus of his mediation. Given this sacramental incorporation, their prayer for sinners is a graced participation in Christ's unique reconciliatory mediation. As Augustine explained, “when the body of the Son prays it does not separate its head from itself” (*Expositions of the Psalms* 85.1). In the Whole Christ (*Christus totus*), that is, the Head, who is the Incarnate Word, and the Body, which is the Church, the faithful are made one single man with Christ: “We pray, then, to him, through him and in him; we speak with him and he speaks with us. We speak in him, and he speaks in us” (*Expositions of the Psalms* 85.1). The prayer of the holy faithful is the prayer of Christ, who, seated at the Father's right hand, intercedes for sinners and alone remits sins.

Christ forgives sins by means of his Spirit who has been poured forth into the hearts of the faithful (cf. Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit lovingly binds these saintly members of the Catholic Church together in unity. He prays within them and thereby assures the efficacy of their prayers (cf. Romans

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continued

8:26-27). Within this divinely established bond of prayerful unity valid baptism becomes efficacious for the forgiveness of sins. Such pneumatology underlies Augustine's broad vision of ecclesial reconciliation and led him to reject the Donatists' false notion of episcopal mediation. Rhetorically engaging the Donatist bishops, Augustine preached: "It's the Spirit who forgives, not you. But the Spirit is God. So it's God who forgives, not you. ...God dwells in his holy temple, that is among his holy faithful, in his Church; it is through them he forgives sins, because they are living temples" (*Sermon* 99.9). Thus does God through the Spirit-filled ministry of the whole Church grant pardon and peace to the sinner.

The lay faithful exercise their regal-sacerdotal mission in a context of tolerance. We must note immediately that by tolerance we do not mean pervasive indifference leading to a climate of relativistic pluralism. Rather, in the ancient Church, tolerating a sinner within the community meant keeping him nearby so as to be able to correct him. For outside the Church there was no hope for his salvation. On this account, Augustine insisted that the pilgrim Church rightly remains a mixed society of saints and sinners wherein the saints tolerate sinners in their midst for the sake of the latter's conversion. Only in the eschaton will the Church be completely without stain or wrinkle. This mixed reality holds true for those seated in the sanctuary as well as those standing in the nave. Preaching on the parable of the wheat and the tares, Augustine instructed his Catholic congregation perhaps unduly influenced by their Donatist neighbours: "I must tell your graces plainly that in the sanctuaries of the church there are wheat grains and there are weeds, just as among the laity there are grains of wheat and there are weeds" (*Sermon* 73.4). On another occasion the Bishop of Hippo humbly confessed: "Certainly, brothers and sisters, because God has willed it so, I am his high priest, I am a sinner, together with you I beat my breast, together with you I pray for pardon, together with you I hope God will be gracious" (*Sermon* 135.7). Augustine was no Donatist bishop. He recognised quite well his prayerful solidarity with the lay faithful in beseeching God's mercy. He effectively prayed: "Lord, look not on my sins but on the faith of your Church."

Hope in the Face of Scandal

Priests are sinners. That is news to no one – least of all to the priest himself. But since 2002 the criminal sinfulness of certain priests has received extensive news coverage in the United States of America. A comparable situation has occurred in Ireland since the 1990's, and the Church in Poland generally for reasons particular to contemporary Polish history has experienced much of the same over the past few years. Much soul-searching has taken place in every quarter of the Church. Arising out of these crises, the voice of the faithful clamours to be heard. It is above all in the Church's liturgy that one rightly hears this voice raised in prayer for the sinner, both clerical and lay. This had been particularly true of the sinful priest's millennium-old prayer for peace. As we have seen with the aid of Saint Augustine's

pastoral theology itself refined in the crucible of an ancient ecclesial crisis, that prayer in its original form gave authentic voice to the lay faithful's indispensable role in ecclesial reconciliation. By an otherwise simple grammatical change of a possessive adjective's number from the singular to the plural – *peccata mea* to *peccata nostra* – this liturgical voice has been muted and consequently it seems a profound theological vision so necessary for today has been obscured. The present experience confirms yet once again: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. How we pray not only reveals, but indeed also informs what we believe. At present dissident voices use the scandalous weakness of some Church leaders to foster that denial of the Church's divinity which Cardinal Ratzinger highlighted back in his 1985 *Report*. These voices bear distinctly Donatist overtones. As a result the authentic voice of the holy faithful is not heard. Present need and opportunity call for the Church both to confess clerical sin and to profess the Church's fidelity which Christ assures and by means of which he reconciles sinners. This critical period in Church history, which is ours, provides an almost singular opportunity for the Church to reaffirm the laity's baptismal vocation to bind the sinner through fraternal correction and to loose him through intercessory prayer. That prayer – as Augustine's saintly mother Monnica so powerfully attested – manifests itself more often than not in tears.

“the Church is His, not ours, ‘and the bearer of faith does not sin.’”

In his 2007 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI, “[t]aking into account ancient and venerable customs and the wishes expressed by the Synod Fathers, [...] asked the competent curial offices to study the possibility of moving the sign of peace to another place, such as before the presentation of the gifts at the altar” (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 49, note 150). As we noted at the beginning, a slight shift in the placement of both the priest's prayer for peace and the accompanying exchange of peace, along with two other significant changes, did occur in the *Novus Ordo*. Whether or not it is opportune or even necessary to move the sign of peace again and in a more radical manner remains to be seen. It would be most propitious, however, to study as well the possibility of reclaiming the singular possessive adjective *mea* (my) and thereby in the context of the priest's essential liturgical ministrations reaffirming the broadly ecclesial dimension operative in sacramental reconciliation. Such a study need not imply that the prayer necessarily become again the priest's private prayer recited quietly to himself. On the contrary, it would be most salutary for both priest and people alike to hear the priest humbly confess aloud in the midst of the Church that he, too, is a sinner in need of God's mercy. Could this not have been the prophetic insight of Pope Paul VI which moved him to insist that this ancient prayer be retained in the Roman Rite? If so, it still awaits to be given full voice.

Holy Mass at Christmas Time *by Fr Edward Holloway*

From the Esher Parish newsletter for December 22nd, 1985

A teenager far from this area complained to me recently that he was being taught about the Mass in a way which was an awful rigmarole, and bored everybody. He was given endless themes about family celebrations and what have you, and by the time you arrive at God you have long ceased to bother. Try it this way: the Disciples trudged out every day to meet Jesus. They went out because they were drawn by his teaching, his works, and grew to love Him. As they walked with Him and became 'committed', they were also fed within their very souls by Him, growing deeper, wiser, nobler and more courageous of spirit. Perhaps they did not realise at the time that Jesus was feeding them, and was working as the food and life of their inward souls. But it was a fact, and they came to realise it more later on. For Jesus Christ was God become man, not simply the greatest of men whom we call 'God'. At the end of his earthly life Christ brought all this to a climax, and you can read about it in the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel, where He explained just how He was the very Bread of Life.

Jesus brought it to a climax at the Last Supper, on the eve of his betrayal and Passion. He loved his own 'to the uttermost' giving them Himself as the food and life of their soul, and of their bodies in so far as we hope for the resurrection of the body. He is, and He always was the Life of their spiritual being, and by giving his whole self, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine, He gave *his whole*

being which is quickened by his Divinity, to be the nourishment and growth in wisdom and goodness of us his people.

It is much the same now. On a cold morning we trudge out to meet Jesus. We join Him in prayer at the entrance antiphon, we listen to Him in the readings and the Gospel. The priest (poor wretch, for who can stand in for Christ?) preaches the word of life, the teaching of Jesus, and the same Jesus works with that preaching, quickening the souls of his people, and making up for the inadequacies of the human preacher.

At the bidding prayer the congregation makes its needs known to Jesus, as the apostles often did. In the Eucharistic prayer, the priest, in the Person of Christ, praises the Father for all his mercies and faithfulness, down the years of creation, and the pain of human sin, until taking it up to Christ in Person he hails Our Lord as Saviour and Redeemer, and enters into Christ's final gift, with the very words of 'consecration'.

Then the Divinity descends on bread, as Christ did into the womb of Mary, and this bread is now Jesus, even as that Man was God made man. In Holy Communion He feeds us fully as only God can feed the soul, and in receiving Him our own bodies are promised a share in eternity with Christ's own glorious body. Then, through his priest, Jesus blesses and dismisses the multitude in his peace. So, we live again the life of the disciples, and we summarise again in the Mass and Holy Communion, the life and work of Christ, and our fullness of blessing in Him. Remember it when you come to Mass and Holy Communion on Christmas Day. You trudge out for the birthday of Jesus. Take Him home with you. ■

The Quality of Mercy *by Fr James Tolhurst*

Rembrandt's portrait of The Prodigal Son reminds us not so much of the son, as of the compassionate father. Who would so dare to portray the all-powerful, all-knowing God? The Catechism says, "Only the heart of Christ who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way."¹

Ezekiel in his 'discussion' with God hears, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked. . . and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezek 18:23) The rabbis, when they came to describe how the angels began to sing of the victory of the Israelites at the Red Sea, say that God stopped them with the words, "My creatures are drowning and you wish to sing?... Do not hate an Egyptian because you were once a stranger in his land."

The Prodigal Father

Jesus however reveals that God does not simply condone our faults but reaches out to us in love. Pope Gregory the Great meditated on this fact and wrote, "The supreme mercy does not abandon us even when we abandon him."² Yes, he does forbid us to sin, "but once we have sinned does not cease hoping in us to give us his forgiveness."³ Such is the Prodigal Father.

How is it that God can continue to love us when we show our hatred to him, not seven times, but seventy-seven times? We can glimpse an insight in that most un-PC parable of the workers in the vineyard. When the late-comers receive the same as the earliest, the grumbling reaches the ears of the owner who says, "What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?" (Matt 20:14-16)

We judge God by our own standards, but Jesus tells us that we must set these higher. Jesus tells his disciples, “You call me Lord and Master and so I am,” (John 13:13) yet he washed their feet. He was entitled to be served but in saying that he had come to serve, Pope John Paul II says, “he showed a disturbing aspect of God’s behaviour... he puts himself at the service of his creatures.”⁴

We sometimes see Jesus’ actions as persuasive gestures, encouraging us to be merciful, forgiving and kind, which they are. They are not just gestures but expressions of God’s very being. He is that ocean of love and forgiveness which was glimpsed by the patriarchs, experienced by the prophets and kings, sung by the psalmists, but finally lived by the Son. As Portia said, “The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.”

Our Self Respect

Beyond all the wars and rumours of wars that so beset civilisation lies the desire for self-assertion, and self-promotion which is expressed in that very unpleasant phrase ‘me-time’. Potentially it was present at the dawn of creation, but it was nurtured by sin. Newman analysed it brilliantly when he wrote, “They do not look out of themselves, because they do not look through and beyond their own minds to their Maker but are engrossed in notions of what is due to themselves, their own dignity and their own consistency. Their conscience has become a mere self-respect.”⁵ It was to free us from this that God wished to manifest himself in the self-abnegation even unto death of his Son.

As Christians we are united with him through baptism into his death so as to rise with him to live no longer for ourselves. But we need to renew the spirit of our baptism by continual contrition joined to the absolution of the Church.

The Need for Contrition

One of the reasons for the decline in the practice of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a loss of an understanding of, and a need for contrition. Newman considered that “the most noble repentance, the most decorous conduct in a conscious sinner is an unconditional surrender of oneself to God – not a bargaining about terms, not a scheming (so as to call it) to be received back again, but an instant surrender in the first case.”⁶ We grow a hard shell which we use to protect ourselves from admitting our own wretchedness and our need for God’s mercy. St Dorotheus maintained that the reason for all the problems “is that no one blames himself.”⁷

We need to start by having compassion for the faults of others. We do not often realise how conditioned we are to slander, libel and gossip. We must listen to the voice of St John of the Cross when he says, “The holier a man is, the gentler he is and the less scandalised by the faults of others, because he knows the weak condition of man.”⁸ There is even an element of self-interest here because, to quote St Philip Neri, “To be without pity for other’s falls, is an evident sign that we shall shortly fall ourselves.”⁹

We must then get rid of the concept that contrition is somehow unworthy and undignified, which is a legacy of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. In fact asking for forgiveness “is not a sign of an unhealthy concern with oneself as is sometimes asserted. It rather arises from, and leads to, the discovery that God is love, and that it is by forgiving that he manifests most fully both his love and his omnipotence.”¹⁰ Pope John Paul II pointed out, “The person who knows how to acknowledge the truth of his guilt and asks Christ for forgiveness enhances his own human dignity and manifests spiritual greatness... he does not feel humiliated but rather found again and restored to value.”¹¹

In this, the Pope added a dimension to the teaching of St Thomas, that after Confession a person’s state of grace may be greater than before his sin, depending on the depth of his repentance.¹²

Those who have truly repented, says St John Climacus, “after their restoration to health, become physicians, lamps, beacons and guides to all.” In spite of falling “into every pit and being trapped in all the snares.”¹³

If we then tend to reproach ourselves that we have enjoyed our snares then we should be sorry for the offence to God “even if we cannot manage to feel detestation for the pleasure which seduced us. The Lord sees more clearly into the depths of the soul than you can; leave the judging to him.”¹⁴ St Peter of Damascus makes the point that it is always possible to make a new start by means of repentance, “As long as you do not surrender yourself willingly to the enemy, your patient endurance, combined with self-reproach, will suffice for your salvation.”¹⁵

Our misfortune is that we underestimate God’s loving mercy and so belittle our need for it. It was not without reason that we read, “Restore us to yourself, Lord that we may be restored.” (Lam 5:21) ■

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Notes

¹n. 1439

²Homily 36 on the Gospels.

³Homily 34 on the Gospels.

⁴General Audience February 4, 1998.

⁵The Idea of a University p. 192.

⁶Parochial & Plain Sermons Vol 3 p. 96.

⁷Colloquies on Doctrine 7,2.

⁸Quoted in Gerald Brenan’s St John of the Cross, His Life and Poetry. Cambridge University Press 1975 p. 24n.

⁹Maxims of St Philip Neri in Faber F W If God Be With Us Gracewing 1994 p.25.

¹⁰Abhishiktananda (Henri le Saux OSB) Prayer. SPCK 1972 p. 52.

¹¹Phoenix Park September 29, 1979 ; Dives in Misericordia n. 6.

¹²Summa Theologica 3rd Part a. 89. 2c.

¹³Ladder of Paradise 26,13.

¹⁴A Monk, The Hermitage Within. Darton, Longman & Todd 1977 p. 33.

¹⁵The Great Benefit of True Repentance.



The Truth Will Set You Free

Fr Mark Vickers, Parish Priest of Hatfield South
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WITHHOLDING ABSOLUTION – A PASTORAL OPTION?

For those passing through seminary in recent years there often seemed only two absolute rules of confessional practice:

1. Never ask questions; and 2. Never withhold absolution.

The priest is deeply conscious that he too is an unworthy recipient of God's merciful forgiveness. Is it conceivable then that he, a minister of God's mercy, should withhold this gift from others?

Any doubts ought to be dispelled by Our Lord's institution of the sacrament: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn. 20:23).

Canon Law and the documents of the Magisterium are clear that circumstances exist in which absolution might, indeed should, be withheld. The presumption, of course, is that absolution will be granted: "If the confessor is in no doubt about the penitent's disposition and the penitent asks for absolution, it is not to be denied or deferred" (CIC, c. 980). However, it is equally clear that the presumption may be rebutted.

In penitential services, especially those held in schools, it is not uncommon to find non-Catholics, even non-Christians, approaching the priest. Not all are aware that they cannot celebrate the sacrament. The priest, perhaps after a welcome, should briefly explain the Church's teaching and offer to pray with them. Absolution can only be given to non-Catholics if there is a danger of death or, in the Bishop's judgment, there is "some other grave and pressing need" and on the conditions laid out in c. 844.*

In a number of unlikely pastoral situations the priest is also unable to give absolution. In reserved cases the priest lacks faculties to absolve; these must be referred to the competent authority. A priest may not absolve a partner in a sin against the Sixth Commandment. Nor may he absolve a penitent who has falsely denounced another confessor in the circumstances described in c. 982.

What of other, more common, situations? Faulty catechesis, pressure from family members, habitual custom, may produce penitents, especially prior to Christmas and Easter, who declare they have no sins to confess. Of course, the priest invites them to reflect upon their lives with a view to inducing the correct disposition and the confession of any sins committed since they last approached the sacrament. Canon Law specifically envisages the confessor having to ask questions, but always "with prudence and discretion" (c. 979). Such an approach, used gently but clearly, often leads to the acknowledgment of sin. If the correct disposition is apparent, absolution will certainly be given. Otherwise, the priest explains Church teaching and offers to pray with the penitent, always inviting them to return to the sacrament in the future.

The correct disposition on the part of the penitent is sorrow for their sins and a purpose of amendment (c. 959). Occasionally, a penitent may "confess" their sins, but indicate that they have no regret in respect of them. Rather, they look almost to the Church for ratification of their behaviour. There are those also who mention a sin but leave the confessor in little doubt that there is no intention of future amendment. This is most frequently the case with "states of sin", e.g. an irregular union or an ongoing adulterous relationship. With sensitivity

the priest endeavours to bring the penitent to see the true consequences of their action, which includes the wounding of their relationship with God, the Church and the wider human community. "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). The priest might highlight the providential nature of their act of confession, and encourage consideration of avoiding the occasions of the sin in question.

Often a grudging acknowledgment of sorrow, a hesitant acceptance that they will endeavour to begin to rectify the situation will be elicited. To grant absolution, one is not seeking cast-iron guarantees that the sin will never be committed again, nor demanding perfect contrition. Other things being equal, absolution can be granted if the penitent simply expresses the desire not to sin again, or regrets the consequences of sin.

Yet a few may hold out against any expression of contrition or purpose of amendment. What do we say to them? There is a view that, for "pastoral" motives, everyone who approaches the sacrament should receive absolution. Not only is this theologically incorrect, it also lacks pastoral charity. How is that individual being helped in the process of conversion, to hear Christ's call to repentance and holiness of life? At best, they are left with a diminished sense of both the seriousness of sin and the sheer beauty of God's forgiveness; at worst, they may despise a sacrament that appears simply mechanical or even magical. Furthermore the necessary healing of the ecclesial and of the human community is postponed. It also suggests arrogance on the part of the priest. We are ministers, not masters, of the sacrament. We are required "to adhere faithfully to the teaching of the Magisterium" (c. 978, s.2). This, in fact, is the truly pastoral approach as taught by Pope John Paul II: "To acknowledge one's sins... to recognise one as being a sinner, capable of sin and inclined to commit sin, is the essential first step in returning to God" (Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*, (1984), n.13). Were it not possible to withhold absolution the very integrity of the act of Christian conversion would be undermined.

Withholding absolution may produce a variety of responses: surprise, dismay, anger – possibly directed against the priest personally. We invite the penitent to continue to reflect upon the truth of the situation, making clear the open invitation to return to us. It may be appropriate for the penitent to be reminded that such withholding of absolution is an act of compassion.

"God... pardons nothing to those who pardon themselves everything," declared that saintly confessor, the Curé of Ars. Purporting to absolve an unrepentant penitent brings no one to this realisation. The rare necessity of having to withhold absolution may just do so. At least the penitent is given a clear choice: persisting in their sins and remaining unreconciled to God and the Church, or the conversion that leads to salvation. This is the tough love preached by Our Lord. Tough love is required on occasion, but we must be careful not to love to be tough. Withholding absolution is a last resort. We do not seek to break the bruised reed or to quench the wavering flame.

"In hearing confessions the priest is to remember that he is at once both judge and healer, and that he is constituted by God as a minister of both divine justice and divine mercy, so that he may contribute to the honour of God and the salvation of souls" (c. 978, s.1).

*I.e., for most other Christians in this country this means they are unable to approach a minister of their own communion, spontaneously ask for the sacrament, demonstrate they hold the Catholic faith in respect of the sacrament and are properly disposed.



The Road From Regensburg

Papal Fostering of Dialogue in the Search for a Modern Apologetic

SECULAR SCIENCES AND SAVING SECULARISM

On the second anniversary of the Pope's Regensburg lecture, September 12th 2008, he spoke the following words to a gathering of French political, cultural and Islamic leaders, including the Minister of Culture, the Mayor of Paris and two ex-Presidents. It took place in the *Colleges des Bernadins*, formerly a Cistercian monastery, now a cultural centre founded by Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger.

"Because in the biblical word God comes towards us and we towards him, we must learn to penetrate the secret of language, to understand it in its construction and in the manner of its expression. Thus it is through the search for God that the secular sciences take on their importance, sciences which show us the path towards language.

"[...] the formation and education of man [...] includes the formation of reason – education – through which man learns to perceive, in the midst of words, the Word itself. [...] We ourselves are brought into conversation with God by the word of God. [...] Speech is not enough. [...] Christian worship is therefore an invitation to sing with the angels, and thus to lead the word to its highest destination. [...] One is praying and singing in such a way as to harmonise with the music of the noble spirits who were considered the originators of the harmony of the cosmos, the music of the spheres.

"[...] Scripture requires exegesis, [...] there are dimensions of meaning in the word and in words which only come to light within the living community of this history-generating word.

"[...] 'The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3:6). And [St Paul] continues: 'Where the Spirit is ... there is freedom' (cf. 2 Cor 3:17). [...] With the word of Spirit and of freedom, a further horizon opens up, but at the same time a clear limit is placed upon arbitrariness and subjectivity, which unequivocally binds both the individual and the community and brings about a new, higher obligation than that of the letter: namely, the obligation of insight and love. This tension between obligation

and freedom [...] presents itself anew as a task for our generation too, vis-à-vis the poles of subjective arbitrariness and fundamentalist fanaticism. It would be a disaster if today's European culture could only conceive freedom as absence of obligation, which would inevitably play into the hands of fanaticism and arbitrariness. Absence of obligation and arbitrariness do not signify freedom, but its destruction". www.vatican.va

BEAUTY COMPLEMENTS TRUTH (AND EVOLUTION)

During the Pope's summer holidays in northern Italy this year he met with priests of the local diocese of Brixen. One priest asked Pope Benedict if he felt that reason and aesthetics should not go together given that "in your address in Regensburg, you emphasised the substantial connection between the divine Spirit and human reason. On the other hand, you have also always emphasised the importance of art and beauty."

He replied:

"[...] A form of reason that in any way wanted to strip itself of beauty would be depleted, it would be blind [...].

"Faith must constantly confront the challenges of the mindset of this age, so that it may not seem a sort of irrational mythology [...].

"In his first letter, St. Peter [...] was clearly convinced of the fact that faith is 'logos,' that it is a form of reason, a light issuing from the creating Light [...]. But this creating 'Logos' is not a merely technical 'logos.' It is broader than this, it is a 'logos' that is love, and therefore to be expressed in beauty and goodness.

"[...] When, in our own time, we discuss the reasonableness of the faith, we are discussing precisely the fact that reason does not end where experimental discoveries end, it does not end in positivism; the theory of evolution sees the truth, but sees only half of it: it does not see that behind this is the Spirit of creation. We are fighting for the expansion of reason, and therefore for a form of reason that, exactly to the point, is open to beauty as well ..." www.zenit.org

PAPAL STRATEGY

Sandro Magister has written an assessment of Pope Benedict's papacy of "methodical reasoning and action."

He suggests that the "synergy between faith and reason' is the linchpin of Joseph Ratzinger's thought as theologian and pope. At the origin of the Christian faith, for him, there is not only Jerusalem, there is also the Athens of the philosophers. Two thirds of the lecture in Regensburg is dedicated to criticising the periods in which Christianity dangerously separated itself from its rational foundations. And the pope is proposing that Islam do the same thing: that it interweave faith and reason, the only way to shelter it from violence." www.chiesa

POPE'S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

The annual gathering of Pope Benedict's ex-students took place at the end of last August at Castel Gandolfo and announced the foundation of a new research institute focused upon the Pope's thought. Fr Vincent Twomey a leading member of the group, and recent author of *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of our Age* gave an interview to Ignatius Press last year in which he listed key intellectual influences upon the Pope. These, he said, grew out of the post-war context where "the neo-scholasticism of the previous half-century was more or less abandoned in the search for a fresh approach". The key figures for the Pope include Augustine, Bonaventure, de Lubac, Gottlieb Soehngen, Newman, Schlier and Joseph Pieper.

Twomey went on:

"For neo-scholasticism, everything found its place in the 'system', but Ratzinger was instinctively aware that truth is more than any system of thought could encompass [...] His methodology is to take as his starting point contemporary developments in society and culture, then he listens to the solutions offered by his fellow theologians before returning to a critical examination of Scripture and Tradition for pointers to a solution. [...]

"His famous dialogue with Habermas in Munich in 2004 came as a huge surprise to Catholic intellectuals, who were unaware of how far Ratzinger was open to the heritage of the Enlightenment. It was not a surprise to secular thinkers, who had learned to treat Ratzinger with respect [...]. It should be remembered that the [Regensburg] lecture at the University before an assembly of academics and scientists received a standing ovation." www.ignatiusinsight.com



Letters to the Editor

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

CATHOLIC IGNORANCE OF SCIENCE

Dear Father Editor

John Farrell's article (*Has the Church Missed the Import of Science?* July '08) makes some good points, but in the United States there is a much bigger issue and I do not believe there is much hope of fixing it. Look to the sources of Catholic educators. Generally speaking, new college graduates will make substantially higher salaries in industry than in K-12 education, be it public, private, or parochial. Thus, there is an economic driving force opposing American science education in general. Individuals holding a B.S. in a scientific field (biology, chemistry) *might* make a decent wage, so defined by the ability to support a family, if they can obtain a permanent job in a public high school. However, such individuals will take a substantial pay cut to do so.

The problem is compounded in Catholic educational systems, which pay substantially less than public schools. Insofar as most Catholic schools operate on a shoestring budget, they can't afford to hire the best scientists fresh from a B. S. program. The situation is so dire that it is essentially impossible to support a family on the salaries offered by Catholic schools. A faithful married Catholic teacher will immediately be put to the test, since Catholic school salaries are insufficient for the support of children. Thus, Catholic educational administrators take who they can get: (a) graduates who are unable to get better – paying jobs in industry or at public high schools, or (b) spouses of individuals who are the primary breadwinners of their families.

To make matters even worse, those who have experience working in Catholic schools are often at a disadvantage when compared to other applicants for well – paying public school positions.

It often comes down to snobbery: some administrators believe that applicants coming from Catholic schools simply were not “good enough” to get a job in a better paying public school to begin with. Thus, working in a Catholic school may even terminate the career aspirations of a college graduate who wants to teach.

Although there are certainly many excellent and devoted science educators in Catholic K-12 education, these factors inevitably lead to a situation whereby Catholic schools simply cannot attract the best scientific educators in the long term. Moreover, this directly impacts the formation of priests, who are almost exclusively products of Catholic educational systems. As discussed by Mr. Farrell, priests are educated in seminaries that have no scientific education component. Thus, virtually all priests and bishops have a scientific education that comes exclusively from their science-poor Catholic high schools. How can a science-ignorant laity produce a science-astute or even science-literate priesthood? Science has not been part of many of their experiences in school or in life, so the importance of science may be lost on many of them.

By contrast, Catholics educated in public schools have the best chance of obtaining a good science education. After all, they have the best science teachers that educator – salaries can buy. However, the public school experience essentially guarantees that they will be secularised. A science-astute but faithless Catholic is unlikely to become a priest.

In summary, I don't see much reason to hope. Most bishops and priests won't seem to see the issues raised by Mr Farrell as important. Moreover, monetary restrictions would prevent them from addressing these issues even if they did care. As school taxes rise, those monetary restrictions will only get worse.

Yours faithfully

Ian Laurenzi
Professor of Chemical Engineering
Lehigh University
Bethlehem
Pennsylvania

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

Dear Father Editor

I am a seminarian in Australia and find your magazine very informative, especially regarding sacramental theology.

In this regard, I have some questions at which I was hoping your magazine might look. I have been reading two Orthodox theologians, Fr Schmemann and Archbishop Zizioulas. Is it possible for you to examine the sacramental theology of the former in his work “For the Life of the World” (especially in the two supplementary essays that are published with it regarding secularism and symbolism) and the theory of the person in the latter's theology?

I am having difficulty in understanding what the Latin Church would say to these positions, if in fact they are in disagreement as is supposed by these authors.

Yours faithfully

Jerome Santamaria
Corpus Christi College
Carlton
Victoria
Australia

EDITORIAL COMMENT: We forwarded this query to Fr Paul McPartlan Professor of Systematic Theology and Ecumenism at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. who made this response:

“The two topics raised are rich and complex. I would refer Mr Santamaria to my book, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (1993; new edition, 2006), for a discussion of Metropolitan John Zizioulas' idea of personhood, and to my forthcoming article, ‘Who is the Church?’, in the next issue of the journal *Ecclesiology* 4(2008), pp.1-18, for some thoughts on Schmemann's sacramental theology. In both cases, it is not necessarily the position of Catholic theology as such that these eminent Orthodox theologians would query, but rather certain scholastic approaches. As I indicate in both of these places, there is much to be gained from what Zizioulas and Schmemann, respectively, have to say.”



Discussion of *Faith's* Editorial Line on Science

SYNTHESIS NEEDED

Dear Father Editor

John Farrell (July '08) does well to highlight the worrying ignorance of scientific culture within the Church. As he points out, since the Belgian Jesuit George Lemaitre pioneered the big bang theory in the early 1930s, "it's almost as though, with the rise of more secular geniuses ... the Church has become discouraged and dropped out of the race, as it were, content to sit on the sidelines and absorb what it can from purely superficial accounts. Given the Church's crucial role in the foundation of the university system and the birth of natural philosophy in the high Middle Ages, this seems tragic."

If "tragic" seems too strong a word, consider how many young, western-educated Catholics have drifted away from the faith, believing that "science has made religion irrelevant" and that the Church has no answer to their questions on life, the universe and everything. While the leadership of the Church continues to miss the boat it is hard to see the way forward.

Fr Holloway's piece from 1950 and published in the same issue has indeed proved prescient in noting that "the case for Christianity is being lost by the default of the defendants". We should expect the "decline of Christian belief" to continue apace until the new vision outlined in your editorial gains some academic and cultural, not to say ecclesiastical, clout. Is it too much to hope that one day a priest inspired by this vision will lead a diocese, or perhaps even become a cardinal? Think what that would do to inject new life into our moribund catechetical system.

I came to London as a young Catholic in the early 1980s – when belief in God was coming under attack not only from the secular establishment, which has always been philosophically materialist,

but from the "fittest" members (in a Darwinian sense) of an increasingly materialistic and self-satisfied society. Surrounded by people who were indifferent or hostile to my beliefs, I found myself desperately searching for a presentation of the faith that was both orthodox and, in the best and truest sense, progressive – one that remained faithful to the Church's Tradition but that recognised the need for our understanding of that Tradition to undergo a gradual and continuous development, in Newman's sense of the word. By God's providence, I found what I was looking for in the *Faith* movement, through its talks, conferences, retreats and publications (including, of course, this magazine).

Today, some 25 years later, the Large Hadron Collider at Cern has just been switched on, prompting fears in some quarters that the collisions it produces could generate a mini black hole that could swallow the earth. In response, some wag wrote a letter, published in the *Guardian* newspaper of the day on which I write, saying: "what an honour it is to have a letter printed in the final edition of the *Guardian*."

Well, let's hope that the world lasts long enough for the new-look *Faith* magazine to inspire a new generation of Catholics (and non-Catholics) through a synthesis of faith and reason that points ever more clearly to the beauty and wisdom of God's self-revelation. I have no doubt that results from Cern (assuming anyone's left to interpret them) will, in due course, reinforce our understanding of that revelation.

Keep up the good work!

Yours faithfully
Adrian Read
Holmesley Road
Honor Oak
London

PROVISIONALITY OF SCIENCE

Dear Father Editor

In the July/August edition of *Faith* magazine dealing largely with science and the lack of it in the Church's approach I was struck by Fr Holloway's paragraph on page six captioned 'An Unscientific Church' referring to the intolerance of young and virile minds of such a Church.

The findings of science are only provisional being based on observations which are subject to revision as we change our point of view. To base the faith on that would have dangerous consequences not least of which would be the downgrading of God's revelation through His Son Jesus Christ.

The young minds you refer to have a well known syndrome going by the name: *my world is the only real world*.

Yours faithfully
Douglas Gibbons
Malden Road
New Malden
Surrey

BIBLICAL PALEONTOLOGY

Dear Father Editor

When looking in the Bible for evidence about how God created the world we tend to limit ourselves to the first chapters of Genesis and thereafter look for spiritual meanings only. We thus miss some very interesting zoological and geological hints elsewhere.

For example, in Ps. 90:13, Ps.73:13, Jer.51:34 and Mal.1:3 (Douay and KJV) "dragons" are mentioned as if part of the normal environment of the Israelites. In Ps.44:19 there is a "place of dragons". Altogether there are 20 references to these creatures in the O.T. and there is nothing in their contexts to indicate that they are just mythical evil beasts. I suggest that they are dinosaurs and living only about 5,000 years ago! Where do we get the idea and shape of dragons anyway?

In Job 40:10-19 God confronts Job with what was presumably the most

powerful animal on earth, the “Behemoth”, and this time supplies some details. “His strength is in his loins and his force in the navel of his belly”, “He setteth up his tail like a cedar”. Elephants and hippos have minuscule tails so what else could it be but one of those huge dinosaurs of which we have so many skeletons, a Tyrannosaurus Rex, for example, fits the description.

There follow details of the “Leviathan” whose “teeth are terrible round about” and “His scales like shields.” This is no whale surely but could only be some sort of giant marine dinosaur. Remember those legendary sea monsters? Today the Mediterranean has no such monsters. Was Jonah swallowed by a dinosaur?

One brief geological reference: in Ps. 113 we read (at the time of the Exodus) “The mountains skipped like rams and the hills like lambs of the flock”. What’s going on here exactly? Something which is much more than an earthquake and a bit over the top for poetic licence.

All this confirms me in the belief that the creation and development of the earth was not all that long ago and took place not by gradual evolution over billions of years but rapidly by a succession of catastrophic upheavals. Learned comment on this would be much appreciated

Yours faithfully
Jim Allen
Seymour Drive
Torquay

WORLD-SOUL

Dear Father Editor

I note from the July issue of *Faith* that you are still proposing the need for ‘A New Synthesis’.

In my opinion the cornerstone of such a synthesis should be to think of The Fall and Original Sin as a catastrophe which occurred in a realm transcendent to space and time. Genesis is then a myth story of a transcendental event, embracing all space-time with all matter and energy, and spirit, and not of an historical event due to the sin of our first parents within space-time on planet Earth, by Adam and Eve in Eden.

Creation, matter and spirit, is therefore always in its true reality transcendental, from all eternity, and is due to one great original divine transcendental thought and act. One might say there is a transcendental Unity Law of Control and Direction, a ‘World-Soul’, which is fully alive and free to choose to accept or to reject the divine will for being.

All of this was already presented by the Great Russian mystic and theologian, V. Soloviev, before the end of the 19th century.

Yours faithfully
Professor John Rooney
Strenmillis Road
Belfast

EDITORIAL COMMENT: The above three letters on science and religion illustrate some of the challenges and misunderstandings that can easily arise with this important topic. First, it is not our proposal in any sense to “base the faith” on science. The doctrines of Catholic Faith do not change, but we can and must show how what is revealed integrates and illuminates what we discover of the world through observation and reason. Theologians in every age have done this, not just our own – St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas most notably – drawing on the scientific-philosophical insights of their own time. We must now do it in our time.

Although we will always be refining our understanding of the universe, this does not make science arbitrary and wholly untrustworthy. The basic insights into the atomic nature of matter and the genetic foundation of life, for example, are established beyond reasonable doubt and form the basis of almost all our modern technology and medicine. To deny or dismiss such insights in the way we present Catholicism to the modern world undermines the credibility of the Church and the message she preaches. However we must be clear about what we do and don’t mean by a synthesis of science and religion.

On the one hand we do not think that Scripture can be turned into a naïve paleontology that is incompatible with the evidence of observation and common sense – man could not exist in the traumatic upheavals of primitive geological formation on earth, nor indeed could he co-exist environmentally with dinosaurs. On the other hand we cannot accept a synthesis that contradicts fundamental Catholic doctrine. To say that “creation” is eternally transcendent and consists in a “World Soul” is actually pantheism, making good and evil part of the very Being of Godhead which is in process of becoming fully Itself through the historic odyssey of Self alienation and return. This is indeed the thinking of Victor Soloviev, and ultimately Karl Rahner, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and others.

What we advocate in this magazine does not alter or accommodate the faith to scientific theory, but if anything the very opposite. We are showing how genuine scientific insight relates most coherently to Christian revelation. Far from downgrading the revelation of the Father in His Eternal Son made flesh, we can show that Christ is the crowning Wisdom who makes sense of every lesser wisdom and of all orders of creation, including the material order which is also made for his glory.



Comment on the Comments

by William Oddie

The Philosemitism of G. K. Chesterton

This column generally takes its starting-point in topical questions which have arisen in the press, Catholic or secular. This time, I am going to concentrate on one piece, an attack on G.K. Chesterton by Adam Gopnik in *The New Yorker*, which appeared in July. For, though it is now several months old, its freshly disinterred allegations are still being taken seriously, and something needs to be said: more than I have space for here, but a start must be made.

According to Gopnik, G. K. Chesterton had an “ugly” and “obsessive” hatred of Jews. Gopnik claims to be an admirer of Chesterton. Chesterton is “a difficult writer to defend”, he writes: “[t]hose of us who are used to pressing his writing on friends have the hard job of protecting him from his detractors, who think he was a nasty anti-Semite and medievalising reactionary, and the still harder one of protecting him from his admirers, who *pretend* that he was not” [my italics].

Gopnik has his own agenda: he claims, for instance, that Chesterton’s supposed Jew-hatred was linked to his conversion to Catholicism, saying he was attracted by the Church’s “authoritarian and poetic solutions” and therefore went for its endemic anti-semitism too. But there is more: “[i]t’s a *deeply racial*, not merely religious, bigotry; it’s not the Jews’ cupidity or their class role – it’s them.” [My italics] The trouble for “those of us who love Chesterton’s writing”, he argues, “is that the anti-Semitism is not incidental: it rises from the logic of his poetic position.” This leads Gopnik to some quite grotesque accusations: in one way, this is useful, since it demonstrates clearly how profoundly ignorant he is of Chesterton’s real beliefs. “He dreamed”, Gopnik ludicrously claims, “of an anti-capitalist agricultural state overseen by the Catholic Church and governed by a military for whom medieval ideas of honour still resonated [What! Where?],

a place where Jews would not be persecuted or killed, certainly, but hived off and always marked as foreigners... his ideal order was ascendant over the whole Iberian Peninsula for half a century.” This almost answers itself: Chesterton demonstrably believed in nothing remotely like this authoritarian, centralising, anti-localist, clericalist and militarist nightmare.

The best place to begin, perhaps, is with the accusation against Chesterton of an obsessive and *racially based* loathing of Jews, since the question of race (with its connections with Eugenics and its goal of racial purity – a pseudo-science of which Chesterton was virtually the only major opponent) is fundamental to the “anti-Semitism” of Chesterton’s lifetime. The term was invented around 1873 by one Wilhelm Marr to describe the policy toward Jews based on “Racism” that he and others advocated. The theory asserted

that “humans were divided into clearly distinguishable races and that the intellectual, moral and social conduct and potential of the members of these races were biologically determined. As elaborated in the Aryan myth, it maintained that Jews were a race and that, not only were they, like other races, inferior to the Aryan race, but also that Jews were the most dangerous of those inferior races”¹.

Chesterton was, in fact, brusquely impatient of current ideas about racial superiority: “I shall” he wrote in 1925, “begin to take seriously those classifications of superiority and inferiority, when I find a man classifying himself as inferior. It is so with the men who talk about superior and inferior races; I never heard a man say: Anthropology shows that I belong to an inferior race. If he did, he might be talking like an anthropologist; as it is, he is talking like a man, and not infrequently like a fool.”²

Thus, not only was Chesterton not a racist, he was positively and with

deliberation intellectually hostile to the philosophy underlying “racism” and hence to that underlying its derivative, “anti-Semitism”. But we need to say more: as a matter of historic record, he was, quite simply, too genuinely friendly toward far too many individual Jews throughout his lifetime for the charge even of a general dislike of or distaste for Jews – let alone of Gopnik’s fanatical charge that he was a “Jew-hater” whose hatreds were “ugly and obsessive” – to be even remotely plausible. On any occasion of discrimination against or cruelty towards Jews – whether individual or collective – he was, instinctively, firmly on the Jewish side. As he puts it in his *Autobiography*, “I lived to have later on the name of an Anti-Semite; whereas from my first days at school I very largely had the name of a Pro-Semite... I was criticised in early days for quixotry and priggishness in protecting Jews”, a reference to his habit of intervening when boys were being bullied for being Jewish. Chesterton’s *Autobiography* is not always a reliable source; but there is corroborating evidence for these protective feelings from his childhood onwards: and since this evidence is virtually unknown, it is probably best here to take this opportunity to publish it for the first time (much of it it will appear in my forthcoming book *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy*, though I discovered some of it too late for it to be included) rather than repeat old arguments.

Some of this evidence is to be found in the notebooks which he kept from his childhood until the end of his life. In one notebook he kept an unfortunately short-lived diary in which he recorded his strong feelings about Russian oppression of the Jews, feelings which had been triggered off by reading in a magazine article of the case of a “respectable young girl of honest parents” who had been seduced by a Christian who had promised to marry her. When she reminded him of his promise, he replied that

“Gopnik perceives Chesterton’s agreement with the Zionist’s perception that ‘we are aliens here’ in a sinister light.”

“he would have her sent out of the city for her presumption. And he did. A cousin of his is serving in the police department, and he had no difficulty to obtain an order for her banishment as a disorderly Jewess. But how could you bring yourself to do such a damnable act? [the article’s author] asked. Oh, she is only a Jewess! he answered. What else is she good for? Besides, everybody else does the same.”³

Chesterton’s reaction was explosive:

[Diary. Monday Jan 5th, 1891]
Expect Bentley. Read in Review of Reviews. Various revelation[s] of Jews in Russia. Brutal falsehood and cruelty to a Jewish girl. Made me feel strongly inclined to knock some-body down, but refrained.

Chesterton’s feelings about Russian anti-semitism were reflected in a series of pieces published during 1891 (written in the form of fictional Letters) in *The Debater*, the school magazine of which he was co-founder and a prolific contributor:

[*Debater*, iii, 11]
What do you think of the persecution of the Jews in Russia? It has, at least, done one service to orthodoxy. It has restored my belief in the Devil.

[*Debater*, iii, 29]
I am going to Russia, I think the most godless, hell-darkened place I can think of, to see if I can’t... help the Hebrews... or do something else that will be for the good of humanity.

The series comes to a dramatic end with a fictional letter, written as though from St Petersburg, in which Chesterton’s alter ego, “Guy Crawford”, describes himself as joining a rebellious mob in which he recognises an obviously Jewish student called Emmanuel, and as springing to his defence, sword in hand, as the Czarist troops attack: but Emmanuel sustains a fatal blow and dies in the street, “a champion of justice, like thousands who have fallen for it in the dark records of this dark land”.⁴

These feelings of extreme hostility to persecutions of the Jewish people were

maintained throughout his life, and were in no way modified by his feelings about certain individual Jews: towards the end of his life he wrote that he was “appalled by the Hitlerite atrocities” (he died in 1936 before anyone knew of the full extent of what was to become the Nazi attempt at a ‘final solution’): “They have absolutely no reason or logic behind them. It is quite obviously the expedient of a man who has been driven to seeking a scapegoat, and has found with relief the most famous scapegoat in European history, the Jewish people.”

The youthful Chesterton had personal reasons for feeling strongly about cruelty to the Jews in Russia. Of the twelve members of the Junior Debating Club – the exclusive membership of which was determined by Chesterton and by his friends Bentley and Oldershaw – four were Jewish: the Solomons, Lawrence and Maurice and the D’Avigdors, Digby and Waldo. Chesterton stayed with the Solomon family during at least one school vacation; Lawrence Solomon was to be a lifelong friend, who even moved to Beaconsfield in Chesterton’s wake so as to be near him; he and his wife were frequent visitors to Chesterton’s house.

Chesterton’s view of Jews in general was exactly that of the Zionist movement: that Jews were exiles, and would never be happy until they had their own country. Chesterton simply thought that Jews were foreigners who had no desire to lose their separate identity: the “Jewish problem”, in the words of Theodore Herzl, the founding father of Zionism, was that “We are aliens here, they do not let us dissolve into the population, *and if they let us we would not do it*. Let us go forth!”⁵ [My italics]

Chesterton, indeed, claimed to be a Zionist himself. He once explained this (to a Jewish audience) by saying that “while all other races had local attachments, the Jews were universal and scattered. They could not be expected to have patriotism for the countries in which they made their homes”. This view may be disputable (time has certainly made it so); but it is

not anti-semitic. Chesterton’s claim to be a Zionist may seem eccentric to us: but, again, it is hardly anti-semitic: nor was it unusual (there was at the time a well-established tradition of Christian Zionism, of which A.J. Balfour is the most obvious example): it is why a group of Zionists invited Chesterton to Palestine, where he met and had a day-long discussion with Chaim Weizmann, later the first President of Israel, who as a result became an admirer of Chesterton: Weizmann would certainly have sniffed out an anti-semitic if Chesterton had actually been one. The resulting book, *The New Jerusalem* sums up Chesterton’s view:

“...if the Jew cannot be at ease in Zion we can never again persuade ourselves that he is at ease out of Zion. We can only salute as it passes that restless and mysterious figure, knowing at last that there must be in him something mystical as well as mysterious; that whether in the sense of the sorrows of Christ or of the sorrows of Cain, he must pass by, for he belongs to God.”

The New Jerusalem, however, poses a problem: for, though it can certainly be seen as evidence for Chesterton’s Zionism and for his appreciation of the “mystical as well as mysterious” dimension of the Jewish heritage, it also contains passages which explain why Gopnik perceives Chesterton’s agreement with the Zionist’s perception that “we are aliens here” in a sinister light. At one point, Chesterton seeks to explain his feeling that Jews are foreigners and should not take on the airs of the English establishment (undoubtedly thinking of the galling attainment by his arch-enemy from the Marconi affair, Rufus Isaacs, of the Vice-Royalty of India and the title of Marquess of Reading) by indulging in a joke: a joke, however which from our own historical standpoint has turned sour: “Let a Jew be Lord Chief Justice [as Rufus Isaacs had been]”, says Chesterton, “if his exceptional veracity and reliability have clearly marked him out for that post. Let a Jew be Archbishop of Canterbury...But let there be one single-clause bill



Comment on the Comments continued

[enacting] that every Jew must be dressed like an Arab.... If my image is quaint my intention is quite serious.... The point is that we should know where we are; and he would know where he is, which is in a foreign land." "Hitler", says Gopnik, "made a simpler demand for Jewish dress, but the idea was the same." But "the idea" ABSOLUTELY WAS NOT THE SAME: Hitler wanted the Jews identified so that they could be first dispossessed and then annihilated: Chesterton wanted them to be given special privileges and protection. No accusation better exemplifies Gopnik's entire lack of basic credibility.

Better to understand Chesterton's idea that Jews were not naturally a part of English culture without the inevitably determinative intervening lens of the Nazi holocaust, we might compare it with modern English perceptions of the problem of multiculturalism as it applies particularly to the Moslem community, still widely seen as being impossible to assimilate: thus, there is understood by many decent and tolerant people to be what might be termed a "Moslem problem" (just as many decent and tolerant gentiles in Chesterton's day thought there was a "Jewish problem"). The perspective of history may or may not similarly show this problem too to be illusory.

Gopnik dismisses Chesterton's claim to be a Zionist by saying that many anti-Semites cynically made the same claim, as a kind of polemical trick. But Chesterton was entirely sincere, as Weizmann undoubtedly perceived; and by the time he visited Palestine he had held these views for at least three decades. In one of Chesterton's youthful notebooks, which we can date around 1893, he recorded the following pensée: "No Christian ought to be an anti-semite. But every Christian ought to be a Zionist." His Zionism, that is to say, is defined here in the context of the hostility to anti-Semitism which he had recently expressed in his diary and in the Debater articles I have quoted. The terms "Zionism" and "Zionist" had in fact been coined only three years before; and Chesterton's use of them

predates the existence of an actual Zionist movement: the first Zionist Congress took place in 1897. Thus, we can say that this was a question that had fascinated him from the beginning: and that his understanding of what Zionists too called "the Jewish problem" was from the outset determined in the context of his hostility to anti-semitism and did not arise later in the contexts of his hostility to particular plutocratic Jews (in 1911, he was reported as saying that "speaking generally, as with most other communities, "THE POOR JEWS [ARE] NICE AND THE RICH JEWS [ARE] NASTY"" [My italics].

There is more to be said; and I have come to the end of my space. I could have quoted Chesterton's poem in praise of Cromwell for his toleration of the Jews and his poem of bitter disappointment with republican France in the wake of the Dreyfus affair. But I have surely said enough to establish, at least *prima facie*, my own case: that there is as much evidence for Chesterton's philosemitism as for his alleged anti-semitism. With his "salute" to "the Jew", "that restless and mysterious figure, knowing...that... he belongs to God" we can place the following passage on "the mission...of the Jews" (which apart from anything else refutes the notion that Chesterton's Catholicism led him to anti-semitism) from *The Everlasting Man*, his first Catholic masterpiece: "... the meaning of the Jews", says Chesterton, was

"... that the world owes God to the Jews.... through all their wanderings... they did indeed carry the fate of the world in that wooden tabernacle The more we really understand of the ancient conditions that contributed to the final culture of the Faith, the more we shall have a real and even a realistic reverence for the greatness of the Prophets of Israel. As it was... this Deity who is called tribal and narrow... preserved the primary religion of all mankind.... He was as narrow as the universe."

So much for Gopnik's argument that Chesterton's "national spirit" and "extreme localism" led him to his supposed anti-Semitism: they were, in fact, precisely what gave him his respect for other nations and other cultures, including that of the Jews, to which the world owed its knowledge of God, "as narrow as the universe". It is the paradox of the sacramental principle, in which infinity is contained within the limited and tangible; but Adam Gopnik, resolute secularist and anti-Catholic that he is, cannot be expected to understand that.

William Oddie's Chesterton and the romance of Orthodoxy: The making of GKC, 1874-1908 is to be published by the Oxford University Press this month.

Notes

¹Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, University of California Press, Berkeley (1990), 311.

²*G.K.'s Weekly*, (April 25, 1925).

³*Review of Reviews* (October, 1890), ii, no 10, 350.

⁴*The Debater*, iii, 71.

⁵Alex Bein's 1941 biography.

Catholicism a New Synthesis

£14.00

503pp

by Edward Holloway

Pope John Paul II gave the blueprint for catechetical renewal with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Catholicism: A New Synthesis seeks to show why such teaching makes perfect sense in a world which has come of age in scientific understanding. It offers a way out of the current intellectual crisis, a way which is both modern and orthodox.

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Notes from Across the Atlantic

by Fr Richard John Neuhaus

Genuine Dialogue

Here's an interesting exercise in political science. It's by Jon Shields of the University of Colorado, writing in the academic journal *Critical Review*. The article is "Christian Citizens: The Promise and Limits of Deliberation". The usual media presentation of pro-life activists as religiously inspired fanatics is simply contrary to fact, writes Shields. It gives rise to books such as Laurence Tribe's *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes*. A clash of absolutes makes rational discussion impossible, and therefore, according to Tribe, the present unlimited abortion license should remain in place. This is called neutrality in the face of an irresolvable conflict. In fact, Shields points out, pro-life activists are concerned to engage their pro-choice opponents in discussion that is based on public and rational arguments that invoke no specifically religious warrants. He cites two evangelical groups, Stand to Reason and Justice for All, that assiduously train activists for such engagement. In sum, says Shields, pro-life activists are more open and eager for genuine dialogue than are their pro-choice counterparts. So you can put the refusal of pro-lifers to engage in democratic deliberation on that long list of things that everybody knows that aren't so. But you probably had it there already.

Common Conundrums

Michael Novak has a new book out from Doubleday, *No One Sees God: The Dark Night of Atheists and Believers*. He addresses many of the questions agitated by the "new atheists", but with the twist that believers, too, don't have a neat and satisfying answer to the intellectual problems that atheists exploit. For instance, the perennial question: If God is God and God is good, how can there be evil? Atheists and Christians can agree on the conundrums that drive them to opposite conclusions. Along the way, he cites a response offered by physicist

Stephen Barr, a frequent FIRST THINGS contributor, to the question of chance. Barr writes: "To be responsible agents means being able to impose our own ordering upon events. This requires that some apparent 'disorder' be present in the situations that confront us as the raw material upon which we can act. A world without disorder, without 'chance' and 'random' events, would be a world in which everything unfolded according to a single, simple, and predictable pattern. But a world in which many wills are acting cannot have a single, simple pattern. It must of necessity be a multifarious world, a world with many patterns, and plots and chains of causation existing side-by-side, occasionally impinging on each other and intersecting each other and throwing each other off course. That is precisely what 'chance' amounts to. A world without chance would be a world with a single overarching and controlling pattern, one plot without sub-plots, one storyline rather than a tangled web of storylines. Everything marching in lockstep. Such a world would have no scope for freedom. It would also have no scope for courage, or hope, or vigilance, or daring or human providence." As I say in my blurb for *No One Sees God*, "The word *dialogical* might have been invented to describe Michael Novak." At some points I would make the argument differently, but Michael is generous to a fault and indefatigably patient in engaging those who disagree.

Feeling the Pinch

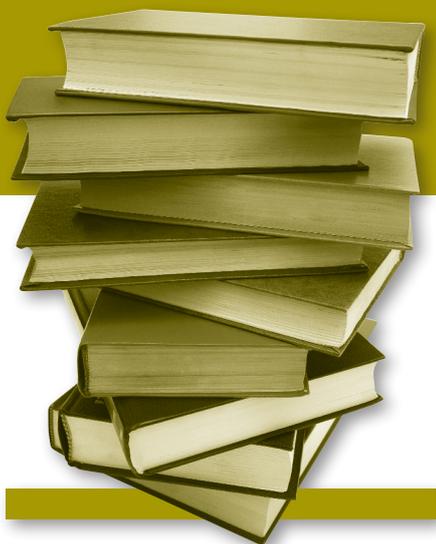
It's no news that newspaper circulation is declining. In the second quarter of this year the profits of the *New York Times* fell by 82 percent. I was, however, somewhat surprised by the reason given. According to this story in the *Washington Post*, "Chief Executive Janet Robinson says business was hurt by the 'U.S. economic slowdown and secular forces playing out across the media industry.'" Perhaps Ms. Robinson should have a word with the editorial-page editor.

Planned Parenthood Flourishes

With all the news about economic woes, you will not be glad to learn that Planned Parenthood is doing just fine. The organisation is "flush with cash", reports the *Wall Street Journal*, having topped one billion dollars in 2007 revenues, including \$336 million in taxpayer funding. Its Action Fund is putting \$10 million into electing pro-abortion candidates, which ensures continuing government handouts, and it is doing a makeover of its 882 clinics with a "contemporary, fun and lively look". Said a Planned Parenthood official, the change makes their work "so much more mainstream". Planned Parenthood perpetrates one out of every four abortions committed in the United States.

On the Catholic Vote

The title is strangely defensive. "Yes You Can: Why Catholics Don't Have to Vote Republican." It's written by Gerald J. Beyer, a professor of theology at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, and published in *Commonweal*. Beyer allows that Senator Obama's position flatly contradicts Catholic teaching on the protection of unborn human beings. Yes, but then there are those other "grave moral reasons" Catholics should take into account. On the Iraq war, Obama is right and McCain wrong. Ditto on the relations between military power and diplomacy, and between race and a just economic system. In sum, Obama is a liberal, and McCain is a conservative, and Catholics should be liberals. Prof. Beyer doesn't do nuance. But then we come to the clincher: "Perhaps the most important commonality between Catholic teaching and Obama's proposals is one of philosophical orientation. Both stress the necessity of nurturing the virtue of hope." Well, there you have it. As a matter of fact, Obama has also said some fine things about faith and charity, and it is well known that McCain is opposed to all three.



Book Reviews

Born of a Virgin: Proving the Miracle from the Gospels

by John Redford, St Paul's Publishing, 218pp, £9.95

Despite its cramped narrowness the Enlightenment still throws dark shadows over our intellectual landscape, especially Scriptural exegesis. The Enlightenment's absolutization of the laws of Newtonian physics led to a denial of miracles and of human freedom, emphatic points of the New Testament message. Although Newton's worldview has been relativised by physicists, many exegetes in the wake of Bultmann insist on a closed world of uninterrupted causal series. Anything beyond hackneyed everyday experience, reproducible at will to 'scientific' observers, tends to be treated as superstition, magic, or myth. Naturally the virgin birth, attested by Matthew and Luke, is branded a *theologoumenon*, the product of the early Church's reflection which invented stories to highlight Jesus' significance. Unfortunately many Catholic exegetes have accepted the premises of Enlightenment Protestant exegesis, resulting in a lethal abyss between the Church's faith and 'historical-critical' exegesis. Redford's book goes a long way to uncovering the prejudices of such exegesis while showing the historical reliability of the Gospel narratives. Interestingly he does so by employing the historical-critical method, hoisting exegetes with their own petards.

After setting out the problem, Redford contends that the virgin birth of Is 7:14 is rightly understood as a prophecy in view of Christ. Jews and Christians accepted that God can inspire a deeper

meaning than what is intended by the human author. He then upholds the reliability of the New Testament manuscript tradition. A fourth chapter shows that Matthew's and Luke's Gospels were composed before the end of the first century AD and no previous witness contradicts their testimony to the virgin birth. The alleged 'silence' about the virgin birth from other New Testament authors cannot be used as an argument against it since its factuality would have been revealed by Mary only after the resurrection and it did not constitute the centre of the Easter message; Redford even finds hints that other New Testament authors framed their affirmations to allow for the virgin birth. The central sixth chapter, examining alleged inconsistencies in the two accounts of Matthew and Luke, concludes that both accounts enjoy a 'substantial historicity.' While both evangelists wished to state facts, they employed traditions available to them, which may have contained some errors, e.g. Quirinius was not governor of Syria when overseeing a census in 4 BC. Such an error would be material, not formal, i.e. Luke accepted it from his source without intending to affirm its historical accuracy. Redford defends the birth at Bethlehem and, in view of multiple overlaps in the traditions behind Matthew and Luke, the historical reliability of the two accounts. It is possible to reconcile these accounts, even if difficulties are encountered. For a presumption in favour of the historical accuracy should be employed, as N.T. Wright argued. Not only does *Dei Verbum* 19 affirm the Gospels' historicity but also Luke 1:1-4 maintains that he relied on eyewitnesses and intended historical accuracy. The final three chapters summarily consider the evidence against and for the virgin birth, arguing that it is neither myth nor indemonstrable truth; instead the evidence for the existence of an historical tradition anteceding the Gospels, ultimately from Mary herself, is more credible than any alternative explanation; hence, for anyone open to the possibility of miracles, there

is good evidence to affirm Jesus' virgin birth on the basis of the New Testament's testimony.

One wonders why no use was made of Jesus' unique relation to His *Abba*? Given the importance of fatherhood in ancient societies and Jewish avoidance of naming Yahweh, how would Jesus have dared such a novelty without insulting Joseph and impinging on God's transcendence unless God alone was His Father? It is strange that Redford refers to Jesus' conception "from the seed of the Word who directly created him in the womb of the Virgin Mary" (p. 199). Did the Word generate Himself? Hardly. Furthermore, can Redford so distinguish inspiration from revelation that Scripture is not revelation but only contains it (p. 36)? Does my body only contain my soul? Can there be meaningful revelation apart from the words mediating it? Preferable is an analogous understanding: Jesus is the prime analogate of revelation, while His words and words about Him participate in the primal revelation. John 8:39-41 is doubly interpreted: on pp. 81-82, 160 Redford favours the view that the verses obliquely refer to a charge of Jesus' illegitimacy (and thus awareness of birth without a human father) while on p. 137 that view is rejected as "highly imaginative." He also exaggerates the difference between *gignomai* and *gennaomai* (pp. 77-78); both words can mean "to be born," and only after the Arian crisis was a consistent effort made to distinguish "to become" from "to be born." Despite such difficulties this fine book is easily recommended.

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Chance or Purpose? Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith

by Christopher Cardinal Schönborn, edited by Hubert Philip Weber, translated by Henry Taylor, Ignatius Press, 181pp, £14.50

On 7 July 2005 an article by Cardinal Schönborn called “Finding Design in Nature” appeared in the *New York Times*. It caused something of a stir – a reaction which the Cardinal seems very happy with: these are important issues and they should be discussed widely. Over the following year he explored the matter in his monthly catechetical lectures, which form the basis of *Chance or Purpose*. The book retains a catechetical approach, clearly presenting the point of view of the Catholic faith, but not engaging in extended analysis of alternative opinions. This level of approach is perhaps related to the Cardinal’s admirably frank admission that he is a layman in scientific terms. Even so, just occasionally his lack of familiarity with scientific ideas lets him down a little. For instance, when he says that Richard Dawkins rejects a “clockmaker” God, he has in mind a God who makes a clockwork world and then just lets it run, whereas Dawkins in fact turns his invective against a “watchmaker” God who designs the complex workings of living organisms.

The Cardinal begins by sketching the Catholic and scientific world views and their mutual relationship. The idea that science and religion are always opposed is a persistent modern myth, and if each keeps to its proper methods there can be no real conflict. Nevertheless, since scientists are human beings, they will inevitably bring philosophical presuppositions to the discussion, which can be a source of apparent conflict. This has been particularly true in the case of evolution, where the scientific theory has often been hijacked to promote a materialistic ideology. Here and throughout the book Schönborn admirably distinguishes between the scientific and ideological aspects of Darwinism. He also succinctly dismisses fundamentalist

creationism as “nonsense” which exposes the faith to ridicule.

Chapters 2 to 4 consider how God is involved in the evolution of new species. First of all Schönborn roundly rejects the deist idea of a Creator who simply brings the cosmos into existence at the beginning of time and then has no further dealings with it. Creation means more than God simply “blowing the start whistle”. But how have ever higher forms of life come about? The Cardinal rejects two views as irrational: the idea that evolution has some mythical power to direct itself, and explaining evolution away as the result of blind chance. The work of creation is ongoing. However, precisely how Schönborn understands this was not entirely clear to me: does each new species require an individual act of creation or not? At times he praises science’s rejection of such ideas: “It is not a matter of ‘intervening, case by case’ from outside” (p. 84); yet, for life to come about, “it truly needs the creative act of God, the ‘divine spark’” (p. 82).

The discussion of the problem of (physical) evil left me somewhat disappointed. Suffering and death are seen as the inevitable concomitants of a universe created in a state of becoming, and destructive natural phenomena are essential for sustaining life. Furthermore, solidarity with those who suffer can bring great love into the world – am I alone in finding this argument a little hollow? A deeper consideration of how sin leads to physical evil would have been a valuable addition.

The chapter on man as the goal of creation was much more successful. Schönborn nicely shows how the “dethroning” of man by Darwin in some ways only reintegrates man into nature after Descartes had separated him from it; yet ideological Darwinism has reduced man further, to the status of a mere part of the material world, leading ultimately in the direction of totalitarianism. The existence of the soul is beautifully demonstrated with a quotation from Hans Jonas, describing a group of scientists taking an oath to

uphold materialism – what could such an oath mean except that they had some non-physical power over their brains? In fact, the Cardinal’s use of telling quotations is one of the joys of this book.

The discussion of Christ as the ultimate goal of evolution left me simultaneously elated and astonished: elated because Schönborn clearly sees the cosmic significance of Christ as the centre of God’s plan; astonished at how effusively he praises the “fascinating” yet “controversial” vision of Teilhard de Chardin, whom he calls a “mystic of evolution”. The Cardinal is not unaware of difficulties here. He acknowledges that Teilhard does not do full justice to science or the faith, in particular that he runs the danger of “naturalising” Christ. All the same, some further critique of his ideas would have been welcome, since they seem to come close to animism and even pantheism: “The entire universe is ... animated by [Christ’s] form. ... Christ becomes the energy of the cosmos itself” (p. 141). (For a fuller discussion of Teilhard’s difficulties see Chapter 5 of Holloway’s *A New Synthesis*, advertised on page 30 of this magazine). It all seems at odds with the Cardinal’s orthodoxy and his desire elsewhere to avoid any mythologisation of evolution. That said, Schönborn is quite right to admire the impressive focus on Christ, the rejection of materialism, and the vital importance of a new synthesis of science and the Catholic faith for today’s world. And, in the end, Schönborn only devotes two and a half pages of his book to Teilhard.

A valuable chapter explores the question of man’s “dominion” over creation, making interesting links to a wide range of ethical issues including gender and homosexuality, animal rights, utilitarianism, and the basis of human dignity.

Overall, Schönborn identifies the Catholic position well. Both science and faith have an essential part to play in understanding ourselves and our world. They do not contradict one another and they can meaningfully communicate. Faith in God the Creator



Book Reviews continued

does not begin where scientific knowledge fails, rather it is based on our rational knowledge of the world. The Creator is no God-of-the-Gaps. But science alone is not enough to understand the purposefulness of evolution as a whole. If I was a little disappointed at times, it was partly because of the catechetical nature of the discussions – the title *Chance or Purpose* had led me to hope for a more in-depth analysis of both sides of the debate – and partly because the Cardinal seems so keen on Teilhard de Chardin. If I was pleased, it was because he clearly shows the vital importance of these questions for the proclamation of the faith today.

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The Spirit of Celibacy

by *Johann Adam Möhler, edited, annotated, and with an Afterword by Dieter Hatstrup, English language edition edited by Rev Emery de Gaál, Hillenbrand Books, 166pp, \$21.95*

This is an excellent little book and surprisingly up to date, given that the German original was first written as an article entitled *Illumination on a Memorandum* in response to a *Memorandum on the Abolition of the Celibacy Requirement for Catholic Priests* submitted by certain theology professors to the Archduke of Baden, the Baden Parliament and the Archbishop of Freiburg in 1828. Then as today the opponents of priestly celibacy made their voices heard.

Möhler's work itself is preceded by a preface and an introduction to the English language edition, both written by its editor. The introduction ends with a brief section about the editor of the original German edition of this book, Rev Dieter Hatstrup. It would have been helpful to have had this separately referenced in the *Contents* for ease of reference when reading the extensive and illuminating *Afterword* from Hatstrup which concludes the book. But this is the only negative comment I have to make.

The *Illumination* is divided into five chapters, describing in turn the state of things in 1828, the Biblical counsel of continence, an examination of celibacy's origins in pagan, Jewish and Gnostic religions, celibacy in the early Church and, finally, the theology of celibacy.

Möhler laments the state of the Baden clergy of 1828 describing them in general as "neither very bright nor very spiritual," having "a rather materialistic and worldly attitude, almost completely devoid of any spiritual life" with "no sign of real spiritual fruit among them – only a stiff and lifeless formalism." The authors of the *Memorandum* appear to be aware of this "spiritual emptiness and hardness" in the clergy "and the remedy they are proposing for it is the abolition of celibacy. So inwardly and spiritually impoverished are the Baden priests ... that they are reduced to ... looking for joy outside themselves; so the cry has gone up from them: 'Who will give us wives?' " as if the provision of wives will give the Church the priests it lacks.

Drawing on Scripture and Tradition, Möhler says rather that prayers should be offered for priests who are "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Barnabas – Acts 11:24), combining "the profundity of an Augustine, the erudition of a Jerome, the rhetorical talent of a Chrysostom, and the gentleness of Hilary." Möhler points out that attacks on clerical celibacy often come about at times when there is significant decadence among the clergy. The Church's normal reaction at such times is to call for a renewal rather than a relaxing of clerical discipline.

Möhler's biblical analysis looks at the teachings of Jesus and St Paul. Whereas the authors of the *Memorandum* dwell on the supposed impossibility of continence ("Not all men can receive this precept") Möhler says that Our Lord is talking about a positive reality, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the power given to men to become eunuchs for its sake (cf. Mt 19:12). Möhler complains: "Instead of raising the spirits of all Christians and especially the clergy, [the fallacious interpretation of Mt

19:12] depresses them; instead of inspiring and blessing hearts with uplifting ideals, it brings them down to the commonest heathen reality and weakness."

As for the supposed impossibility of continence, so enthusiastically were the people of Corinth embracing it that St Paul had to encourage them not to "refuse one another except perhaps by agreement and for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again..." (1 Cor. 7:5). Contrary to the assertion of the *Memorandum* that the Church emphasised virginity because it considered marriage as bad, in the chapter on the theology of celibacy Möhler says that he "will demonstrate incontrovertibly that it cannot be considered an accident if the Catholic Church, which honours virginity so much, also has the deepest grasp of marriage and hallows it as a sacrament."

In this connection, one can recall what GK Chesterton wrote: "It is true that the historic Church has at once emphasised celibacy and emphasised the family, has at once (if one may put it so) been fiercely for having children and fiercely for not having children. It has kept them side by side like two strong colours, red and white, like the red and white upon the shield of St George. It has always had a healthy hatred of pink." (*Orthodoxy*, ch. 6 The Paradoxes of Christianity)

In the same chapter, Möhler refers to the close relationship with their community that the Catholic priests have in contrast to the Protestant clergy. While favouring dialogue, he argues against compromise with the spirit of the age. Priestly celibacy is the guarantee of the freedom of the Church from submission to the State, as also from any secularising tendencies arising in the Church. The chapter provides a critique of the foundations of Protestantism and asks: "Why is it ... that the enemies of celibacy always seem to be hostile to the Pope while defenders are on his side?" Möhler links the demands for the abolition of celibacy to attempts to make the bonds of communion with

the Pope weaker. And then local Churches would become weaker in the face of pressures from the State. “The states deal with bishops as with subordinates, whereas the Pope is respected as an acknowledged power independent of all states. In him, we are free.”

There is much more that one could write in favour of this excellent book. It deserves to be read by everyone, priest, seminarian and lay faithful. In an age when so much questioning of the value of celibacy can, as Möhler says, undermine the idealism of priests who have generously given up wives and children for the sake of the Kingdom, priests will find this book immensely encouraging and inspiring, seminarians will acquire a conviction early in their formation of the worth of abandoning everything for the sake of the Kingdom, and laity will find reasons to pray for their priests and for more vocations to the priesthood.

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Humanae Vitae Forty Years On: A Commentary by George J Woodall

Family Publications, 224pp, £8.95

In *Humanae Vitae Forty Years On* Fr Woodall presents a cogent translation of Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, accompanied by a comprehensive commentary. As the translation text is set out on the left page with the commentary on the right it is easy to follow. However, one minor distraction may prevent quick referencing: whilst the paragraph numbering of the text matches the numbering in the commentary, the commentary seems to use an unduly complicated system of lower case letters and roman numerals sometimes to indicate a subparagraph or particular distinctions made within the text. Thus, for instance, n.10.3 in the text is considered in (10) b in the commentary; n.14.1 is discussed in (14) (a) i. Despite this very slight difficulty, overall, Father Woodall's book is user-friendly. In addition to his commentary Fr Woodall offers a more

general commentary dealing with questions on the status of the encyclical, response of conscience, arguments raised in the wake of the encyclical to illuminate the teaching and observations on later 'developments': assisted and substitutive procreation, the condom and HIV, rape and other violent sexual intercourse.

Fr Woodall hopes in his commentary “to shed some light upon the problems tackled and especially on the teaching given” in the encyclical (p.7). He usefully discusses Paul VI's appointment of a commission in preparing the encyclical and he points out that the role of the Commission was advisory (p.33). Yet his assertion that the majority report (that advocated the use of contraceptives where there was grave reason) can be seen as a “real change” rather than “just a development” in the moral teaching of the Church (p.37) may have benefitted from a critique of the arguments used by the opposing side. After all, arguably, in the call for the renewal of moral theology lines were being drawn up between revisionists who saw change as the answer and conservatives who called for continuity yet also a deepening of understanding. Indeed, some of the other views, the “popular presentations” (p.69) and “ill-formed” (p.79) opinions to which Father Woodall alludes could either have been given to the reader with precise reference or been dealt with more thoroughly, and surely most successfully, by Fr Woodall himself. In that way the reader would be able to appreciate the genuine difficulty and struggle some found in accepting the teaching, even if their reasoning was in some sense misguided.

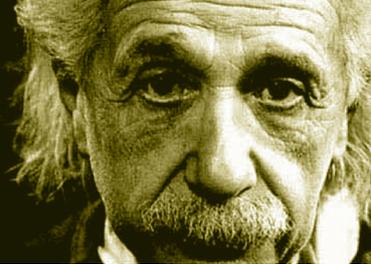
Whereas Fr Woodall helpfully makes some additional distinctions in his reflection on n.14 subsection 4 (see his Foreword p.7) to clarify the Pope's line of argument, his introduction to n.14 could be clearer (p.93). The Pope makes an important distinction between “regulating the number of children... *already begun*” (my italics) especially through the illicit means of direct abortion (n.14.1), then sterilisation (n.14.2), then methods

that impede procreation (n.14.3). Fr Woodall begins his reflection of n.14 by focussing on the issue of *avoiding* another child since he says the purpose of the encyclical is to consider contraception and the “new pill” (p.105). Fr Woodall does comprehensively discuss direct abortion, but an interesting point of reflection is this clear distinction between a child who has “already begun” and impeding procreation in the first place, particularly today when arguably many see early abortion as a form of contraception.

Again, Fr Woodall does remind his reader that Pope Paul reflected diligently on the response he was about to give, but he does not seem to allude to the Pope's feelings of anguish and responsibility. Such feelings point to the idea that the encyclical was prophetic not only in the subsequent developments that Fr Woodall mentions (eg assisted procreation). The Pope was pastorally sensitive also to the demands made on married couples. The difficulty modern society has in understanding this teaching whether from cultural blindness, structures of sin, complexities of life or the widespread anti-life mentality mean that in an often hostile world Pope Paul charges married couples themselves to be prophets, to witness to and proclaim life as a gift and a blessing from God.

Undoubtedly Fr Woodall gives a clear and concise perspective on the encyclical and Church teaching on marriage and responsible parenthood. He gives it context not only by discussing the arguments in their historical and cultural setting but also by considering documents of Vatican II and other Church teaching and finally he brings the teaching forward by including reference to the writing of John Paul II.

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Cutting Edge Science and Religion News

CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S HELPFUL VISION OF DARWIN'S THOUGHT

On the 14th September last, the Church of England instituted a project of information about Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary theory, to mark the approaching bicentenary of Darwin's birth in 2009. In a series of new web pages on the Anglican website, Darwin's life and work is commemorated. It is recorded how he was brought up and educated firmly within the religion of the Church of England, but how in his twenties he began to find that faith eroded in his own mind. It was an Anglican clergyman, the professor of botany at Cambridge, who encouraged him to move away from studies for ordination in the Church of England, and to take up botany, and indeed to take up the post of an unpaid naturalist on the HMS Beagle – the research from which ultimately led him to the ideas he formulated on evolution.

An introduction to the new material is provided by the Anglican bishop of Swindon, who writes: "The anniversaries associated with the life, discoveries and writing of Charles Darwin will no doubt prompt many to take a different view. On the one hand, that Darwin's theories on *the origin of species* sounded the death knell for belief in a Creator God. On the other, that accepting a place for evolution in the development of *homo sapiens* is tantamount to atheism and flies in the face of Scripture. Such extreme and opposing voices are loud and hard to ignore. However, those using this site will find here a more balanced assessment of the role Charles Darwin has played in the conversation between the Church and the Academy."

A particularly prominent section of the new website is the long essay by Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, the Church of England's Director of Mission and Public Affairs, entitled 'Good religion needs good science.' He expounds on Darwin's painstaking scientific progress, emphasising that "nothing in [the] scientific method contradicts Christian teaching." He moves towards

making a crucial distinction in stating that: "Humanity has acquired the capacity to reflect, to imagine, and to reason from what is known to what is not yet known. Some animals may have these features in a very rudimentary form, but the human capacity is so much greater as to be effectively unique. It is our capacity to imagine other people as more than bodies, but as persons, which marks us out." He doesn't quite manage the unfashionable affirmation of the spiritual soul or mind in the image of the transcendent creator, which idea can complete the vision of man as having a privileged place in creation.

Brown concludes: "Charles Darwin: 200 years from your birth, the Church of England owes you an apology for misunderstanding you and, by getting our first reaction wrong, encouraging others to misunderstand you still. We try to practise the old virtues of 'faith seeking understanding' and hope that makes some amends. But the struggle for your reputation is not over yet, and the problem is not just your religious opponents but those who falsely claim you in support of their own interests. Good religion needs to work constructively with good science – and I dare to suggest that the opposite may be true as well."

The new webpages can be seen at www.cofe.anglican.org/darwin.

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE ON EVOLUTION

The very same week, the Catholic Church announced it was preparing for an international meeting in Rome in March 2009 on 'Biological Evolution: Facts and Theories.' The conference is subtitled 'A critical appraisal, 150 years after *The Origin of Species*,' with regard to Charles Darwin's seminal work on biological evolution, published in November 1859. The conference will take place at the Gregorian, the Jesuit university in Rome, and is co-organised by the University of Notre Dame, a Catholic university in Indiana, under the patronage of the Vatican dicastery, the Pontifical Council for Culture. The

purpose of the meeting is described on the conference website: "within the complex and multifaceted issue of the Science/Faith relationship, this event focuses on the possibility of reconciling in the same philosophical position the 'Creation' and 'Evolution' thinking, without first pretending to be a scientific theory or secondly being affirmed as a dogma."

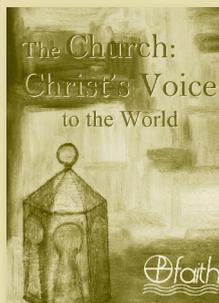
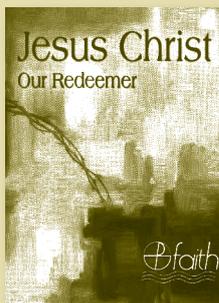
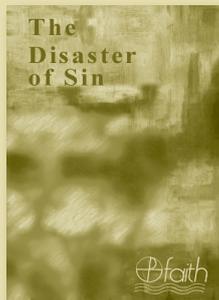
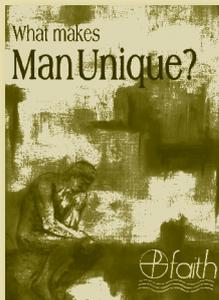
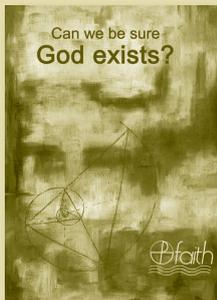
By all accounts, the President of the Council for Culture, Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi gave a very robust introduction at the conference's announcement at the Vatican Press Office on the 16th September. The *National Catholic Reporter* described him glowingly as 'The Church's great interlocutor with secular culture,' and quoted him as saying, "I want to affirm, as an *a priori*, the compatibility of the theory of evolution with the message of the Bible and the Church's theology." It went on to report:

"Ravasi pointed out that Charles Darwin had never been condemned by the church, nor was his *Origin of Species* ever placed on the index of prohibited books. Ravasi brushed aside a question about whether the Catholic Church should posthumously apologise to Darwin, as a senior British prelate has suggested the Church of England might do" (see <http://ncrcafe.org/node/2122>).

The same page of the NCR website provides *YouTube* videos of this Vatican Press Conference, complete with subtitles! In his wide-ranging address, Archbishop Ravasi insisted that the conference planned was to promote an increased understanding between scientists and theologians: he used an image of those working 'at the frontier' on either side being given a better view of the other side.

The *Faith Movement* intends to have some representation at the conference. Full details of the conference, including the presentation programme and online registration, can be found at: www.evolution-rome2009.net.

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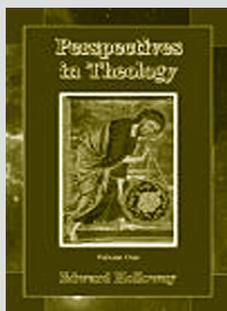
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Faith Movement offers a perspective upon the unity of the cosmos by which we can show clearly the transcendent existence of God and the essential distinction between matter and spirit. We offer a vision of God as the true Environment of men in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), and of his unfolding purpose in the relationship of word and grace through the prophets which is brought to its true head in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, Lord of Creation, centre of history and fulfilment of our humanity. Our redemption through the death and resurrection of the Lord, following the tragedy of original sin, is also thereby seen in its crucial and central focus. Our life in his Holy Spirit through the Church and the Sacraments and the necessity of an infallible Magisterium likewise flow naturally from this presentation of Christ and his work through the ages.

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



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