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The Catholic View of Matter: Towards a New Synthesis	2
<i>Editorial</i>	
The Universe in a Grain of Dust	8
<i>Peter Hodgson</i>	
Catholic Tradition and the Creator of All	14
<i>Peter Kwasniewski</i>	
Marriage Vows: What Relevance Today?	27
<i>Petroc Willey</i>	
The Truth Will Set You Free	32
<i>"Preparing cohabiting couples for marriage" – Fr John Boyle</i>	
Precious Time	36
<i>Delia Smith</i>	
A Mother's Diary	37
<i>Fiorella Nash</i>	
Letters	38
<i>To the Editor</i>	
Comment on the Comments	44
<i>William Oddie</i>	
Sunday by Sunday	46
<i>Our regular guide to the Word of God in the Sunday Liturgy</i>	
Book Reviews	49
<i>Sr Jordan James is inspired by some everyday reflections which foster a Catholic culture; Cyprian Blamires applauds a lawyer's defence of the bodily resurrection of Christ; Peter Hodgson is both convinced and alarmed by a distinguished scientist's analysis of the devastating effects of climate change.</i>	
Notes From Across The Atlantic	53
<i>A survey of religious and public life in America by Richard Neuhaus</i>	
Cutting Edge	55
<i>A leading geneticist discerns a Mind behind intelligible matter</i>	
Faith Online	56
<i>Highlighting Catholic resources on the World Wide Web</i>	

Plus OTHER ANGLES from Moira Shea p.12 and Ronald Knox p.22 and Joanna Bogle p.24

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The Catholic View of Matter: Towards a New Synthesis

"You have ordered all things according to measure and number and weight... How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything have been preserved if were not called into being by You?" (Wisdom, 11.20 & 25)

"The gulf between the Church's theology of matter, which is more or less explicit in the Scriptures and in the mystics, and the philosophical tools she currently has at her disposal for deploying that vision in the light of modern science remains a great handicap to the evangelization of the modern world. A new synthesis on this level would do much to bridge the credibility gap between reason and faith in the twenty-first century."

The Underlying Issue: How Much is Matter, How Much is Mind?

An editorial article dealing with the subject of 'matter' may at first sight seem far removed from the pressing concerns of the Church today. And yet we all know that the dominant philosophy of our times is that of 'materialism'. This means more than just a worldly, acquisitive outlook. It includes the rejection of any spiritual dimension to human nature; in fact, in terms of philosophy proper, it entails the rejection of the notion of "natures" as such, dismissing any idea of objective meaning, purpose and values embedded in the structure of things. All existence ultimately reduces to randomly shuffling material energies with no other aim than survival for its own sake.

It has been this effective denial of transcendence in Western philosophy since the so called 'Enlightenment' which has led to our current cultural crisis and to the sustained decline of Christianity in the West. So many of the issues that trouble us now—how to uphold the enduring certainty of doctrine, which can yet be developed and deepened over time; the transcendence and the immanence of God; the absolute value and dignity of human life from conception to death; the debate between science and religion—all revolve at heart around this key question which concerns both Man and the Universe: how much is matter and how much is mind? Or to put it another way: what is relative and what is absolute? It turns out, then, that what we think of 'matter' matters far more than we may think.

Of course this crisis did not come about suddenly, nor without a certain cumulative logic to the error. We would argue that it was remotely and unwittingly rooted in the metaphysical real distinction which the ancients and the medievals made between 'prime matter' and 'substantial form'. We must ask the untrained reader to be a little patient with us here as we explore the root of the question on a philosophical level. After all we have been promising to do so for some time. And in any case, issues in philosophy are not just of academic interest or of interest only to academics. How we interpret the material world and its relationship to mind or spirit will shape the fundamental categories through which we identify ourselves and interpret our lives. The answers we give—or even the presumptions we make—translate directly into practical consequences, many of them very far reaching indeed.

The Scriptural Vision of Matter

Catholicism is *par excellence* the religion of the Incarnation. It's guiding principle and its over arching aim is the communion of all humanity with the Blessed Trinity through God the Son who adopted human nature into the closest possible union with himself. In the theology we share and promote through this magazine, not only is human nature made for union with God, it is uniquely perfected and fulfilled through the Incarnation and the sacramental/Eucharistic economy that derives from it. And insofar as the human body derives from the physical fabric of the earth, we can also say that the whole material Cosmos, attains its final glory in Christ, and that it was intended to do so from the very outset of creation. The universe was made for Christ, not the other way around.

Such a perspective is in essence the vision of Christ and creation outlined by St. Paul in his great epistles when he wrote that “all things cohere together in unity in Christ” (Colossians 1: 15-18) and that Christ is the completion of the plan laid out by the Father “before the foundation of the world”, such that “all things are brought to their head in Christ” (Ephesians 1:1-7). It is perhaps easy to forget how radical and revolutionary this vision of the material world really is. It confers the highest dignity on the human body and indeed on the whole of the material world. Matter is the matrix of salvation, the vector of grace. It is the means of God’s intimacy with his mortal creatures, the cause of his greatest humility and therefore of his most perfect manifestation of majesty.

The Pagan Traditions of East and West

The great religions and philosophies of Asia are very different in their view of the physical world. They effectively merge the problems of matter and of sin, attributing suffering to a primal ‘fall’ by which the peace and unity of eternal Spirit was shattered into the divided and limited world of material existence. Every material thing therefore carries some shadow of scattered spirit and every spiritual entity is imprisoned by its surrounding materiality. The goal of life, in this world view, is to escape from the corrupting illusions of matter and recover primal bliss. Such an account of reality is hard to reconcile with any objective study of matter or with upholding the dignity of the human body. It also leads inevitably to pantheism as everything in existence is viewed as a fragment of Godhead which is seeking to return to Itself.

The Ancient Greek stream of thought, upon which the Western tradition is largely founded, also struggled to grant any positive place to matter in the ultimate scheme of things. They likewise viewed the human body as a burden upon the spirit, hence the amazement of St. Paul’s listeners at the Areopagos in Athens when he mentioned the resurrection of the body. However, they did not ascribe evil to matter as such. Rather, their various schools tended to see mind and matter as two infinitely contrary poles of existence: perfect and absolute Being at one pole, and absolute ‘non-Being’—the emptiness of pure potential—at the other. In our view, this ‘bi-polar’ account of being has, in some ways, remained an unresolved tension in Western philosophy ever since.

Greek Thought: Pros and Cons for a Christian Synthesis

Nonetheless, the most positive aspect of Greek thought is that they did recognise in the things of nature around them an inbuilt intelligibility and purposefulness. They saw that things have a certain inner ‘logic’ of their own, independently of the human mind. The question they wrestled with, therefore, was how exactly the organising

principle of Mind—*Logos*—impinged upon the seemingly infinite possibilities of mundane existence to give them actual shape and dynamism. They also asked how these identities (that which makes an ‘entity’ what it is) come and go in an ever changing world? What mechanisms and relationships drive the creative interactions that are evident in nature, and which also have an apparent logic of their own? In short they wondered how the imprint of Mind works upon and within the flow of material events.

The neo-Platonic school, which all but dominated the late antiquity into which the Church was born, thought of the mundane world of limited entities as reflections of Light from Absolute Mind or Logos as it is refracted onto the sea of endless possibility. The lower forms of existence have a lesser degree of intelligibility because they are further from the Logos itself and closer to the void of non-Being. So creation was seen as a mingling of Being and Nothing, of the Logos projecting itself into Void.

The Intellectual Journey of St. Augustine

In the *Confessions* of St. Augustine we can read the fascinating and instructive record of a brilliant young mind as he made the intellectual and spiritual journey out of the Eastern dualism of the Manichees, through neo-Platonic metaphysics and finally into the Catholic faith. In Book VII he compares his pagan reflections with what he found in the Scriptures, especially in the prologue of St. John’s Gospel. He found there the corrective to neo-Platonic pantheistic emanationism in the knowledge that the transcendent Logos created all things freely and simply *ex nihilo*, not by diffusing himself into the surrounding darkness of ‘not-Being’. He found that there is nothing truly evil or alien to God in creation. He discovered that evil comes from the distortion of spirit, from creatures who refuse to love in the likeness of their Creator.

He recognised with joy that God has made us for Himself and we are restless until we rest in Him and that this communion with Godhead is to be one of flesh as well as spirit, for matter too is good. And so, “the Word was made flesh in order that thy wisdom, by which thou didst create all things, might become milk for our infancy” in the Eucharist (BkVII c18). In such a perspective it finally made sense to him that God Incarnate should die and rise again in the flesh in order to heal us of our sins and gather our own flesh and blood into eternal union with Himself in the final resurrection. Drawing on the earlier Fathers of the Church, Augustine outlined a great synthesis of dogmatic, moral and spiritual theology, coupled with profound psychological insight. But he was a busy pastor and he left no comprehensive philosophy of the material order with which to correct the secular schools in detail. The beginning of that task fell to the medievals.

Aristotle and the Scholastic Synthesis

St. Thomas Aquinas found in Aristotle's metaphysical system a more useful model of created reality than that of Plato. In Aristotle's thinking a thing has its own specific identity rather than being a vague emanation of Godhead. Everything has its own 'form' that defines its nature or species, making it the sort of thing it is within the universe. The 'form' is really the '*idea*' of a thing, its blueprint or universal pattern. Indeed the word Aristotle uses for 'form' is '*eidos*'. This formal idea, which is a universal and immaterial principle, is made concrete in the individual instance when 'prime matter'—which in itself is nothing other than infinite potential—is taken up into actuality by being enveloped in that particular form. One cannot avoid hearing an echo of the 'two infinities' of pagan antiquity in this amalgam of abstract actuality and empty potentiality from which arise all substantial realities, especially as Aristotle maintains a 'real distinction'—objective not just notional—between 'matter' and 'form'.

Aristotle's philosophy was undoubtedly the best available approximation to reality for its time, and proved highly successful as the handmaid of theology, especially the dogmatic and moral theology of the Church, for many centuries. It has the supreme advantage of upholding an ordered and meaningful account of the world, which is nonetheless flexible and relational and truly accessible to the human mind. It is perhaps more subtle and dynamic than it might sometimes appear, especially as he sometimes uses the word '*enetelechy*' to indicate 'form', a term which means 'that which organises for a purpose' (from the Greek *telos*). The mind principle in nature not only organises but energises towards an end perfection.

Weaknesses in the System

However the limitation of Aristotle's system, especially in its epistemological development by Scholasticism, is that it cannot relate the forms to each other. The forms are, at the end of the day, static and inflexible. All variability and change is founded upon the 'underlying matter' which somewhat paradoxically remains in itself completely unchanged because it is pure potential, passive and without properties. All tangible properties of an entity are attributed to the form, and yet the form, being pure actuality, cannot itself be subject to change. And so a further real distinction is introduced between 'substantial' and 'accidental'—meaning incidental—forms.

The true 'substance' of something therefore becomes a sort of soul in the machine, beyond and behind anything that ordinary perception would regard as reality. For example, when we consider an oak tree growing in a field, Aristotelianism would tell us that its leaves and acorns, being ephemeral, are not part of its substantial

definition. Strictly speaking, anything we can see and touch, including the material properties of extension and mass, are accidents too. We believe that there is a vitally important truth in the notion of "substance" or "nature", but if the Aristotelian model as it stands is pushed to its unintended conclusion, when we try to grasp reality we are left holding a collection of incidental properties (accidents) inhering in a metaphysical alloy made up from abstraction (form) and non-entity (prime matter).

In fairness, this always was a theory in search of higher synthesis. Aristotle himself, his Arabic interpreters and the different scholastic schools have always struggled to adjust and harmonise the system with the facts of experience. In an age that had no detailed scientific knowledge of how the material world is put together it was the best attempt to wrestle with the broad structure of reality. Nonetheless we cannot avoid the impression that the whole framework of thought has been left behind by the development of contemporary science.

For example, in Scholastic terms the colour properties of something are due to accidental forms: 'redness' or 'blueness' etc. These are thought to intervene on a substance as metaphysical presets or optional extras. But we now know that colour arises from the interaction of molecular structures with the wavelengths of light. And even more importantly, Aristotle and much traditional Catholic metaphysics would account for substantial change—an animal's body decaying into earth, for example, and then the earth being incorporated into the flowers that spring from it—by the successive swapping of abstract forms across unchanged prime matter. We know so much more about the atomic structure of matter and its chemical processes that it has long since been clear that scholastic philosophy of matter and form needs a radical rethink in the light of modern science.

Modernity and The Rejection of Metaphysics

The failure to meet this need has led to the rejection of metaphysics altogether among most scientists for whom the word stands for untestable and fantastic speculation. Following the thought of Immanuel Kant—who said that all we can ever know is the stream of impressions that strike our senses, which we interpret through the projected contours of our own consciousness—most reductionist philosophers of science reject any organising principle, any imprint of mind, in matter at all.

Kant did not actually say that objective natures do not exist, just that we cannot ever know that thing 'in itself', but modern empiricists do indeed say that matter is all and matter is ultimately meaningless (cf. Dawkins' latest book, *The God Delusion*). On the other hand it is not uncommon to come across people trained in the

Scholastic tradition who dismiss all science because it deals with only with the 'accidental' order, or—showing more of a debt to Kant than to Aquinas—because we cannot access 'real' reality through theories about mere matter. For them the world of ideas is wholly independent of empirical discovery and scientific progress. The rapid rise of secular materialism and the corresponding retreat of religious philosophy into abstract idealism is the outcome of the unresolved tension between the two infinities of Greek thought: unknowable matter and immaterial formalities. Both these opposing mentalities are lost on either side of a deep philosophical rift that desperately needs bridging.

Towards a New Synthesis

Edward Holloway attempted to bridge this gap by working out a new metaphysics that updates and realigns the *philosophia perennis* of Catholic tradition without losing the essential truth behind the idea of intrinsically intelligible 'natures' in reality, which lay behind the Greek ideas of form and substance. In answer to Kant and the empiricists he maintained that there is no such thing as raw phenomena with no 'noumenal' (objectively meaningful) frame of reference:

"A bird, for example, is a complex of basic energies, molecules, proteins, chemical and biological systems etc. But for all that it is still a bird, a definite entity with a unique place in its environment. Often this unity of meaning is simply presumed, so instinctive is its recognition to our minds and so it is overlooked in the modern world. Yet this was the essential truth of the Greek insight about the 'form. We know from analogy with our own creative work and the machines we build that there must be an 'idea' behind anything that works together as a unity. That idea is the blueprint which gives something not only its identity but also its intended function in relation to the mind that made it". (*Perspectives in Philosophy*, vol 3)

In short, material things could not be intelligible to our minds unless they were already related to a principle of Intelligence. The whole material order bears the inescapable imprint of mind. Holloway was fond of using the analogy of the Boeing 747 to illustrate the point. On one level, a Boeing 747 is no more than a collection of bits and pieces. What makes them into 'an aeroplane' is the unity-idea which inter-relates the parts as a whole and also relates the whole thing as a function to the mind and culture of modern humans. And yet he did not accept the Aristotelian account of the 'substantial form':

"Man does not put an objective idea, a 'form' into the existential which is the Boeing 747. The form, the principle of meaning, suffuses the entire mechanism.

As objective it is in the mind of man. *In the last analysis it is a man thinking and willing.* So it is with creation by God... There is neither being nor intelligibility apart from the foregoing reality of the Ultimate Existential, God." (*Perspectives in Philosophy*, vol 3)

Updating Metaphysics in the Light of New Physics

There is truth to the Greek notion of an objective "idea" to a thing which makes a thing more than the mere sum of its parts, and it does have a universal reference, but it is not abstract and unchanging or separate from its material properties. Rather the form or type of a thing is defined through the pattern or configuration of those parts as a fact and a function within the universal equation of interlocking energy patterns that constitute the unfolding universe.

Just as the 'idea' of a machine ultimately means "a man thinking and willing"—and therefore enacting—so the form of anything in nature is ultimately God a relationship to the creative Mind of God within the total relativities of creation. That last clause is important, for we do not mean that God maintains things in being in an arbitrary, piecemeal or 'occasionalist' way. God knows each one of us directly and intimately, yet he also knows us through our parents by whom we are brought into being. He loves us personally and totally, and yet his loving is always through Christ and the redemptive relationships that constitute the Church. So also God knows and wills every material creation within the network of causality which is the universe, set out as a plan to be fulfilled in Christ.

Holloway updates the idea of substance/nature defined through universal form, prime matter and accidental properties by synthesising them all into a single integrated concept of 'relative substance'. This is simply the existential fact of an entity set within, defined and produced by meaningful and dynamic energy patterns. Variation and variability within specific limits are already part of its definition. So there is no need for 'substance' and 'accidents' to be metaphysically distinct on this model. The colour properties of a mineral, for example, arise from the atomic and molecular structure of the substance itself as they interact with other material energies such as light and heat. A range of variability is written into the material substance.

Rethinking Forms in a Dynamic and Relational Universe

Neither is there any need for the forms to be unchangeable. No abstract idea of 'rabbithood', for example, is needed to define a given species of 'rabbit'. All that is needed is its genetic configuration, together with the whole fabric of relationships that set out its place and set its limits within the network of living things. The recent unravelling of the human genome has dramatically

confirmed this point. It seems that we do not possess vastly more chemical triggers along the sequence of our DNA than any other life form. It is the way they work together as a unit that makes us physically unique and indeed any species specific. DNA in turn consists of just four chemical bases arranged in varying combinations. It is already a synthesis of meaning and purpose, a unity in complexity, which builds into the higher syntheses of form and function which we call living organisms. As noted in our *Cutting Edge* column, the Head of the Human Genome Project has just published *The Language of God*, supporting most of these insights.

The Concept of Substance in an Age of Relativity

We also have the Periodic Table which describes how the elements, each with radically different properties, are built from mathematically incremental formulations of identical protons, neutrons and electrons. The properties do not come from intervening 'forms' but from the unique 'formulae' of more basic patterns.

We also know more about the laws upon which even the subatomic packages are built. Scientists have even synthesised artificial elements with very useful properties because we understand how these patterns work. So at whatever level we look, we find organised unity framed in relation to other levels of unity in vast network of mutual causality in an unfolding series of being and becoming.

Are we saying, then, that relative substance is no more than the atomic structure or the genetic code? Not entirely. These configurations are only part of the 'formula' of a material thing in its totality. The full form of a substantial entity includes everything that defines its place and its purpose in nature—from the quantum relationships that shape its subatomic particles up to and including its final purposes in God's plan, or a substance defines all its relativities, and only God can know those to the absolute degree. We are saying that substance is not determined by something abstract and immaterial, nor is it formed out of a 'matter' that is unintelligible in itself.

Realigning 'Act' and 'Potential' in a Christian Perspective

By collapsing both the metaphysical 'form' and 'prime matter' into a single insight, Holloway abolishes the age old tension which came from trying to picture reality as the intersection of two infinitely opposed poles of being in mutual limitation: pure actuality and pure potentiality. Surely only God is Pure Act? Any attempt to maintain metaphysical 'forms' or 'ideas' which have unlimited abstract actuality must eventually tend towards philosophical Idealism and ultimately pantheism. For what else could they be but scattered particles or shadows of godhead? And similarly, any hint of an infinite Void of non-

Being is the uncomfortable remnant of paganism which has no place in our Christian thinking.

We can now see that it is the nature of created things to be both actual and potential *from the same principle*. Created being is 'actual' because, whilst being distinct from God, it is contingent upon God and exists in simple relation to the Divine Being. In its very being it bears the imprint, the distant echo of Absolute Being. There is no other source of existence, no corresponding infinity of empty possibility. A created things remains 'potential', provisional, unfinished and interdependent in its basic definition, simply because it is not-God. It exists distinctly from the Absolute but in necessary dependence upon Him and upon other being in the community of mutual causality, which is in fact the basis of the serial relationships of being and becoming which we know as time and history.

It is very interesting that St. Augustine actually came to this same essential insight during the process of his conversion from the radical dualism of Manicheism:

"And I viewed all the other things that are beneath thee, and I realized that they are neither wholly real nor wholly unreal. They are real in so far as they come from thee; but they are unreal in so far as they are not what thou art." (*Confessions* Bk VII c8)

By so jettisoning any principle of intrinsic unintelligibility, or positive non-being, from the make-up of physical things we can show all the more easily that this whole complex of intelligible forms and functions makes no sense unless it is related to a single, absolute, transcendent Intellect, that is, God. A thing is what it is because God thinks and wills it through his one creative act of knowing and willing the entire structure and developmental plan of the cosmos, the Unity Law of Control and Direction.

Knowledge Through Insight, Not Abstraction

We can also answer Kant more easily about the 'knowability' of reality. If the substantial form of a thing is not abstract but its existential configuration within the universe under the Mind of God, then the human brain, which is formed through that same network of meaningful relationships, can instinctively grasp things as concrete unities—not just as an inchoate stream of sense impressions—and also what sort or what kind of thing something is. Animals routinely make this kind of recognition in relationship to their own survival.

When we speak of the "brain" here we are using a kind of short hand, for the brain is the literal and metaphorical nerve centre of the animal consciousness. But it is really

the whole body with all its senses that exists in organic relationship of natural 'knowing' and interaction with its environment. Since the human soul transcends matter/energy in the image and likeness of the Mind of God, so the human intellect will naturally and immediately enter this relationship, grasping the significance of the objects of experience not only as they exist 'for me' but also as realities independent of our minds.

So we *can* grasp 'the thing in itself' in basic objectivity. As children attain to reason they become capable of recognising things in relationship to other things according to the meanings and functions of their respective natures. However, given what we have said about the relative nature of substance, our grasp of reality will always be capable of further insight and development. We are always deepening our perspective on substantial forms through empirical experience, which is why the scientific, and indeed the philosophical enterprise is natural to us.

Ongoing Development

We are by no means at the end of the road in unravelling the secrets of matter, nor therefore of progress in metaphysics. But we are at last in a position to banish the 'two infinities' and lay out the details of a more truly Christian philosophy in which all created existence is good and immediately dependent upon the Creator. Professor Kwasniewski's article later in this issue powerfully highlights this emphasis of the Catholic tradition.

The fundamental distinction which marks all of creation is between matter and mind, and the principle that both distinguishes and relates the two can be expressed as '*Matter is that which is controlled and directed, Mind is*

that which controls and directs'. This thought has many far reaching implications and on careful reflection appears to open many doors in both philosophy and theology. They cannot be explored any further here without trying our readers' patience beyond endurance. But one important thought does bring us back to the vision of St. Paul with which we began.

Man Known and Willed Unto God in Christ

In the case of Man, the material potential that is the human body can only take place through the living actuality of the spiritual soul. And so in this instance, the 'form' of the body is really distinct from the matter it informs. Distinct yet not designed to be separated from it. Man is made for life with God, and only Christ can grant this to us. He is the model on which Man is designed and therefore the Master Key to the meaning of Creation.

This is the end to which our realigned perspective on matter may carry us. For matter has a vocation. From the beginning of time it has been destined to form the Body of Christ: both his personal body born of the Virgin Mary and his wider sacramental Body formed through the Church from his brothers and sisters as they are sanctified and the exalted in body as well as in spirit to the Glory of the Father.

The gulf between the Church's theology of matter, which is more or less explicit in the Scriptures and in the mystics, and the philosophical tools she currently has at her disposal for deploying that vision in the light of modern science remains a great handicap in the evangelization of the modern world. A new synthesis on this level would do much to bridge the credibility gap between reason and faith in the twenty-first century.

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

EDWARD HOLLOWAY

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The Universe in a Grain of Dust

Peter Hodgson

Dr Peter Hodgson is a nuclear physicist and a renowned writer on science and religion. He is a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and President of the Pax Romana Secretariat for Science and Religion. He has recently published: Modern Theology and the New Physics (Ashgate Press).

Here he succinctly outlines the culture-changing journey of scientific discovery which is gradually revealing the universal structure of matter and the interactive unity of the material cosmos.

"The belief that the world is some sort of emanation from God hindered the development of science. Matter is not only essentially good, but it is all made through Christ, thus excluding any other source and with it the belief that the world is a battleground between good and evil forces."

The Wonder of Matter

If we knew all there is to know about a piece of dust, we would understand the universe and all the matter in it. We now know that dust is composed of many types of molecules and that these in turn are made of atoms. The atoms themselves are intricate structures comprising a central nucleus made of neutrons and protons, surrounded by electrons. The protons and neutrons are made of quarks and gluons.

These elementary particles, as they are called, are the constituents of all matter. In various configurations they form water and acids, bacteria and ants, mice and lupins, lions and elephants and finally our own bodies. All is made of dust and will return to dust. These simple building blocks of nature have the potentiality to form all the wonders of nature that surround us. This leads us to ask where it all comes from in the first place, and how it developed into what we see today.

We believe that all matter is created by God, and that He gave matter its properties and potentialities. God "ordered everything by measure, number and weight" (Wisdom, 11.20), and "stretched the measuring line across it" (Job, 38.7). This means that every particle of matter has very definite properties and always behaves in exactly the same way in accord with His design. The techniques of modern physics enable these properties of matter to be measured to high accuracy. The mass of every electron, measured by several different methods, is 9.109381×10^{-31} kilograms, and so on for the other particles. Matter is not fuzzy or indeterminate as often maintained by adherents of the discredited Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics: it has definite and unchanging properties.

The particles interact among themselves according to forces that are also fixed and determined to high accuracy. There are four types of force, the gravitation, the electromagnetic, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. The velocity of light is 2.99792458×10^8 metres per second.

The History of Matter

Matter has not always existed; we know from Revelation that it was created at a definite time in the past. Astronomical studies enable us to trace the development of the universe back to a singularity about 13.8 billion years ago. Scientifically, we cannot go further back, but we cannot say that this was the moment of creation because we cannot eliminate the possibility that it was preceded by an earlier collapse. At the singularity, matter had an enormously high density and temperature. It expanded rapidly, cooling all the time. Studies of the properties of the elementary particles enable us to calculate how the undifferentiated matter rapidly separated out into separate particles subjected to the four forces. When the temperature was low enough the protons and neutrons combined to form helium and other light nuclei. These were blown off into space, and over vast times and distances were gradually drawn together by the gravitational force to form stars. As the stars grew larger, the interiors became hotter, and chains of nuclear reactions

took place that formed the heavier elements carbon, oxygen, iron and about ninety other elements. All these processes can be calculated in detail using the results of measurements in physics laboratories. The dust of which everything is made is stardust.

Millions of years passed, and some of the stars somehow acquired planets that revolved around them. This is unlikely enough, but only very rarely does one of these planets have an orbit that allows it to be in the rather narrow range of temperatures that permits life. If it is too near, it is too hot, and if too far away it is too cold. The chemical constituents of the atmosphere must also satisfy very stringent conditions. Detailed studies show that these conditions, taken together with others, are so restricted that it is likely that our own earth is the only one in the whole universe that can support life.

At first the earth was lifeless, and then gradually, perhaps as a result of lightning strikes, some more complicated molecules were formed in rocky pools. By processes still not understood, these molecules combined together to form other molecules and eventually cells and primitive microorganisms. Studies of fossils in rocks, particularly those of the Cambrian era, have shown that there were small organisms that were able to live and reproduce. They are the ancestors of all living things including ourselves.

The Journey of Scientific Discovery

We have come to know all this by a long journey from the speculations of the ancient Greeks to the present day. Thales first had the idea that there is an intelligible simplicity behind the complexity surrounding us. Democritus suggested that everything is made of tiny unbreakable particles called atoms. The Greeks asked many of the right questions but had no means of finding the answers. Euclid consolidated the foundations of geometry and thus the mathematics that is vital for science. But for all its brilliance, the Greeks failed to develop science and a self-sustaining enterprise.

The breakthrough came from an unexpected source, a small tribe called the Israelites wandering in the desert. They believed in one God, who created the universe and gave it its properties. He looked on what He had made, and saw that it was good (Genesis 1.31). It was an exactly ordered world that depends continually on His creating power. He made it freely, so its order is contingent; He could have made it otherwise. He made the universe in such a way that it is to some extent open to the human mind (Genesis 1.28), and He declared that everything we are able to discover about it should be freely published (Wisdom 11.20). These beliefs are just the ones necessary for science. The Greeks held some of

them, but admixed with many others inimical to science. This is the reason for the failure of science to develop in all the great civilisations of antiquity.

If the world were not good, if we considered it evil, there would be no incentive to study it. If it were not ordered, it would be impossible to build up a body of knowledge that is true for all places and times. If we believed that it is a necessary world so that it could not be otherwise than it is, we might think that we could find out about it by pure thought, as we do for mathematics. As it is contingent, we cannot do this, and so we must make experiments to see how God made it. If we kept our knowledge to ourselves it would be impossible to build up a sophisticated science, that has required the efforts of thousands of men and women for several millennia.

Christianity Encourages the Scientific Endeavour

Science did not spring into being immediately; it required many centuries before these fundamental beliefs permeated the European mind. Furthermore, the material conditions were lacking: a stable society sufficiently developed for there to be people free to spend their time thinking instead of being concerned about the next meal.

The Incarnation of Christ still further prepared the way for the development of science. Matter, the dust of the earth, was deemed worthy to constitute the body of Christ. The Incarnation was a unique event, and so it destroyed the idea of cyclic time that in all ancient cultures hindered the rise of science. Henceforth time is linear, with a beginning and an end, from alpha to omega.

Christians in the early centuries passionately debated the nature of Christ. It eventually became necessary for the Pope to convene Councils of Bishops to define the true faith and exclude the many heretical views that circulated at that time. One of these Councils was held in Nicea in 325 and another in Constantinople in 381, and together they formulated the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that we recite every Sunday.

The Essential Goodness of Matter

It is seldom recognised that this Creed, in addition to defining the essential truths of faith, contains many beliefs necessary for the development of science. First of all there is the affirmation that God created heaven and earth and all that is, the fundamental belief on which all rests. Next it is declared that Christ is the only-begotten Son of the Father. Only Christ is begotten, everything else is made. This excludes pantheism, the belief that the world is some sort of emanation from God, a belief that hindered the development of science in ancient cultures. Christ is the one through whom all things were made so

that matter is not only essentially good, but it is all made through Christ, thus excluding any other source and with it the belief that the world is a battleground between good and evil forces.

As part of His teaching Christ told us that we have a duty to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. This can be done most efficiently by applying the results of science. As soon as this is realised it provides a further incentive for the whole community to support scientific research.

The Middle Ages: A Time of Technological Progress

During the first millennium Christians were just one of many sects, often persecuted and awaiting the second coming of Christ. They had neither the incentive nor the means to undertake scientific studies. But steadily the beliefs essential for the beginning of science were spreading through the whole Christian community. After the fall of the Roman Empire Europe was in chaos, but gradually it recovered, notably through the Benedictines who did all they could to salvage the ancient learning.

In the early Middle Ages there was great technological progress stimulated by the Christian belief that whenever possible manual work should be replaced by machines. Some key inventions, such as the stirrup, the horse collar and the whittle-tree greatly improved agriculture and enabled the heavy soils of northern Europe to be farmed. The land could now support more people and the population increased. In the high Middle Ages universities were founded in many major cities, and learning flourished. The first chancellor of the university of Oxford, Robert Grosseteste, wrote on optics and is regarded as one of the founders of experimental science. Also at Oxford, the Mertonian school of natural philosophers made important contributions to the study of motion. In Paris, John Buridan was thinking about motion in the context of the Christian doctrine of creation.

This is the most fundamental problem in physics and hence in all science. Aristotle had asked how a ball that is thrown continues to move after it has left the thrower's hand. Buridan suggested that at the creation God gave all the particles an impetus that enabled them to keep moving. This was a fundamental insight that later became Newton's first law of motion and was the beginning of modern science. Scientists were spurred on by the belief that every event is linked to its antecedents in a perfectly defined way following general principles, a belief that is ultimately theological.

The Mind of Man Explores the Whole Universe

Throughout the Middle Ages studies of geometry and astronomy flourished in the universities, and many

advances were made that formed the foundation of the developments of the Renaissance. Copernicus revived the idea of some Greeks that the sun is at the centre with the earth revolving around it.

Kepler showed the orbit of the planet Mars is elliptical and not circular as Aristotle had maintained. Galileo studied motions on earth and showed that they follow simple mathematical laws. In particular, a solid body dropped in air falls a distance that is proportional to the square of the time. Finally Newton formulated his three laws of motion and his theory of universal gravitation and showed that it accounted for the celestial motions studied by Kepler and the terrestrial motions studied by Galileo. The Aristotelian distinction between celestial motions and terrestrial motions was broken, and matter was shown to obey the same universal laws.

The success of Newton's work was so impressive that it became the paradigm of all intellectual endeavour. His astronomical calculations were carried on by Laplace, Lagrange, D'Alembert and many others, giving a very accurate understanding of the motions of the moon and the planets. In the nineteenth century many studies showed that energy can take many forms and that these are accurately related to each other.

Thermodynamics was stimulated by the widespread use of steam engines in industrial processes. Electricity and magnetism were studied by Franklin, Faraday, Ampere, Ohm and Volta, and their results unified by Clerk Maxwell. By the end of that century it looked as if physics was nearly complete.

The Birth of Modern Physics

This expectation was rudely shattered by the discovery of radioactivity by Becquerel and of the quantum by Planck. Classical mechanics was completed by Einstein's theory of relativity, and Rutherford showed that atoms consist of a central nucleus surrounded by electrons. The attempts to understand the structure of atoms, particularly by Bohr, were only partially successful but in the nineteen twenties quantum mechanics, due mainly to Born, Heisenberg, Schrodinger and Dirac, provided a way to calculate atomic and nuclear phenomena.

Rutherford and his colleagues studied nuclear reactions, at first using natural sources and later a series of electrostatic accelerators. Chadwick discovered the neutron and the atom was split by Cockcroft and Walton. Bethe showed that the sun gets its heat from a series of nuclear reactions that convert hydrogen into helium. Evanescent particles called mesons with masses between that of the electron and the proton were discovered in the cosmic radiation and Yukawa showed that they are

responsible for the nuclear forces.

Full Circle

In the subsequent years nuclear structure was explored in detail and many new short-lived particles discovered and their properties measured. Following the pioneer work of Bethe, the new knowledge of nuclear reactions was applied to calculate the processes taking place in the first few minutes of the big bang. The researches of scientists has come full circle, as the knowledge of the very small has enabled us to understand the processes taking place over vast distances and times that have ultimately led to the world we know today.

This is how, over the years, we have come to know a little about the dust of the earth. It is difficult to convey the scale of these particles and their interactions. The nuclei at the centre of atoms are quite small, about a million millionth of a centimeter across. If it were possible to line them up across one of the full stops on this page, like beads on a necklace, and then expand the full stop to the size of Europe, there would still be ten thousand in an inch, far too small to be seen except with a powerful

microscope. Some of the nuclear reactions I study take place in a ten thousand million million millionth of a second. Truly dust is wonderful beyond all our imagining.

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All Flesh is Divinised in Christ

On the eve of his Passion, during the Passover meal, the Lord took the bread in his hands - as we heard a short time ago in the Gospel passage - and, having blessed it, he broke it and gave it to his Disciples, saying: "Take this, this is my body". He then took the chalice, gave thanks and passed it to them and they all drank from it. He said: "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many" (Mk 14: 22-24).

The entire history of God with humanity is recapitulated in these words. The past alone is not only referred to and interpreted, but the future is anticipated - the coming of the Kingdom of God into the world. What Jesus says are not simply words. What he says is an event, the central event of the history of the world and of our personal lives During the procession and in adoration we look at the consecrated Host, the most simple type of bread and nourishment, made only of a little flour and water. In this way, it appears as the food of the poor, those to whom the Lord made himself closest in the first place. The prayer with which the Church, during the liturgy of the Mass, consigns this bread to the Lord, qualifies it as fruit of the earth and the work of humans. It involves human labour, the daily work of those who till the soil, sow and harvest [the wheat] and, finally, prepare the bread. However, bread is not purely and simply what we produce, something made by us; it is fruit of the earth and therefore is also gift.

We cannot take credit for the fact that the earth produces fruit; the Creator alone could have made it fertile. And now we too can expand a little on this prayer of the Church, saying: the bread is fruit of heaven and earth together. It implies the synergy of the forces of earth and the gifts from above, that is, of the sun and the rain. And water too, which we need to prepare the bread, cannot be produced by us. In a period in which desertification is spoken of and where we hear time and again the warning that man and beast risk dying of thirst in these waterless regions - in such a period we realize once again how great is the gift of water and of how we are unable to produce it ourselves. And so, looking closely at this little piece of white Host, this bread of the poor, appears to us as a synthesis of creation. Heaven and earth, too, like the activity and spirit of man, cooperate. The synergy of the forces that make the mystery of life and the existence of man possible on our poor planet come to meet us in all of their majestic grandeur.

In this way we begin to understand why the Lord chooses this piece of bread to represent him. Creation, with all of its gifts, aspires above and beyond itself to something even greater. Over and above the synthesis of its own forces, above and beyond the synthesis also of nature and of spirit that, in some way, we detect in the piece of bread, creation is projected towards divinization, toward the holy wedding feast, toward unification with the Creator himself.

Benedict XVI

Homily on the Sacred Body and Blood of the Lord, Thursday, 15 June 2006

OTHER ANGLES

TIME AND ETERNITY

Moira Shea

SIMULTANEITY

If God had a beginning we would ask what caused God to begin, we would seek the ultimate cause of all. But when we understand God to be that ultimate cause we can conclude only that God had no beginning. Nor can we think that God has an end, because what could cause the end of the ultimate cause? It does not follow that God lives in an eternity stretching back forever into the past and forward into the future, because that envisions eternity as ongoing time – and where could that time dimension have come from? Moreover such a view would apply ‘no beginning’ and ‘no ending’ to eternity instead of to God. If, as it seems, the future of this planet depends largely upon what we ourselves decide to do, does God already know how it will be? What can we understand of our Creator's relationship with the ongoing time that we experience?

At the turn of the fourth century after Christ Augustine of Hippo saw God's eternity in terms of “simultaneity” and “total presentness”. Boethius, a century or so later, understood God's eternity as “the perfect possession of interminable life held wholly at once”, and similarly in the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas held that God's knowledge “is measured by eternity, as is also his existence; and eternity, which exists as a simultaneous whole, takes in the whole of time.”¹ But in the sixteenth century Luther saw eternity as “a ‘total simultaneity’ in which all the succession of time is present to the eternal as a timeless moment.”²

Instead of simultaneity understood as an attribute belonging to God, Luther presented simultaneity as an attribute belonging to “all the succession of time.” It then appears as if all the moments, days, years throughout the ages are present to God simultaneously, the whole of world history spread out “*totum simul*” to the view of God above. This appeared to be validated in the seventeenth century by Isaac Newton's theory of time as a separate something existing in its own right.

Professor of theology Thomas F. Torrance notes that it is to the “cross-fertilization of Lutheran

and Newtonian thought that we owe some of the most persistent and deep rooted problems that have come to the surface”, and he urges a re-think.³ The interpretation of “simultaneity” seems to be an area where re-thinking could be helpful, returning the flow of thought to the mainstream from which it had been diverted. In the words of scientist and Anglican theologian Arthur Peacocke, “we must now posit both that God transcends space and time for they owe their being to him, he is their Creator; and that space and time can exist ‘within’ God in such a way that he is not precluded from being present at all points in space and time.”⁴

PRESENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE

God's eternity “must not be understood as Platonic timelessness, but as powerfully living simultaneity with all time.”⁵ In God's all-time-inclusive presence, God is with each one of us at every moment—equally present now with Abraham in Canaan and with Moses on Sinai; with Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem and with Jesus' disciples at Pentecost. Inevitably we read scripture from our perspective so that it appears, for example, as if John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, was predestined to be Baptist and given no choice, but the omnipresent God would know of John's acceptance of this role before John was even conceived. The text: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer 1:5) applies not only to Jeremiah. All times, places and events are united by God's undivided yet dynamic presence. In this perspective time has no reality apart from the physical world, as in Einstein's theory of relativity which led science to regard time as an aspect of the relationship between the universe and the observer. Time may simply be our experience of the irreversible before-and-after succession of events.

We cannot think of God as living for endless ages before creating the universe, because the Creator has never been exclusively “before” anything. It seems truer to say that God is equally before and after creating the universe—Alpha and Omega—and has never been otherwise; never even before the decision to create without being equally, concurrently, after the decision. “Before all and at the end of all, I AM.”⁶

FREE CHOICE

If God is equally in our past and in our future, equally with each one of us now and next week, does this mean that the future already exists? In that the words “future” and “next week” are words of time, in our universe where those words belong the answer must be “no”, the future does not exist insofar as it has no actuality. Yet because scientists now talk of the “non-separability” of events at the deepest level they have probed, it can be said only that in our universe the answer may be “no”. If God, whose loving omnipresence unifies the whole, is equally now with us today and in our tomorrow and our next week, can our future really be said not to be present as an aspect of the universe itself?

Yet I can choose between alternatives that will face me tomorrow, or change my mind about something not yet undertaken. The fact that the omnipresent God sees my final choice and the many mind changes I may have between my today and my tomorrow doesn't deprive me of the choice. Nor does there seem any reason why God, in and through his one creative fiat, could not program, as it were, into the fabric of the universe whatever is needed to take care of disruptive events, while never being without full knowledge of the outcome.

From this it follows that we can each be free to make our own choices; our love-orientated actions contribute to whatever is eventually to be achieved and our self-orientated actions delay, temporarily, the intended outcome – clear evidence that God is Love. But the delay affects the world, not God, because it is we who are caught in the cause-effect sequence we call time. God, everywhere and everywhen, is never other than seeing our right and wrong choices and their place in the whole; never other than originating the universe in such a way as to take into account these choices of ours, yet is unfailingly with each one of us in our present moment as well as transcending the whole of our time.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.” The Jews then said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (Jn 8:56-58)

THE SIMPLICITY OF PERFECTION

As physicists now speak not only of the non-separability of events but also of curving space-time and other mind boggling concepts, and say that questions such as: ‘was there a starting point?’ and ‘does the universe have boundaries in space and time?’ begin to lose their meaning at the frontiers of research, it may be that it is more appropriate to think that that-which-explains-why-there-is-something-and-not-nothing is at the ‘centre’ of existence rather than ‘before’ it: an inexhaustible Power who is everywhere, within and without; at the heart of the universe while also transcending it. Science makes a Creator God more credible, not less.

Human words can never be adequate to express what may be hazily perceived of this Power, but it conforms with the loving, involved, ever-present and all-seeing God of the Bible, the God who has no material body and is not located in any one particular time or place either within the universe or outside it; the God whose knowledge encompasses the whole. Likewise it conforms with the God of mystics throughout the ages, the God described by Meister Eckhart in the fourteenth century as “both ultimate depth and inaccessible height” and by Thomas Merton in the twentieth as “that centre who is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” – a dynamic God of the utmost simplicity, the simplicity of perfection.

It is because of this indivisible omnipresence of God that the Mass is the same one Sacrifice as Calvary, not a repetition of it. In the time-free presence of the risen Christ we are all, whenever and wherever we live, brought into the presence of the offering of his one and only Sacrifice to his Father and ours. But when, as in Luther's mistaken view, simultaneity is understood to be an attribute belonging not to God but to “all the succession of time” then the reality of that Eucharistic presence is inevitably lost.

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, 14, 13.
2. Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (OUP 1969), 34.
3. *ibid.* 40 & 59.
4. Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford 1979), .81.
5. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Collins 1977), 306 & 307.
6. Isaiah 41:4 (Knox)



Catholic Tradition and the Creator of All

Peter A. Kwasniewski

Peter A. Kwasniewski, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at The International Theological Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family in Gaming, Austria, presents a compelling and coherent overview of the Catholic affirmation of God the Creator. He draws on neo-Thomistic philosophy to clarify the debate triggered by Cardinal Schönborn's widely publicised reflections on Catholicism and Evolution. Our editorial – as well as the Cutting Edge column – argues the need for some philosophical development in this approach to the crucial task of defending the full Catholic doctrine of Creation.

"Does not the whole world speak in praise of God? Does not every star in the sky, every tree and flower upon earth. Do not the pearls in the sea, and the jewels in the rocks, and the metals in the mine, and the marbles in the quarry – do not all rich and beautiful substances everywhere witness of Him who made them?"

Catholic Doctrine and Evolution: The Continuing Debate

In a hotly-discussed *New York Times* opinion piece of July 7, 2005, "Finding Design in Nature," Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna stated that the Catholic Church has never endorsed evolutionary theory *tout court*, and could never endorse that strand of neo-Darwinism which sees all living things, including man, as having arisen from the chance interactions of matter functioning according to necessary "natural laws"—albeit, for some, under the benevolent gaze of a non-involved deity. The Cardinal noted that while John Paul II has been cited as a supporter of evolutionary theory, he was careful to distance himself from the philosophical naturalism and materialism that are more or less required to sustain Darwinism.

If the late Pontiff favoured the idea of an evolution of species, it was according to a notion far more limited than the one held by secular scientists. Hence the Cardinal quoted these sharp words of John Paul II: "It is clear that the truth of faith about creation is radically opposed to the theories of materialistic philosophy. These view the cosmos as the result of an evolution of matter reducible to pure chance and necessity." He also quoted a statement to the effect that the refusal to ask questions about a transcendent source of finality in nature amounts to an abdication of intelligence.

Thus, concluded the Cardinal, there are no grounds for rapprochement between the Church's perennial teaching and the non-theistic premises of mainstream evolutionary theory. On the contrary, there is reason to reject the latter as an example of ideology masquerading as scientific objectivity.

The Need for Clarity

This op-ed piece caused a flurry of negative reactions, especially from "scientist-believers" who were upset that their creed of chaotic cosmology mysteriously brooded over by the Spirit had been called into question. One of the first reactions, an article by Cornelia Dean and Laurie Goodstein that appeared on the front page of the *Times* on July 9, sported the title: "Leading Cardinal Redefines Church's View on Evolution." What the Cardinal said was, however, traditional and should have seemed unsurprising in the light of classic Catholic sources. Far from constituting a "redefinition," it was a *modest* restatement of what has always been and will always be the Church's position. Still, the Cardinal's piece was important both in content and in timing, because it helped clarify a point that for many Catholics has become murky.

There are many books and articles that deflate the exaggerated claims of the so-called neo-Darwinian synthesis, but the response typically given by spokesmen of the scientific community is a flood of *ad hominem* sneers. It is easier to thunder "Proven fact!" than to make the effort of taking counter arguments seriously. Notice the current favorite strategy: all anti-evolutionists are painted as Christian biblical "fundamentalists" who insist that the world and all its species (in a post-Linnean sense¹) were created in six days, or that the world is only 6,000 years old. On the

contrary, the strongest critiques of evolutionary doctrine come from Catholic philosophers and scientists who have no difficulty with large-scale timelines or variations within kinds. St. Augustine was already proposing a mechanism called “seminal reasons,” *rationes seminales*, to explain a gradual appearance of species over the span of ages. His account nevertheless emphasizes pre-planned natures and purposes as well as the intimate presence and activity of God in all things—as must any adequate account.

Although much can be done to refute certain evolutionary beliefs by the disciplined use of reasoning and scientific research, believers also have a duty to be clear about the limits that are set “from above.” This is not fideism but reverence for the Lord of reason, the infinite Light of Truth from whom the spark of human intelligence derives.

“Intelligent Design”: Two Different Meanings

It is important to clarify, before proceeding, that a theory of “intelligent design” can be parsed in two different ways. It can mean that a rational account of the universe as a whole and in each of its parts demands the existence of a divine being, intelligent and free, that foreknows or “plans” this universe, and executes its plan such that what it foreknew does come to pass, *whatever* the subordinate means employed to forward this along. The theory can also mean that a divine being intervenes to micromanage or introduce specific designs *into* a world that would otherwise fail to achieve key steps of progress—as if to say: you’ve got a bicycle, but some intelligent intervention is required to turn it into a motorcycle, since this won’t happen automatically; or, you’ve got a light-sensitive spot, but an external operation of considerable dexterity is required to transform this into a functional eye.

The former is the more traditional Thomistic approach, which makes allowances for a diversity of secondary agents that can bring about the primary agent’s designs or purposes. The latter is what people now are referring to as “intelligent design theory” (IDT). Whatever their differences, defenders of both approaches agree on the necessity of there being a creator and ruler of the universe, the objective (i.e., written-into-things) reality of purpose in nature, and the impossibility of evolutionary mechanisms bearing the sort of explanatory weight they are customarily allowed to bear.

Scriptural Foundations

Because of the secular venue chosen for his op-ed, Cardinal Schönborn did not fully exploit an angle that is important when it comes to the Church’s faith: the witness of Sacred Scripture to the discoverability of God’s existence, wisdom, and creative power *through* his works.² The Bible says remarkable things about how much we can and should know about God from

an attentive consideration of the world he has created. First, there are the creation accounts in the first two chapters of Genesis. There is much that can be said about the implicit “natural philosophy” of these chapters, but here I will limit my observation to this. The creation accounts teach us that God, sole author of the world, has left his signature on it precisely in regard to (a) its goodness—the goodness of each thing and the goodness of the totality; (b) its beauty and orderliness; (c) its utility for man; (d) the image of God in man’s soul, owing to its rationality and freedom. Genesis does not, however, reflect philosophically on this signature; by depicting the act of creation and the result—a magnificent paradise well stocked with its birds, fishes, cattle, and so on, not to mention creeping things, a veritable kingdom over which the man and the woman reign in the peace of an integral nature—it simply shows that God’s abundant goodness has been poured out, that his own nature has been “mirrored” somewhat as a mountain is mirrored in a clear lake.

For the careful reader, the creation accounts are saying that however God fashioned the world—we are not made privy to the formation but only to the results and, in a general way, their cosmic purpose of displaying God’s glory—*he*, his generous love, is its single ultimate source. This completely rules out the idea of a random process that might or might not have yielded the cosmos as we have it. On the contrary, God planned in detail the cosmos he wanted; he is an artist who has conceived the work to be executed and who executes it in the most suitable way, in order to lead mankind to union with himself. He is not a Jackson Pollock who “paints” by splattering pigments randomly onto a canvas.

A World Full of Meaning and Purpose

The cosmic perspective of Genesis is shared by many of the Psalms. The ringing assertions of Psalm 148 come to mind: “For he commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed” (Ps. 148:5–6). Again, there is no attempt on the part of the sacred writer to describe, as a scientist would attempt to do, the sequences or processes by which stars or starfish arose in a world aborning; but the Lord did command, and it did happen according to his command, in such a way that boundaries—note the connection with ends: *finis* in Latin, *telos* in Greek, mean “end, bound, terminus”—were firmly fixed. Definite kinds of things came about; the Almighty wanted them so.³

As the Bible underlines, the Almighty is no species-egalitarian; the creation accounts bring man and woman into view as the summit of the visible creation, with everything else placed at their service, and in general,

with lower things being placed at the service of higher ones (plants are given to animals for food, and later, after the flood, animals are given to men for food). But this relationship of “means to end” is itself subtle. Thus, the book of Wisdom seems to regard the visible universe as principally designed to reveal the beauty of God to mankind, and only secondarily to provide for the needs and wants of human life.⁴

A Universe Ruled by Intelligence and Providence

Psalm 19 presents the very skies as preachers of God’s creative lordship: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge” (Ps 19:1–2). *All* things, not just human beings, are subject to divine providence: “He determines the number of the stars, he gives to all of them their names” (Ps 147:4). Psalm 33 bears witness both to the *manner* of the Lord’s working (he acts by intellect and will, preconceiving and executing his designs; cf. Ps 136:5) and to the extent of his work (he is the author of being as being, of the very substance and nature of things). While it does not exclude a lengthy period of time over which God may bring about distinction within his creation, nor many subordinate means through which he may have executed his designs, the doctrine here manifestly excludes pure chance: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. ... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth” (Ps 33:6, 9; cf. Ps. 104:2 and Ps. 95).

Aristotle considered Empedocles to be mistaken in saying that the cycles of weather, of rainfall and evaporation, are purposeless processes that just happen to benefit mankind; it is more reasonable to see their purposefulness (Physics II, ch. 8). It is true that purposefulness is much harder to see in lifeless than in living things, since the element of appetite, of striving for a good as a goal, seems absent from the former, whereas it becomes increasingly important and evident in the latter in proportion to their complexity, their rank in the hierarchy of living forms. Yet Scripture expects us to stand with Aristotle, so to speak, on this matter: “Thou visitest the earth and waterest it, thou greatly enrichest it; the river of God is full of water; thou providest their grain, for so thou hast prepared it. Thou waterest its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. Thou crownest the year with thy bounty” (Ps 65:9–11).

Psalm 104, a poem much quoted in the liturgy, eloquently probes the mystery of creation. Three verses sum up its perspective: “Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the

heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man’s heart. ... O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy creatures” (Ps. 104:14–15, 24).

Everything in the Cosmos Gives Praise to God

Scripture is replete with such expressions of joy and admiration at the works of God’s hands, songs of praise to the Creator who reigns over all and whose handiwork is visible all around—he himself remaining hidden because he is infinite spirit, in all and yet above all.⁵ I should like to draw attention to one other song, from the book of Daniel—the hymn known as the *Benedicite*, where, in a manner that must have inspired the canticles of St. Francis, the whole of creation is called upon to “sing praise to God and exalt him above all forever.”⁶ Now, this *Benedicite* is on the lips of priests and religious (and laity who pray the Divine Office) as often as several times a week, so it cannot be unfamiliar; but is its significance always appreciated?

What is by chance is, *ipso facto*, not intended; and what is not intended is no praise to anyone. Those who assert that God is “creator” and “ruler” of a world that comes about by chance events are in truth denying that God is really the cause of things as they are; and so, this makes the *Benedicite* utterly meaningless. (There would not even be a universe, a single cosmos or world: note how the Latin *universum* means “turned upon one” or “combined into one,” and the Greek *kosmos* refers to the world as something orderly or adorned.) There is no further “spiritual” meaning to this famous hymn. It plainly says that all creatures, being what they are, become a kind of praise-offering to God when man, contemplating God’s wisdom and goodness in them, turns to God in praise. Whatever secondary causes are involved in the temporal unfolding of his eternal plan, God is the primary maker of all these things, and so, as an intelligent and free cause, he knows them, “plans” them (i.e., conceives their plan), and wills them to be just such as he knows them. Whatever other causes are involved are all subject to this foreknown plan, and so they too do not operate by chance but by design.⁷

Contingency Within a Structured World

It is true that nature often makes use of random methods for definite purposes, as with the scattering of seeds into the breeze, or the vast multiplication of insect offspring many of which will not survive. As Aristotle long ago saw, nature does not work in a purely mathematical way, but involves the uncertainties of prime matter, of potentiality and its multiple possibilities.⁸ If there is ample room for what we call chance in the natural world, it is because there is already an intelligible structure of purposes within which unintended intersections can occur. It is because

I am going to the marketplace already that I happen to meet my friend who is also going to the marketplace. We did not intend to meet each other, but we were lucky because our paths crossed. Here, the “luck”—the chance that turns out well—depends on the prior intentionality of both agents. At the level of subordinate, mutable, material causes, then, there is plenty of room for the unintended, though always because there are already definite purposes in play; but from the vantage of the ultimate Cause, who knows and wills all that has being, motion, or life in any way, there is no such thing as chance.

Put differently, whatsoever *really exists*, in whatsoever way it does exist, has and must have God, *ipsum esse per se subsistens*, for its cause—but in a radical way that extends even to its mode of being, its very mutability, its possibility for otherness, interaction, frustration, and fulfillment.⁹ The significance of this is that God remains ever most intimate to a thing in its essence and constitution, yet without depriving it of its individuality and distinctiveness as a creature of such-and-such a sort, indeed *guaranteeing* that it come to be and remain so for the time, or span of life, he apportions for it.

Any Theory of Evolution Entails the Notion of "Good"

As we have seen, what occurs by chance is precisely unintended and purposeless, regardless of whether or not the result happens to be something good (“good luck”) or bad (“bad luck”). The evolutionist holds, in fact, that what we call “good” is simply that which survives or works, and “bad” that which thwarts survival or fails, but such terms must be purely subjective—from the perspective of a subject struggling to survive, a tool striving to be functional. This is, however, a begging of the question. A subject only exists because it is a certain kind of subject that has as its fundamental aim continuing in being and, if possible, reproducing the same kind of being; a tool is only a tool by being purposeful. Thus in the order of intention, the good aimed at (always some perfection of being) preexists the thing aiming at that good, so as to achieve it. If the thing so aiming has no intelligence with which to understand the end, and no freedom with which to direct itself to the end, that is undeniable evidence of a prior intellect and will by which it is aimed at that end.

Thus, to say that God is Creator and Lord if the actual steps by which the world comes to be as it now is are chance results, is to say something empty. This God can, at best, be a passive observer (and so, it turns out, cannot be God—at least not the God whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship). If, in contrast, he is actively involved in what things are doing and why, he is their origin and explanation—in short, their designer, whatever be the tools he employs to get his designs across.

No Place for True "Chance" in a Theistic World View

In a world built up by chance, God would no more be responsible for the success of his “offspring” than a father whose children got fed and dressed because they were lucky enough to find scraps of food and clothing in the neighbors’ trash bins. When a father is said to provide, it is because he works and plans for the good of his family. God is truly provident: he provides; foreknowing, planning, willing, bringing it about.

This is why Jesus says it is his Father who feeds the birds and clothes the flowers (Mt 6:25–34), and why Job says, in response to the bad news about his family and flocks, “the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). And why the Psalmist confesses: “For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13).

In his critique of pagan theology, St. Augustine observes that the denial that God’s providence extends directly to everything that has happened, is happening, or will happen, is to deny the existence of God, period.¹⁰ This position has never been understood to be a form of determinism or necessitarianism, because God causes not only beings but modes of being, and so makes some things to be necessary and others contingent, and of the latter he makes some to be unfree and others free. Yet all this is *within* the sphere of divine governance, not outside of it; and so it does not make any sense to speak as if things can occur without God’s causing them to be.

Denial of Divine Nature

Another passage of Scripture often cited by Catholic philosophers and theologians down through the ages is from the opening chapter of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans:

What can be known about God is plain to them [sinful human beings], because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. (Rom 1:19–21)

The most explicit text in the Bible on the manifestation of divine wisdom in and through the beauty and order of creatures is found in chapter 13 of the Book of Wisdom.¹¹ The teaching of this passage becomes all the more striking when read today against the backdrop of the modern materialistic mind-set and its pseudo-scientific justifications:

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them.

And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him.

For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things? (Wis. 13:1–9)

The Church in Defence of Reason

It is not the Catholic Church that decides, through the personal (and evolving?) views of her Popes, what can and cannot be accepted as consistent with the doctrine of God as creator and governor of the universe; it is, on the one hand, the plain witness of what we accept as the revealed word of God, and, on the other hand, the conclusions that human reasoning based on well-interpreted experience bring home to us about the world we see around us.

Looking back on the scriptural texts gathered above, particularly the verses from Wisdom 13, what should we conclude? First, it is revealed that, for those who make suitable efforts, God's existence, wisdom, love, creative power, can be glimpsed in what he has made—in the works of his hand. This is a confession of confidence in reason and of the intelligibility of creation that is a central *leitmotif* of all Catholic theology; it is not in the least a matter of "fundamentalism." On the contrary, and ironically (as the Cardinal points out), it is Catholicism that is placed in the curious position of defending reason's ability to understand reality, to understand it as an orderly and beautiful whole that demands a transcendent source of beauty and order not only for its coming into being but for the continued existence of each and every part so long as it has being.¹²

Great Teachers of the Christian Faith

We find this to be the teaching of all the great theologians. Let us take some especially notable figures: St. Augustine (354–430), St. Bonaventure (1221–1274), his almost exact contemporary St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and nearer to our times, John Henry Newman (1801–1890).

It would be easy to find parallels in almost any Father, Doctor, Pope, or theologian, at least of the preconciliar generation. Augustine wrestles in Book X of the *Confessions* with the question of God's nature:

I put my question ["But what is my God?"] to the earth. It answered, "I am not God," and all things on earth declared the same. I asked the sea and the chasms of the deep and the living things which creep in them, but they answered, "We are not your God. Seek what is above us." ... I spoke to all the things that are about me, and all that can be admitted through the door of the senses, and I said, "Since you are not my God, tell me about him. Tell me something of my God." Clear and loud they answered, "God is he who made us." I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave.

Creation Answers the Seeker of Truth

As Ronald McArthur of Thomas Aquinas College once pointed out, Augustine is here the very model of the honest seeker that the Book of Wisdom admonishes us to be—one who, sensing God's works, understands them to be made, and proceeds to venerate their maker. Later in the same discussion Augustine explains why it is that the "answer" given by all these things does not speak aloud to everyone:

Surely everyone whose senses are not impaired is aware of the universe around him? Why, then, does it not give its same message to us all? The animals, both great and small, are aware of it, but they cannot inquire into its meaning because they are not guided by reason, which can sift the evidence relayed to them by their senses. Man, on the other hand, can question nature. He is able to catch sight of God's invisible nature through his creatures, but his love of these material things is too great....

Nor will the world supply an answer to those who question it, unless they also have the faculties to judge it.... It would be nearer the truth to say that it gives an answer to all, but it is only understood by those who compare the message it gives them through their senses with the truth that is in themselves. For truth says to me, "Your God is not heaven or earth or any kind of bodily thing."

Augustine's insight that the world does give answer to all who are prepared to listen, is developed with Franciscan enthusiasm by St. Bonaventure:

"All creatures, whether they are viewed in terms of their defects or in terms of their perfectibility, in voices most loud and strong, cry out the existence of God whom they need because of their deficiency and from whom they receive their completion. Therefore, in accordance with the greater or lesser degree of fullness which they possess, some cry out the existence of God with a loud voice; others cry out yet louder; while still others make the loudest cry". (*Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*)

What kind of a man is it who can hear these cries? The Seraphic Doctor tells us in his work *The Soul's (or Mind's) Journey into God*, which is about the spiritual ascent from the world around us and the powers within us to the ultimate source above us:

"All creatures in this visible world lead the spirit of the contemplative and wise man into the eternal God. For creatures are shadows, echoes, and pictures of that first, most powerful, most wise, and most perfect Principle, of that eternal Source, Light, Fullness, of that efficient, exemplary and ordering Art".

God "Shines Forth" in the Works of His Intellect

Bonaventure means us to take him at his word: God is really known in and through creatures themselves, in whom his signature is inscribed. It is not as if he is an infinitely remote postulate that answers the abstruse question "Why is there something rather than nothing?"; *he shines forth in the deliberate effects of his intellect*. "It must be said that as the cause shines forth in the effect, and as the wisdom of the artificer is manifested in his work, so God, who is the artificer and cause of the creature, is known through it." (*Commentary on the First Book of the Sentences*)

The Dominican friar from Aquino had similar things to say. In the sources he treasured—Scripture, the Fathers, Aristotle—Aquinas discovered support for the message he himself read in the created world: there is a God, who is pure actuality, possessed of all perfections, essentially and supremely good, infinite, ubiquitous, unchangeable, utterly one—the source of the whole of reality. For Thomas no less than for Bonaventure, creation can be compared to a book, as we see in this comment on Romans 1:19: "God manifested his attributes to men [without special revelation] both by infusing the light of reason within, and by setting forth all around the visible creatures in which, just as in a book, the knowledge of God might be read." (*Commentary on Romans*)

Recognising The Creator's Art

Aquinas concludes a discussion of why it is obvious that nature acts for an end with these words: "Hence it is clear that nature is nothing but a certain kind of art, i.e., the divine art, impressed upon things, by which these things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if the shipbuilder were able to give to timbers that by which they would move themselves to take the form of a ship." (*Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*) This is the strategy we find in the fifth of St. Thomas's celebrated "Five Ways" of proving the existence of God, near the start of the *Summa Theologiae*:

"The fifth way is taken from the governance of things. For we see that things lacking intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end [*propter finem*], which is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end not by chance, but by design [*ex intentione*]. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot tend towards an end unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are ordered to their end—and this we call God".

In a sermon he preached in Naples near the end of his life, Aquinas was even more insistent:

"'God' means the ruler and provider of all things. That man believes in God who believes that everything in this world is governed and provided for by Him. He who would believe that all things come into being by chance does not believe that there is a God. No one is so foolish as to deny that all nature, which operates with a certain definite time and order, is subject to the rule and foresight and orderly arrangement of someone. We see how the sun, the moon, and the stars, and all natural things follow a determined course, which would be impossible if they were merely products of chance. Hence, as is spoken of in the Psalm, he is indeed foolish who does not believe in God: 'The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God' (Ps. 14:1).

Clarity of Vision More Persuasive Than Arguments Alone

Taking up the implied conclusion of Ps. 14:1, namely that the existence of God is above all a matter of the heart and the heart's recognition of the truth, John Henry Newman developed an approach that centered rather on conscience and consciousness than on proofs derived from cosmological or teleological order.

Newman also entertained a good deal of skepticism about the power of arguments or proofs when it came to winning

over unbelievers who did not want to believe, or even to listen; he knew there had to be a basic friendliness to the Gospel, an openness to conviction, before any apologetic could be received into the ear, let alone judged by the mind. Yet Newman was not a Cartesian solipsist who found the root of all certitude inside the soul; on the contrary, he was peculiarly sensitive to the beauty of the natural world and to the message (one thinks again of Augustine) that it speaks to the wakeful heart:

"Does not the whole world speak in praise of God? Does not every star in the sky, every tree and flower upon earth, all that grows, all that endures, the leafy woods, the everlasting mountains, speak of God? Do not the pearls in the sea, and the jewels in the rocks, and the metals in the mine, and the marbles in the quarry—do not all rich and beautiful substances everywhere witness of Him who made them? Are they not His work, His token, His glory? Are they not a portion of a vast natural Temple, the heavens, earth, and sea—a vast Cathedral for the Bishop of our souls, the All-sufficient Priest, who first created all things, and then again, became, by purchase, their Possessor?" (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*)

In *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, Newman proclaims, in line with Wisdom 13 and Romans 1, that God's "traces" can be found in the material world:

"He has traced out many of His attributes upon it, His immensity, His wisdom, His power, His loving-kindness, and His skill; but more than all, its very face is illuminated with the glory and beauty of His eternal excellence. ... This is that quality which, by the law of our nature, is ever able to draw us off ourselves in admiration, which moves our affections, which wins from us a disinterested homage; and it is shed in profusion, in token of its Creator, over the visible world. Leave, then, the prison of your own reasonings, leave the town, the work of man, the haunt of sin; go forth, my brethren, far from the tents of Cedar and the slime of Babylon: with the patriarch go forth to meditate in the field, and from the splendours of the work imagine the unimaginable glory of the Architect".

A Common Voice of Reason and Faith

Such witnesses from the Christian centuries could be multiplied *ad libitum*. There are few questions on which unanimity can be so easily ascertained, and the reasons for that unanimity so readily grasped, as in the case of God's creative, intelligent, designful causality of the whole of reality—from its heights to its depths, from galaxies to subatomic particles. This ultimate causation can be understood on the basis of rational engagement with and contemplation of reality; it may be, but it need

not be, a matter of faith. It was in this sense that Aquinas thought that the best of the philosophers, Aristotle, knew that God was creator.¹³ While Aristotle did not know *how* or *why* God created the world, he glimpsed *that* an infinitely perfect Mind was the source of its orderly being. Whether Aquinas was right or wrong in his interpretation of Aristotle has been a hotly disputed question, but this much is clear: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Newman, and countless others concurred that this world is ordered *by* the good, *to* the good, *for* the good. With varying degrees of clarity, they saw and bore witness to the primacy and causality of the Good, and with it, the reign of Wisdom, for the two can never be dissociated.

Schönborn Simply Restated Catholic Tradition

All in all, as I have shown, Cardinal Schönborn's op-ed is an unassuming restatement of what has been commonly held and taught in the Catholic Church. It expresses a view soundly rooted in Scripture (which, for Catholics, is inspired, inerrant, a more certain foundation than any merely human source of knowledge¹⁴)—a view sustained in all ages by the Church's pastors, including John Paul II in his more substantive remarks about the natural world.

Dr. Kenneth Miller is one among many who worries that the Cardinal's op-ed "may have the effect of convincing Catholics that evolution is something they should reject." To which I can only reply: *Deo gratias*. Catholics with a mind for natural philosophy and the sciences might start to think again for themselves, within their own rich tradition and with the freedom of offering trenchant criticism, rather than yielding to the pressure of a modern scientific culture whose historical antecedents were anything but encouraging toward revealed religion and whose present-day tendencies do not augur a friendly collaboration with Catholicism.

Prejudice and Confusion to be Overcome

The uproar over Schönborn's statements once again shows us what thinkers who wish to be faithful to the Catholic tradition are up against in the contemporary world. Much "science" is sheer assertion, unwarranted or unwarrantable by empirical evidence. We have much more going for us: the formal beauty and intelligible order of the natural world; the testimony of great religious traditions; a nearly unanimous consensus among pre-modern philosophers; and most of all, the clear teaching of divine revelation that the visible world offers man a road to the discovery of God as Creator and Lord. We have no reason to cower before the high priests of scientism, who offer us (in the Cardinal's words) "ideology, not science." It is fitting to conclude with a remarkable passage from *Gaudium et Spes*. It comes at the point where the Council

Fathers are trying to explain the "rightful autonomy" of earthly affairs. They say, of course, that there cannot be any genuine conflict between faith and reason, theology and natural science, but they provide this commentary:

By the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws, and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity. ... For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear his revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. But when God is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible.

- 1 The concept of "species" as used in post-Linnean biology is not what anti-evolutionists mean when they speak of the "species" God created; these are better referred to as "created kinds" within which there can be considerable development or, one might say, micro-evolution. The boundaries of these created kinds do not necessarily correspond to biological "species" in the narrow sense; for instance, in a biblical worldview dogs, wolves, and coyotes would belong to the same "kind," whereas modern biology classifies them as distinct species. Few scientifically-minded anti-evolutionists argue for a fixity of species in the post-Linnean sense of the term. What they question most basically is the grandiose and question-begging extrapolation of the radically more complex from the radically simple, at level after level in the hierarchy of organisms.
- 2 cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 31–34, 286, 299.
- 3 cf. CCC, n. 269.
- 4 cf. CCC, nn. 293–294; Psalm 8 captures both aspects.
- 5 cf. CCC, n. 300.

- 6 cf. Dan. 3:35–68; Ps. 148 is quite similar.
- 7 cf. CCC, nn. 269, 306–308.
- 8 In this sense, God is more interested in the survival of ants and bees than in the survival of this ant or that bee; the species takes precedence over the individual. With human beings it is otherwise because they are persons—rational, free animals, who bear the image of God and have thus an intrinsic dignity or worth.
- 9 It is very important to point out that for Aquinas, not only a thing's existing, but its way of existing, is caused by God. God stands so much beyond being as we know it that he is even beyond necessity; God is being, he is not this or that kind of being. When he freely creates a finite being, he determines whether it will exist in such a way that it must exist (a "necessary being" in his terminology), or in such a way that it need not exist, though it does exist for a time (a "contingent being"). The two types of being that belong to the former class are angels and human souls (inasmuch as our souls are spiritual and hence incorruptible); all other beings in the visible universe belong to the latter class, and can perish into a nothingness as profound as that from which they emerge when called into being by their Creator.
- 10 See *On the City of God*, Book V, chs. 8–10.
- 11 Our Protestant brethren do not recognize this book as inspired Scripture, but the Catholic Church has always accepted it.
- 12 cf. CCC, nn. 299–301.
- 13 Aquinas argued that Aristotle, and to some extent Plato, knew that God was "creator" in the sense of the one who gives being (esse) or ultimate actuality to things, even though neither could know that God's creation had a beginning in time (even as it will have an end at the Second Coming), which is something knowable only through revelation.
- 14 It is surprising how often nowadays one hears Catholics and Protestants contrasted, as if Protestants believe that the Bible is literally the word of God, inspired and without error, whereas Catholics believe that the Bible is a special way that God teaches us, but is only inerrant in regard to doctrines of faith and morals. This is a flawed description of Catholic doctrine, as a perusal of key documents indicates (not only Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus*, of course, but also Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*). The Catholic Church herself teaches that Scripture is written, as a whole and in all its parts, by God as the primary author and by men as true secondary authors, "intelligent instruments" that the Lord employs to convey a message that, rightly understood, is always and only true. Hence there can be no factual error that a secondary author not only thought to be true—for there are plenty of false opinions recorded in the Bible—but also intended, as God's instrument, to communicate as if it were true. Scripture is true as a whole and in all of its parts, precisely according to the meaning that its authors (primary and secondary) intended for these parts. Catholics therefore accept the literal meaning of every passage of the Bible, yet not according to a superficial notion of what "literal" means, but with a nuanced understanding of what the "letter"—i.e., the meaning intended by the author—really is in this or that passage (see CCC, nn. 105–119).

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APOLOGETICS IN THE ATOMIC AGE

Ronald Knox

Extracts from a 1945 Sheed and Ward book 'God and the Atom' written shortly after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima

... we felt certain till now, we could not do without God as the explanation of things, now we are not quite so certain. Brute matter could not enter the lists as a rival explanation; a negative thing, mere potentiality. But this Force lurking at the very root of matter... That was quite a different affair... the atheists of tomorrow may be in the making, and all unconscious of it as they read through two dozen lines of cold print about something that has happened two continents away... it strikes at our sense of cosmic discipline... (p.8)



... I suspect that the atom will be the totem of irreligion tomorrow, as the amoeba was yesterday. Meanwhile we have to reckon not only with the attacks of our enemies, but with the inadequate apologies of faint-hearted friends. There will be an intensified demand for the kind of apologetic which gives up the notion of religious certainty, and attempts to rally the sporting spirit of our compatriots in favour of a balance of probabilities. There will be fresh attempts to dissociate natural theology altogether from our experience of the natural world around us, to concentrate more and more on precarious arguments derived from the exigencies and the instincts of human nature itself. Meanwhile the seminary-trained theologian, with all the wisdom of centuries at his finger-tips, will more than ever find himself talking a strange language, more than ever at cross-purposes with the shibboleths of an Atomic Age. So it will go on, I suppose, till we find someone with enough courage, enough learning, enough public standing to undertake the synthesis; there is a battle royal, long overdue, which still has to be fought out at the level of academic debate. (p.13)



The dominant thought of Europe was certainly Platonist when the Schoolmen took control of it. What the moderns usually forget to give them credit for, is having dragged the world back from Plato to Aristotle (St Thomas) imposed on his generation a synthesis of philosophy and religion.... But it was a ready-made philosophy, not a tradition of research, that had been rescued from the ruins of Greek civilization. It was the

task of St Thomas to make a Christian of Aristotle, not to make a better scientist of him.... (He) became to the generations that followed him a model of what a philosopher should be, and research was left to the alchemists, whom the popular mind obstinately associated with magic.

... It must be confessed that the best intellects of their time gave themselves up to abstract speculation, which shows, as the centuries progress, a law of diminishing returns. It is unfair to criticize the schoolmen for their indifference to the inductive process, unwise to defend them on the ground that they had minds too lofty to be content grovelling among the data of sense....

Our loss is that they couched the eternal verities in language which was then the jargon of the laboratory, and is the jargon of the laboratory no longer.... Our metaphysical principles might be expected to emerge from our study of physics; but the student who should digest a modern manual of physics by way of preparing himself for a course of St Thomas would do worse than waste his labour.... An accident of history has put us all at cross purposes.

Nowhere is this inconvenience more observable than where it is most vital; namely when the schoolmen set out to convince us about the fact of God.... They are meant to fit with our ale-house debates; but for the most of us, to open a book of formal apologetic is to step into a remote cloister. The ladder that is meant to climb to heaven from our front door step climbs it, instead, from a period world which only history recaptures for us. It is definitely pre-Atomic.

... During that astonishing efflorescence or research that would mark the seventeenth century science and metaphysics drew further than ever apart.... Descartes would cut philosophy and theology away from all contact with rude material things.... He made absolute by a decree that has lasted to our own day the divorce between study of the world outside of us and study of the human mind as an instrument. (Curiously for more than a century science made use of its married name and gave itself out to the world as "experimental philosophy"). (pp. 23-27)

What is it that gets us down when we hear, almost in adjacent lecture rooms, the metaphysician talking his native language, and the modern scientist talking his? Whence arises the uneasy suspicion that our minds are being conditioned in two different ways at once; this way when we go to church, that way when we pick up the morning paper?

Truth is one; we cannot doubt the sterling unity of that philosophic system which is so deeply encrusted in the precious fabric of theology; on the other side, can we suspect mere paste-board glitter in the brilliant science of our day, which opens for us so many windows of experience? And yet they never seem to match.

... how (we ask) is it possible for research to burrow deeper and deeper into the very heart of being, and come back to us with no news of having come across, even having go nearer, to the heart of being as philosophers conceive it? We talk about 'form' and 'matter'; distinguish between the mere undifferentiated substratum which underlies any existing thing, and the added principle which makes it what it is. And

here are the physicists, splitting up the molecule into atoms and now picking away at the atom itself, peering down into the deep abyss in which the constituent elements of all chemical things are the same; yet never a word have they to tell us about where 'form' ends and 'matter' begins! We are still more familiar with the distinction between 'substance' and 'accidents'; all the qualities in a thing on which our senses report to us, ending with the termination '-ness'—the blackness, sweetness, thickness, for example, which mark out the perfect coffee, are only accidents which 'inhere' in the substance of the thing in front of us.

Depending as we do on the senses for our information, we could never (we were told) come in contact with the substance itself in our daily experience; that always eluded our senses, but we knew it must be there. Was it possible we asked ourselves that the daring enterprise of the laboratory would do something to clear up the ancient riddle for us? But no; protons, electrons, nuclei are there if we want them, but of substance divorced from its accidents never a word.... (pp.35-36)

Do Not Be Afraid of Progress in Scientific Truth

In educating the new generations, therefore, we must not have any fears about confronting the truth of the faith with the authentic conquests of human knowledge. Science is making very rapid progress today and all too often this is presented as being in contradiction to the affirmations of faith, causing confusion and making the acceptance of the Christian truth more difficult. But Jesus Christ is and remains the Lord of all creation and of all history: "All things were created through him and for him... in him all things hold together" (Col 1: 16, 17). Therefore, if the dialogue between faith and reason is conducted with sincerity and exactness, it offers a possibility of perceiving more effectively and more convincingly the reasonableness of faith in God—not just in any God but in that God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ —, and likewise of showing that every authentic human aspiration is fulfilled in Jesus Christ himself. Dear young people of Rome, press forward, therefore, with trust and courage on the way of the search for the truth. And you, dear priests and educators, do not hesitate to promote a true and proper "pastoral care of the mind"—and more widely, of the person - that takes young peoples' questions seriously, both existential questions and those that arise from comparison with the forms of rationality widespread today, in order to help them find valid and pertinent Christian answers, and lastly, to make their own that decisive response which is Christ the Lord.



**Extract from Address of Benedict XVI
to the participants at the Ecclesial
Convention of the Diocese of Rome
Basilica of Saint John Lateran, Monday,
5 June 2006**

JUSTICE AND CHRIST IN THE CONGO

Joanna Bogle

CAFOD has recently produced a *Campaign Service*. It begins with some formal words by someone called a "leader":

In this service we bring before God our concern for those adversely affected by unjust mining practices....

I support CAFOD's campaign about mining, of which more in a moment. But I suspect I am not alone in being non-plussed by the platitudes presented in this Campaign Service. It follows the general format for the first part of the rite of Mass: hymn, act of penitence, reading, Creed. There is, however, only one passing mention of Jesus Christ. There is no Sign of the Cross at the start of proceedings. The Creed is said to be "adapted from an *Affirmation of Faith of the Pacific Women's Consultation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*." It runs thus:

*We believe that creation is a gift of God,
An expression of our creator's goodness.
We believe that we are a part of this creation,
Called to be good stewards of God's earth.
We believe that the resources of our land...*

There is a lot more in the same vein. Is any young Catholic, forced to listen to this turgid sloganising, going to take the Church seriously or hear the voice of Christ? And the hymn is even sillier—claiming to be "from Nicaraguan oral tradition"

*The angels cannot change/ a world of hurt and pain/
into a world of love/ of justice and of peace./ The task
is mine to do/ to set it really free. /Oh, help me to obey;
/help me to do your will.*

It seems to say—in so far as it says anything at all—that God and his angels are redundant and that our real task is purely one of practical political action. The "Campaign Prayer" with which the 'rite' closes, asks God to "Save us from the desire to control what is not ours, and the impulse to possess what is there to share."

And this is precisely the point. The liturgy of the Church is not ours. To twist it to our own purposes is wrong. It's not clear whether or not CAFOD wants this "Campaign Service" to be used as a format for Mass, but that is

the style in which it has been designed. The team which produced it is very clearly trying to possess what is really given to be shared – the liturgy of the Church and the act of common worship. The idea here seems to be to turn it into a series of political slogans.

All this is the more irritating because the cause that CAFOD claims to be embracing—impoverished miners in Africa and elsewhere—is by no means an unworthy one.

At a recent meeting of Catholic women, a speaker from CAFOD told us about mining companies in Congo polluting water and destroying the local environment. We thought about miners struggling in African heat in conditions of real danger, facing injury and death, receiving unjust recompense for the jewelry that decks out Britain's teenagers, and we wanted to help. We were invited to write messages on a strips of gold paper, forming a symbolic chain.

The tragically ill-named Democratic Republic of Congo is rich in minerals but has been engulfed in a grisly civil war for years. The government provides nothing in the way of electricity supplies, water pumps or road networks for the majority of its people, let alone schooling or a health service. Villagers in rural areas have been caught up in the war initiated by rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda—essentially an extension of the tribal war between Hutu and Tutsi. This is a desperately poor country. But literacy and medical care arrived with Christian missionaries in the 19th century and today the Church is a vital part of people's lives.

I am aware of much good work being done by a major international charity—not CAFOD as it happens—through which vitally necessary educational materials are funded by Catholics in richer countries who will never visit Congo but desperately want to help. The schools in Congo run by the Church used to ask for a modest fee from families, but the bishops abolished this last year because most parents cannot manage to pay anything at all. Books in Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo, Tshiluba and French (the official language) are now being provided, thanks to the generosity of Catholics in richer nations who simply responded to appeals in their churches and schools. The books, which teach

the Faith as well as being a literacy resource, are being distributed by the Divine Word Missionaries and will, for many of the children they reach, be a most cherished and valued possession, treated with care and respect in a way unimaginable by youngsters in our well-stocked European classrooms.

What, then, of the wider issues of social justice and political reform? On the golden paper I was given by the CAFOD speaker, I wrote "Cut African corruption" and was later confirmed in my stance when I read on CAFOD's website that "much of the wealth from the mines is smuggled out of the country" and the rest tends to go to "army, militia, and other elites". I do want to be part of the campaign to change this.

But if mining policies change—CAFOD says we should ask that Anglo-Gold Ashanti Ltd shares information with local people, reveals its financial dealings, develops a "sustainable programme for working with artisanal miners"—will life for most Congolese actually get better? And, assuming that schools, hospitals, and care for the poor will still be needed and that Christ's call to serve the poor will still apply—will the dreary liturgy I have just described – with its complete absence of any reference to Jesus Christ as the centre of all human history, dying for us all on the Cross, feeding our souls with his Sacraments, calling us to a life of grace—inspire people here in Britain to help? The Church is—or should be—something utterly inspiring, thrilling in its call, confident in its transforming power, God's love in action. It really won't work to reduce it to a series of platitudes set out in vaguely political language.

One of the staggering facts of Catholic life is and always has been the heroic sacrifices of young men and women who leave home, security, and family to take the Gospel to distant places and to help to the poor. It is, quite literally, awesome. It is the way of love, and history has shown that it is the way—there are unfortunately no shortcuts—to spread the Gospel. Those who remain in comfort in pleasant places must give generously to help and must support all good works with our prayers, sacrifices, and sense of solidarity. But this is not a middle-class "feel good" thing in which we can smugly ask God to "bless us with wisdom to care for our Earth" (yes, that's part of the CAFOD service) or

a political thing, in which we refer to "*the Holy Spirit, our agitator and guide*" (yes, that's in the service too). It is real Christian work, rooted in faith in a transcendent God, and it won't be inspired by re-inventing our Faith as a set of political or social initiatives.

Campaigning about mining is not without value, but spreading the Gospel is at the core of our Faith, and if we want to obey Christ's command and take his message to the nations, care for one another, live generously, and deserve a final reward with Him, we have to offer him something a lot better than a "Campaign Service" by way of worship, and lift our own hearts with something a lot more Godly than a slogan-style Creed which says "there is a rhythm to God's creation/when we ignore the beat/ we damage the earth." And, for goodness' sake, liturgy must mean more than placing "a gold paper link on the altar to form a chain—a symbol of oppression" and lighting a candle "a symbol of hope".

Although the collapse of Communism meant the death of a certain type of Liberation Theology, its dreary slogans live on—and undermine efforts for social justice that could be inspired by a larger and more thrilling vision, which might then actually result in some practical good. Real corruption and injustice in Africa demands real and spiritually-inspired action. Our Faith is capable of bringing about great changes, of being the breaking-point of the great waves of history. Africa needs just this in its most desperate places. It probably doesn't need paper-chains with slogans on, and it most certainly doesn't need smug bogus liturgies designed to reduce prayer to clichés.



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Return to Faithfulness

The Spanish Bishops have just published a "pastoral instruction," entitled *"Theology and secularization in Spain, forty years after the end of Vatican Council II"*. The document was planned in conjunction with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and has been three years in the making, which would imply the involvement of the then Cardinal Ratzinger.

ON THE MISUSE OF VATICAN II

They are not few who, in the shadow of a nonexistent Council, in terms of both letter and spirit, have sown agitation and disquiet in the hearts of many of the faithful.



ON THE ERRONEOUS DISTINCTION BETWEEN "THE JESUS OF HISTORY AND CHRIST OF FAITH"

At the root of these theories there is often found a rupture between the historicity of Jesus and the profession of the Church's faith: the historical evidence on Jesus Christ provided by the evangelists is considered to be scarce. From this perspective, the Gospels are studied exclusively as a testimony of faith in Jesus, and are thought to say nothing or very little about Jesus himself, so that they need to be reinterpreted. (28)



ON UPHOLDING KEY TRUTHS OF THE FAITH

When doubts and errors are spread about the Church's faith in the coming of the Lord in glory at the end of time (the parousia), about the resurrection of the body, about the particular and final judgment, about purgatory, about the real possibility of eternal condemnation (hell) or eternal beatitude (paradise), this has a negative effect on the Christian life of all those who are still pilgrims on this earth, because one then remains "in ignorance about those who have died" and falls into the sadness of those who have no hope (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Silence over these truths of our faith, in the area of preaching and catechesis, is a cause of disorientation among the faithful who experience in their own lives the consequences of the division between what is believed and what is celebrated. (41)



ON FALSE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SHORTAGE OF VOCATIONS

The lack of clarity with respect to the ordained ministry in the Church is not extraneous to the vocational crisis of recent years. In some cases there even seems to be the intention to provoke a "vocational desert" in order to produce changes within the Church's internal structure. (45)

ON "DISASTROUS DISOBEDIENCE"

Conceiving of the consecrated life as a "critical presence" within the Church presupposes an ecclesiological reductionism. When hierarchical communion is lived in dialectic terms, with the opposition of the "official or hierarchical Church" to the "Church as the people of God," one passes in practice from affinity with the Church to antagonism against it. It is then that the "time of the prophets" is invoked, and the attitudes of dissent, which so seriously fragment ecclesial communion, are passed off as "prophetic denunciations." The consequences of these arguments are disastrous for the entire Christian people, and, in particular, for consecrated men and women. (47)



ON DISSENTING GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

Groups "whose common characteristic is dissent" present an implacable clash between the hierarchy and the people (in English, the expression often used is "the institutional Church"). The hierarchy, identified with the bishops, is presented with fairly negative traits: it is a source of "imposition," "condemnation," and "exclusion." In comparison, the "people" with which these groups identify is presented with the opposite traits: it is "liberated," "pluralistic," and "open." This way of presenting the Church implies an explicit invitation to break away from the hierarchy and to construct, in practice, a "parallel Church." (50)



ON DEFENDING HUMAN LIFE

We cannot call into doubt the fact that, from the moment of conception, there exists a real and authentic human life, distinct from that of the parents, for which reason interrupting its natural development constitutes an extremely serious attack against life itself. [...] It is contrary to the Church's teaching to maintain that until the implantation of the fertilized egg one cannot speak of "human life," thus establishing a rupture in the order of human dignity between the embryo and what is defined, erroneously, as a "pre-embryo." (64)



Marriage Vows: What Relevance Today?

Petroc Willey

Dr Petroc Willey, editor of The Sower and Deputy Director of the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham, considers why the notion of permanent vows has become so unpopular in modern Britain and why, nevertheless, the notion of permanent commitment has an enduring value.

"A vow is not equivalent to a prediction. When a man marries, he is not predicting that he will be living with his wife in ten years time. His vow is a guarantee of his commitment."

What Difference Does A "Vow" Make

We live at a time when the taking of lifelong marriage vows is increasingly regarded as unnecessary, as a mere optional extra, while alternative forms of domestic arrangements are given official sanction, arrangements which enable couples to live together as 'partners' under some mutilated or truncated 'form' of traditional vows.¹ At the same time, however, a sizable proportion of those wishing to live together stubbornly continue to do so within this traditional context of vows that bind for life. It is an opportune moment to look again at the significance of vowing, both for one's self-understanding and for one's understanding of the other to whom such vows are made.

This examination of vows may also assist us in appreciating some of the fundamental differences that there are between couples who live together in a vowed state and couples who enter trial marriages² and free unions. Such unions may *turn out* to be permanent; but the important point is that there is no explicit vow of permanence on the part of the couple.³

The Avoidance of Marriage Vows

Let us begin by looking at possible reasons for the absence of vowing. Underlying a disinclination to take vows may be partly a general sense that things are impermanent, are in flux. An atmosphere of instability prevails in which any thought of permanent commitments appears misplaced. This general sense can be fuelled by a popular picture of progress, which encourages one to let go of the past as out-dated and quickly surpassed. Whereas the predominant 'myth' of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was that of evolution⁴, today the overarching 'story', in so far as post-modernism allows one, is that of revolution, and especially *scientific revolution*.

We are being faced not just with gradual shifts in our understanding of ourselves and the world; people experience not just a sense of rapid alteration but of a continual breaking with the past, a perpetual overturning of the established order of things. The world of the children is no longer the same as that of their parents: it often happens that parents have to ask their children, or grandchildren, to explain the technology and social vocabulary of the present.

A general atmosphere of change need not affect peoples' views on the value of making permanent commitments. But it is also understandable that anything which is not 'moving with the times' tends to be labelled as 'old-fashioned' and 'outmoded'. There is another aspect we may want to consider. Some people do not want to take vows because they do not want to lose their freedom. A particular concept of freedom is being employed here, understood as a matter of not being tied down, as having as many options as possible kept open.⁵ In the sphere of romantic love, the typical expression of this refusal to commit oneself is flirtation. Here a person seems to offer himself, but draws back at the last moment. The gestures of

the flirt suggest that the self is being offered, but nothing comes of it. The mutual self-offering, which lies at the heart of genuine love, is reduced to a game which can never reach a conclusion.

Ironically, this understanding of freedom ends by undermining the very potentialities inherent in the act of choice, for all choice limits us: whenever we choose to do anything, we have rejected everything else. Every act of choice is a selection and an exclusion. Not all of our choices have final and decisive consequences, of course. We can choose to make a pot of tea now and tidy the garden later. We necessarily conduct a good deal of our lives on this level, making choices which only temporarily exclude other possibilities. Still, there are choices which are decisive, which *do* finally exclude. A commitment to faith in God is one of these. Marriage is another. Built into the very nature of these choices is an unchanging commitment, a forsaking of all others.

We can simply refuse to take these larger decisions in order to retain our freedom. We can refuse to think about the weightier matters of choice. But the cost to us is that life then becomes superficial. Dante, in *The Divine Comedy*, his allegory about the human soul, places those who have avoided choice all their life on the edge of hell. They are not *in* hell, because it is not as if they were sinful. They are simply empty. In her commentary on this poem, Dorothy Sayers describes this group as the refusers of life, who can have no final resting place. Dante pictures them running aimlessly, being stung continually by small insects, which represent the thought that, in doing anything definite at all, they are missing out on something else. Even in their indecision they cannot settle⁶.

In addition to this sensitivity to the general atmosphere of impermanence, and the adherence to a concept of freedom understood as a perpetual openness, many people avoid taking marriage vows out of a sense that such vows appear to involve an unrealistic level of commitment. How can a couple know whether they will still want to be together in five years time, or in ten years time? What if one should fall in love with someone else? After all, as the Book of Proverbs pragmatically advises, "Do not boast about tomorrow; for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (27:1). Perhaps vows are a subtle form of boasting, an attempt at an impossible level of self-reliance. "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (Jas 4:14b). A character in Kierkegaard's fictional journal, *Either/Or*, suggests that

"If, instead of promising forever, the parties would say, until Easter, or until May-day comes, there might be some

meaning in what they say; for then they would have said something definite, and also something that they might be able to keep".⁷

Between today and tomorrow all kinds of pressures and problems might arise: who knows whether we have the strength or the inclination to endure such testing? Better not to vow at all. Some, then, doubt whether it is really possible to make a vow of lifelong commitment to another. Such a doubt may be born of personal experience: perhaps their own, or their parents' lives have seen the impact of abandonment or divorce.

Moreover, as life expectancy rises, a 'lifelong commitment' means something increasingly demanding - although even in Christ's time, when life expectancy was much lower, His disciples responded with horror and disbelief at His prohibition on divorce: "If that is the position, it is better not to marry" (Matt.19:10). Alongside the rise in life expectancy, and with this the length of lifelong marriages, there has been a rise in expectations concerning the interpersonal dimension of married life⁸ - resulting in an unfortunate parody of the Lord's saying that, "to whom more is given, more is expected".

The thought, then, might be: are we not asking the impossible?⁹ A vow, after all, has to be possible in order to be valid. We are not obliged to undertake the impossible. If someone were to vow to grow an extra limb, there would be no point in taking such a vow seriously. But surely a lifelong commitment to another person is not an impossibility in this way: one only has to look to the significant number of people who remain married throughout life to see that this is not the case. Perhaps; though the sceptic might still argue that here one is looking not at the impact of vows, but at those couples who have contrived to hold together through a certain level of psychological stability supported by sufficient conditions of external security. Let us allow the sceptic to press his point: can one really do more than *hope* for permanence in marriage?¹⁰

The Persistence of Vowing

Despite these many worries, every year thousands of people continue to make marriage vows, swearing eternal fidelity to each other. As G.K.Chesterton noted, those who ridicule the whole idea of vows often seem to imagine that they are some kind of yoke imposed on reluctant lovers by the devil. But in fact they are a yoke consistently imposed by the lovers themselves. It appears to be of the very nature of love to want to bind itself. Lovers do not want to be free, and the very concept of 'free love', if this means love without commitment, is a contradiction in terms. Vows made before God are not an intrusion into lovers' lives; lovers *want* to swear

an oath on the highest authority as confirmation of the seriousness of their love.¹¹ Vows are very different in kind from the sort of ordinary undertakings we give to do things – “I’ll come to see you tomorrow”, “I’ll write to you”, and so on. There are innumerable instances of this kind of undertaking from which a fairly minor degree of inconvenience exempts us. People normally understand if we do not turn up the next day, or do not write, if they know that something more pressing has appeared on the horizon. We can make and remake our obligations, even some of our more solemn promises. We do not have many commitments to which we feel unshakeably bound. We can express this point by saying that we are in control of our obligations. We do not allow them to control us.

However, there is a small category of undertakings, normally including vows taken before God, which we make and intend as absolutely binding. Once we have made them we have no control over them to re-organise and reshuffle them as it suits us. Marriage vows are one such case. We allow the choice which is made in this act of vowing to be the last word on the subject for us. Marriage vows exercise a self-imposed necessity.¹² Moreover, considerations about possible changes in circumstances in the future are not allowed to count when making marriage vows: “Marriage conditioned on a future event cannot be validly contracted” (Canon 1102.1). The Church is clear that if a couple attach conditions concerning the future to their consent there is no valid marriage.

Reasons for Making Vows

Why, then, should we make marriage vows? And what is it that such vows do for us as persons? What is their significance? I would like to make two suggestions regarding the importance of vows. First, they enable us to form a stable identity; secondly, they orientate us towards goodness and, in particular, towards the unique dignity and goodness of another person.

1. Vows and personal identity

In order to understand how vows help us to form stable identities, let us look more closely at what a vow is. A vow is not equivalent to a prediction. When a man marries, he is not *predicting* that he will be living with his wife in ten years time. His vow is a *guarantee* of his commitment. There are two important differences between a prediction and a guarantee. First, guarantees involve personal commitment with reference to the future. Secondly, they imply power over the future.

In the case of predictions, neither of these points is likely to hold. Take the case of a weather-forecaster: he might predict that it will rain tomorrow, and he might be correct. But this does not mean that he has some kind of personal

interest in seeing it rain; nor does it mean that he can make it rain. To make a marriage vow, then, is to say that in the future I will stand in a certain relation to another person. I commit myself to *being a certain type of person*, one who will be faithful to another. “The man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place”.¹³

Now to be able to do this, to surrender the whole of my life to another, I have to believe that in some sense I am the kind of creature who can ‘comprehend’ my future and take power over it. I have to be able to stand over my life as a whole, and say to the other person in the light of all of it, “I do”. It is the whole self which is offered, not just the present self, but the self extended in time. The moral challenge is, “Will I keep that vow?” Or we could put it like this: “Will I *remain the same person*, the person that I was when I made that vow?” There is nothing to stop me, of course, being a faithful husband one day and a Don Juan the next, just as theoretically I could change career every week. But if I lived like that I would rapidly cease to regard myself as a single person - I would be constantly becoming someone else. It takes self-discipline to be only one person.¹⁴

The challenge, which making marriage vows enables us to take up, is to become integrated, ‘pure in heart’ - that is, single-hearted. In fallen Adam, the Church teaches that we have lost our natural integration and each of us is scattered. In his novel, *Steppenwolf*, Hermann Hesse described the human condition thus: “the souls that dwell in man are not two, nor five, but countless in number”. Only Christ, the new Adam, was ever fully One. And it is by living in Christ that we are healed and made one-self again. We become a particular person by, and through, the choices that we make. Our identities are formed through our decisions. Our choices not only have an effect on the world, they have a lasting effect on us as well. John Paul II wrote of this in *Familiaris Consortio*: “Man, who has been called to live God’s wise and loving design in a responsible manner, is an historical being who day by day *builds himself up through his many free choices*” (34, *my emphasis*). Under God, that is, and with the assistance of his grace, each one of us is a self-maker¹⁵. For good or bad we are creating a self that is either moving towards the harmony of a single self under God, or towards disharmony. Dag Hammarskjöld writes in this way about our choices,

“At every moment you choose yourself. But do you choose your *self*? Body and soul contain a thousand possibilities out of which you can build many I’s. But only in one of them is there a congruence between the elector and the elected. Only one - which you will never find until you have excluded all those superficial and fleeting possibilities of being and doing with which

you toy, out of curiosity or wonder or greed, and which hinder you from casting anchor in the experience of the mystery of life, and the consciousness of the talent entrusted to you which is your I".¹⁶

Making a vow, then, provides a basic orientation to one's life, around which a stable identity may be formed.

2. Vows and the unique value of the person

We make choices in response to goodness, which we perceive in people and in created things. The goodness of what lies outside of us draws the will. We love and make vows in response to a perceived good. Writing about our desire for God, Augustine says,

"If the poet can say, 'Everyone is drawn by his delight', not by necessity but by delight, not by compulsion but by sheer pleasure, then how much more must we say that a man is drawn by Christ, when he delights in truth, in blessedness, in holiness and in eternal life, all of which mean Christ?... Show me a lover and he will understand what I am saying."¹⁷

Making a vow involves a *steading of the will* in its response to goodness. That is its value. It involves narrowing the opportunities we have for seeking and doing good so that we can respond more fully to a specific good. It means turning our attention onto something specific. The idea of *attention* is important here. When one pays attention, one narrows one's gaze upon a single object, excluding everything else. One holds oneself alert in relation to that object - not towards things in general, but towards that specific object. Attention is always concerned with the particular and the unique.

Kierkegaard's analysis of the figure of Don Juan is especially interesting in this regard. Don Juan, he says, with his constant series of 'beginnings' of relationships is looking for the *common* in all his women. To him every girl is an ordinary girl, "every love affair an everyday story". It is not the unique for which he is looking, not individuality, but the common. "He desires, and this desire acts seductively. To that extent he seduces. He enjoys the satisfaction of desire; as soon as he has enjoyed it, he seeks a new object, and so on endlessly".¹⁸ Don Juan may find a new object, but it is the 'womanhood' which he loves in each woman, the 'essence' of each woman. Vows, on the other hand, focus our attention so that what is loved is the *unique individual*. These reflections shed light on why marriage should be both lifelong and exclusive.

- Marriage vows should be *for life* because only this commitment of the totality of one's attention, of one's time, can reflect the Christian belief in the unlimited value

of the other person. The worth of the person one marries cannot be measured, and the institution of marriage bears witness to this fact by the absolute commitment it asks each spouse to make to the other. The supra-temporal reality of the person is affirmed by the gift one makes of *the whole of one's time*. If all marriages were only trial marriages, or if vows were made for temporary periods, or with conditions attached, the infinite worth of the person would no longer be affirmed.

- Again, marriage is necessarily *exclusive* in character because only the narrow path of attention leads to life, not restless movement along the broad path. We can only see the value of something fully when we have our gaze focused in an uncluttered way. The French philosopher, Simone Weil, described the state of attention as one of control, not giving orders to do things, so much as stopping us from doing other things.¹⁹ In taking marriage vows a couple are doing something profoundly human. This is how it was "in the beginning" (Matt. 19:8). Moreover they open the couple to being swept up into the work and union of Christ and his Bride.

1. For example, the proportion of religious marriages in England and Wales continues to fall. There were 168,500 civil marriages contracted in 2002, accounting for two-thirds of all marriages. This compares with 1991, when fewer than half of all marriages were solemnized in a civil ceremony. See *Changing Trends in Family Life, CARE Factsheet* January 2002. Download from www.care.org.uk/resource/doscs/res_familytrends.htm
2. The notion of 'trial marriages' would seem to be self-contradictory, since vows belong to the essence of marriage. The apparent attraction of a trial marriage lies in the seeming possibility of experiencing marriage without actually undertaking it. But just as one cannot pretend to eat salmon and experience the taste, or pretend to believe in God and experience the act of faith, so neither can one pretend to make marriage vows and experience marriage.
3. Some 25% of men and women cohabit, although of this group some 60% decide to marry. The breakdown rate of cohabitantes is very high when one considers that around 35% of those who cohabit split up without marrying, and that the proportion of divorces is far higher among those who have previously cohabited than among those who did not do so. See *Changing Trends in Family Life, CARE Factsheet* January 2002. Download from www.care.org.uk/resource/doscs/res_familytrends.htm
4. See Mary Midgley, *Evolution as Religion*
5. One of the characters in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* offers this prudent advice: 'One must always take care not to enter into any relationship in which there is the possibility of many members. For this reason friendship is dangerous, to say nothing of marriage. Husband and wife are indeed said to become one, but this is a very dark and mystic saying. When you are one of several, then you have lost your freedom; you cannot send for your travelling boots whenever you wish, you cannot move aimlessly about in the world. If you have a wife it is difficult; if you have a wife and perhaps a child, it is troublesome; if you have a wife and children, it is impossible'.
6. See *Commentary on The Inferno*, Canto III, Penguin Classics.
7. Princeton University Press 1956 Vol.I, p.292.
8. For a useful critique of this increasingly burdensome emphasis on the interpersonal dimension of married life, see David Matzo, *Sex and Love in the Home*, SCM 2003.
9. 'Sir, it is so far from being natural for a man and woman to live in a state of marriage, that we find all the motives which they have for remaining in that connection, and the restraints which civilised society imposes to prevent separation, are hardly sufficient to keep them together.' (Dr.Samuel Johnson, cited in Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, Everyman Edition Vol.I, p.241).
10. To support the sceptic's view, evidence might be drawn from sociobiology - that is, looking at human society and customs from the standpoint of biology. According to the standard evolutionary view, the study of primate behaviour is particularly relevant for understanding the roots of our own nature. But in fact the evidence we can draw from this is ambiguous. The most popular pattern among primates is the clan or group 'marriage', where a dominant male lives with several females (gorillas are one example of those who adopt this form of life). It has been argued on the basis of primate behaviour that human females will want the support and faithfulness of their males more than the males will be inclined to stick to their females. This has to do with the closer link between the mother and her offspring, a fact which humans share with all mammals: the perpetuation of the genetic line is more dependent on the females' constant care and attention than upon the males'. In evolutionary terms, then, it may not always 'pay' to be monogamous that is, the highest number of offspring may be best guaranteed by some non monogamous arrangement such as group 'marriage'. Moving across the species boundary, then, it is worth noting that many human societies permit the taking of many wives, most of them encouraging this practice by law and custom (see Stephen Clark, *The Nature of the Beast*, OUP 1982, pp.77f and 'Sexual Ontology and Group Marriage', *Philosophy* 58, 1983, pp.215-227). Does any of this show that we are not 'designed' for marriage? Is this kind of comparison with other species which are closest to mankind helpful for understanding human behaviour

and commitments? Such comparisons can surely throw some light on human behaviour, for we are mammals, even though spiritual mammals. It does indicate, I think, that marriage is not 'natural' in the popular sense of easy or problem free. Our instincts could point us in a different direction, and these instincts will be with us if we marry.

At the same time, there is some evidence that we may have a natural pair bonding tendency. Pair bonding may not be the best or only way to serve our genes but then there is no reason why we have to accept the so called 'selfish gene' theory, that we are of value only as gene carriers (the theory popularised by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*. People want to live in pairs for emotional reasons and for personal satisfaction, and want to do so even if there are no children. And we do also have an example of pair bonding among the primates: the gibbon. Clark points out that those who think that we have no pair bonding tendency should note the behaviour of those species who really do not have it e.g. chimps: no social consequences at all follow mating; the males who are present mate with any female in season and then depart to live as they were before. Human beings rarely act like this (see Roger Trigg, *Understanding Social Science*, Blackwell 1985, pp.154-184).

So, while sociobiology does not lead one to inevitably declare that Christian marriage is impossible, the evidence indicates that it is not uncomplicated either. Our natural tendencies are ambiguous. But then the natural is only a starting point for a Christian, not the conclusion. The Christian life as a whole is a supernatural affair, in which God makes possible even what

is impossible for men (cf Matt. 19:26f). And our real nature, transcending the level of any purely biological inheritance, is to imitate the goodness and fidelity of God, as Jesus said (Matt. 5:48; cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1648).

11. See Chesterton's essay: 'A Defence of Rash Vows', in *The Defendant*, J.M.Dent and Sons 1901
12. For the philosophical question as to how the making of a sign can impose a moral obligation see G.E.M.Anscombe, *Collected Philosophical Papers* Vol.3, Blackwell 1981 pp.10-21, 97-103.
13. G.K.Chesterton: 'A Defence of Rash Vows', *The Defendant*, J.M.Dent and Sons 1901, p.33.
14. '...if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally'. (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11)
15. On the self-making nature of choices, see G.Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol.1, Franciscan Herald Press 1983 Ch.2; J.Boyle, 'Freedom, the Human Person and Human Action', in W.E.May (ed), *Principles of Catholic Moral Life*, Franciscan Herald Press 1981; J.Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, OUP 1983 pp.136-144.
16. *Markings*, Faber and Faber 1966 p.38.
17. *Homilies on St.John's Gospel*, 26:4f.
18. *Either/Or*, Princeton University Press 1956, I, p.97.
19. *Lectures on Philosophy*, RKP 1978 p.205.

SONY'S OTHER CODE

By screening *The Da Vinci Code*, has Sony followed its own corporate "Code of Conduct" concerning respect for religious belief? The following is the text of a Press Release from the Communications Office of Opus Dei, Rome, May 17, 2006

Today Sony Pictures lifted its veil of secrecy from *The Da Vinci Code*. The novel's offensive caricatures of Jesus Christ, Christian history, the Catholic Church and Opus Dei have all been retained in the film. Indeed the offensiveness of the caricatures has been magnified by the power of visual imagery.

Moreover, Sony has announced that the film will not include a fiction disclaimer stating that any resemblance to reality is purely coincidental. Catholics, other Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other persons of good will have repeatedly asked Sony to respect religious belief. In so doing, we were not asking for a special favor. Nor have we wished to limit anyone's freedom of expression. From the beginning we have appealed to Sony's own sense of common decency. Unfortunately, this appeal has failed.

In addition, this request for respect is in line with the commitments to society that Sony Corporation has made publicly. The Sony Group "Code of Conduct," approved by the highest authorities of the corporation on May 28, 2003, contains the following:

- **"Recognizing that conduct that is socially acceptable in one culture or region may be viewed differently in another, Personnel (of Sony) are required to give careful consideration to cultural and regional differences in performing their duties" (section 1.3);**
- **"No Personnel may make racial or religious slurs, jokes or any other comments or conduct in the workplace that create a hostile work environment" (section 2.4);**
- **With respect to publicity, Sony commits itself not to engage in false publicity that misleads or slanders others (section 3.4).**

In a recent business publication, a high executive of Sony acknowledged that "its businesses have direct or indirect impact on the societies in which it operates." Another affirmed that "ethics and integrity have to be in the company's DNA". And a third stated that "there can be no prosperity for a company that does not consider the environment and society."

In appealing to Sony in recent months, no one has asked Sony to do any more than live up to its own public commitments. Unfortunately, Sony's actions have not matched its words and have offended the religious beliefs of hundreds of millions of Christians. The end, in this case financial, does not justify the means. It is the aggressor that loses dignity, not the victim.

We do not mean by this to judge the intentions of any individuals. The question is whether this film respects the Sony Group Code of Conduct, or whether that code is yet one more "Fictional Code" in which any resemblance to reality is purely coincidental. As he was 20 centuries ago, Jesus Christ is for many today "a scandal and a folly". But many still receive the gift of faith, and firmly believe that he is the Son of God, the Redeemer of every man and woman, and the source of charity for the world. God can bring good out of bad and the events of recent months will lead many believers to rediscover the depth and beauty of their Christian faith. Soon this regrettable but fleeting episode will be forgotten. Let us hope that its lessons about mutual respect and understanding are not.

Manuel Sánchez Hurtado, Opus Dei Press Office, Rome

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

PREPARING COHABITING COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE

John Boyle

Fr John Boyle, who is Parish Priest of Ashford, Kent and also lectures in Canon Law at St. John's Seminary, Womersley, addresses another tricky modern dilemma that can make faithful priests feel spiritually conflicted and pastorally stretched without clear guidance.

COHABITING NOW THE NORM NOT THE EXCEPTION

In many British Catholic parishes most engaged couples who present themselves for marriage preparation appear to be cohabiting. It is fair to say that most priests would be pleasantly surprised if a couple were to supply different home addresses when the pre-nuptial enquiry form is being filled in. Cohabitation is commonly understood to involve living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. This public state of life contradicts the natural meaning of such a commitment and the covenantal relationship of Christ with the Church. And this relationship, if they are both baptized, is one which they happen to be preparing to enter into sacramentally. The question of how to approach such preparation can be a difficult one.

Canon Law states clearly the right of couples to marry: "All can contract marriage who are not prohibited by law" (Can. 1058). Impediments render one legally incapable of contracting a valid marriage. These impediments can be of divine origin (e.g. being already bound by an existing bond of marriage) or of ecclesiastical origin (e.g. being in sacred orders). In order to contract marriage validly, one who is impeded by ecclesiastical law must obtain a dispensation from the appropriate authority. An impediment of divine law cannot be dispensed. Marriage can be prohibited under certain circumstances.

The universal law of the Church prohibits the marriage of a Catholic to a baptised non-catholic. For such a marriage to be licit, the permission of the local Ordinary must be obtained. Without this permission the marriage would be valid but illicit. A local Ordinary can, in a specific case, forbid a marriage of a Catholic who is one of his subjects or who is actually present in his territory, but he can only do so for a time, for a grave reason and while that reason persists. But no such prohibition could be invalidating since only supreme authority can attach an invalidating clause to a prohibition. (Cf. Can. 1077)

Cohabitation is not amongst the impediments to marriage. Neither is there any prohibition of cohabiting couples from marriage in universal law. Could a local Ordinary prohibit marriages of those who are cohabiting? It would appear not since he only has the authority to make a prohibition for a particular case (i.e. couple). A general prohibition would not be in keeping with the law. In any

event, no such prohibition could be invalidating. So, there is no prohibition upon those who are living together from getting married. Therefore, in and of itself, the fact that a couple are living together is not a sufficient reason for postponing or refusing to celebrate their wedding. However, it is recognised that such couples may be in need of particular formation and preparation in the light of their situation.

MARRIAGE PATTERNS IN GREAT BRITAIN

Census data for 2001 published on the National Statistics website tell us that those with no religion were the most likely to be cohabiting in Great Britain in 2001 (16% amongst 16 to 24 year olds). Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were the least likely to do so. Young Muslim adults were more likely to be married (22%) than young people from any other religious background. Christians and those with no religion were the least likely to be married—3% of 16 to 24 year olds in each group.

Hindus and Sikhs of all age groups are the least likely (10 to 11%) to be divorced, separated or re-married. This compares with 17 per cent of Muslims, 34 per cent of Christians and 43 per cent of those with no religion. The graphs show that the living arrangements of young Christians are broadly in line with those who profess no religion. It seems that about 12½ per cent of young Christians are living with a partner, and about 9 per cent (or 75% of those who are living with a partner, which is the more interesting figure for us) are cohabiting. We need to recognise therefore that most Christians have gone the way of the world in this regard. Our experience as priests confirms that the majority of Catholics are no exception.

Those who profess to be Christian, together with those with no religion, are the least likely to get married. The majority of Christians aged between 16 and 24 who are living with a partner are not married. On the other hand, the majority of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in this age range who are living with a partner are married.

A study in the Office on National Statistics' *Population Trends* bulletin published in 1999 showed that people who cohabit for the first time are up to nine times more likely to split up than married people, and those living

together for the second time are up to six times as likely to separate as those in a second marriage. Marriage is therefore inherently more stable than cohabitation. This further supports having a positive attitude towards a couple which comes to us to move from cohabitation to marriage.

AMERICAN STUDIES

The American Bishops have looked into this question in some detail. In the US it is seen as a problem that needs a response, and priests have been given guidance. In 1999 they published *Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples* (MPCC). The profile of the cohabiting household is broadly similar in America as it is in the UK. The average cohabiting household stays together just over one year and children are part of two-fifths of these households. Men are more often serial or repeat cohabitators, moving from woman to woman, while women tend to cohabit only one time.

The reasons for cohabitation include "seeking to ensure a good future marriage and (belief) that a 'trial marriage' will accomplish this; many are simply living together because it seems more economically feasible or because it has become the social norm... Cohabitation may be in equal parts an alternative to marriage and an attempt to prepare for marriage." (MPCC Part One, 3)

Overall, less than half of cohabiting couples ever marry. The US bishops see those "who choose to marry instead of continuing to cohabit (as) the 'good news' in a culture that is increasingly anti-marriage." As regards the risk of breakdown after marriage, the bishops report:

Those cohabiting couples who move to marriage seem to be the 'best risk' of a high risk group: they have fewer risk factors than those cohabitators who choose not to marry. Even so, they still divorce at a rate 50% higher than couples who have never cohabited. They are a high risk group for divorce and their special risk factors need to be identified and addressed, especially at the time of marriage preparation, if the couples are to build solid marriages. (MPCC Part One, 4)

THE RISK FACTORS (MPCC, Part One, 5)

The US bishops suggest that the very attitudes, issues and patterns that lead a couple to a decision to cohabit often become the predisposing factors to put them at high risk of divorce when they do choose to move from cohabitation to marriage. The cohabitation experience itself creates risk factors, bad habits, that can sabotage the subsequent marriage. These attitudes and patterns can be identified and brought to the couple preparing for marriage for examination, decision-making, skill-building, change. Without creating "self-fulfilling prophecies,"

those preparing cohabiting couples for marriage can help them identify and work with issues around commitment, fidelity, individualism, pressure, appropriate expectations. The Bishops' offer a significant list of "predisposing attitudes and characteristics", which can be seen, along with the whole document on their website.

CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES

The Church speaks of distinct phases in preparation for marriage: remote, proximate and immediate preparation. The first two are supposed to take place within the family and at school, in a manner appropriate to the age and condition concerned. The marriage preparation given by a parish priest or other agency is, in practice, immediate preparation.

In most cases the couple already have a date set for the wedding and time is often short. Priests can often feel they are given an inadequate opportunity to provide effective marriage preparation because it cannot be assumed that the prior phases have been given. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II acknowledged the various factors that might lead a couple into cohabitation. He wrote:

Each of these elements presents the church with arduous pastoral problems.... The pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation. (*Familiaris consortio*, 81)

The US bishops' approach seems difficult to argue with, viz. the avoidance of two extremes: immediately confronting the couple and condemning their behaviour on the one hand, and ignoring the cohabitation aspect of their relationship on the other. There needs to be a "middle way" integrating "general correction with understanding and compassion." (MPCC, Part 2, 1).

Whilst, in the past, some pastors chose to ignore the entire issue of cohabitation because of the awkwardness of dealing with the situation, most it seems (in the US at least) have now abandoned this approach in favour of addressing the cohabitation gently but directly. This is an act of love for the couple in the process of spiritual growth. Once one discovers that a couple are cohabiting, it may not be wise to discuss this issue immediately, but rather it should be flagged up as an issue to be addressed at a subsequent meeting. But it should be discussed earlier rather than later in the marriage preparation process.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Like all marriage preparation, we would hope to create in them a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness (cf. Faith editorial, March /April 2006). We want them to become more aware of marriage as a sacrament and sign of God's love for the Church and, consequently, of the hope that the Church places upon married couples and families to perform the mission which is rightly theirs in the Church and in the world. For cohabiting couples, an added goal would be reflection on their situation, why they decided to cohabit, what has led them to the decision to marry, what particular challenges they might face, how they might be at particular risk of marital disruption.

Should cohabiting couples be encouraged to separate before marriage? Most priests will recognise that to demand that cohabiters separate before marriage is unreasonable. Yet there are ways in which they might be encouraged to do so. Some way needs to be found to help couples see that marriage is not a continuation of the life already begun as a cohabiting couple. As the Catechism says: "Those who are engaged to marry are called to live chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity, and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity". (CCC 2350)

The US bishops suggest that the challenge to separate or to live chastely is more fruitfully posed after the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality has been carefully explained. As the diocese of Peoria's 1997 guidelines put it, after suitable instruction "The priest must ask the couple to consider chaste and separate living and give the couple time to reflect on their decision."

This is a call to conversion, to integral preparation for marriage and to a ceremony free of contradictory signs. Many positive results have been reported by priests who do this. Sometimes couples have returned to their priests, surprised by the new insights they have gained through living separately, giving them new perspectives on their relationships.

In the final analysis we cannot insist on separation. At least we can see the marriage and the preparation for marriage as assisting them in regularising their situation. Only if one seriously doubts that the marriage will be both valid and lawful may one postpone the it and prolong the preparation. Pope John Paul offered sensible guidance to the priest/minister who might have concerns about the couple's preparedness for marriage, particularly the issue of freedom from sin:

The faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed. (FC 68)

It is to be assumed that a couple have the right intention, at least implicitly, and that they are consenting to what the Church intends to do when it celebrates marriage. Pope John Paul warned against setting any further criteria by which to judge a couple's eligibility for marriage:

As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. In the first place, the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; second, the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, with grave harm to Christian communities and new and unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples; one would also fall into the danger of calling into question the sacramental nature of many marriages of brethren separated from full communion with the Catholic Church, thus contradicting ecclesial tradition. (FC 68)

However, where it is clear that those to be married do not intend marriage as the Church's understands it, then refusal might not only be a possibility but a requirement:

However, when in spite of all efforts engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In spite of his reluctance to do so, he has the duty to take note of the situation and to make it clear ... that in these circumstances it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves. (FC 68)

CONCLUSION

The US bishops recognise that additional formation needs to be given to those who prepare couples for marriage so that they can more effectively handle this issue. They encourage priests and others to

"recognize this as a teachable moment. Here is a unique opportunity to help couples understand the Catholic vision of marriage. Here, too, is an opportunity for evangelization. By supporting the couple's plans for the future rather than chastising them for the past, the pastoral minister can draw a couple more deeply into the Church community and the practice of their faith.

Treated with sensitivity and respect, couples can be helped to understand and live the vocation of Christian marriage.” (MPCC, Conclusion, 7)

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul presents a patient approach to this phenomenon and to those who are caught up in it. But above all, he writes,

“there must be a campaign of prevention, by fostering the sense of fidelity in the whole moral and religious training of the young, instructing them concerning the conditions and structures that favour such fidelity,

without which there is no true freedom; they must be helped to reach spiritual maturity and enabled to understand the rich human and supernatural reality of marriage as a sacrament.” (FC 81)

This means we must spread the message. This means we must preach upon it. The advertising media and lobby groups know the power of insisting on a message and presenting it again and again with great persuasion. Smoking has become a stigmatised behaviour by the promotion of an anti-smoking culture. Perhaps pre-marital cohabitation might become less accepted as the norm as younger generations hear the teaching afresh.

THE PATIENT APPROACH TO MARRIAGE PREPARATION

This phenomenon [*of unions without any publicly recognized institutional bond, either civil or religious*], which is becoming ever more frequent, cannot fail to concern pastors of souls, also because it may be based on widely varying factors, the consequences of which may perhaps be containable by suitable action.

Some people consider themselves almost forced into a free union by difficult economic, cultural or religious situations, on the grounds that if they would be exposed to some form of harm, would lose economic advantages, would be discriminated against, etc. In other cases, however, one encounters people who scorn, rebel against or reject society, the institution of the family and the social and political order, or who are solely seeking pleasure. Then there are those who are driven to such situations by extreme ignorance or poverty, sometimes by a conditioning due to situations of real injustice or by a certain psychological immaturity that makes them uncertain or afraid to enter into a stable and definitive union. In some countries traditional customs presume that the true and proper marriage will take place only after a period of cohabitation and the birth of the first child.

Each of these elements presents the church with arduous pastoral problems, by reason of the serious consequences deriving from them, both religious and moral (the loss of the religious sense of marriage seen in the light of

the covenant of God with his people; deprivation of the grace of the sacrament; grave scandal) and also social consequences (the destruction of the concept of the family; the weakening of the sense of fidelity, also toward society; possible psychological damage to the children; the strengthening of selfishness).

The pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation.

But above all there must be a campaign of prevention, by fostering the sense of fidelity in the whole moral and religious training of the young, instructing them concerning the conditions and structures that favor such fidelity, without which there is no true freedom; they must be helped to reach spiritual maturity and enabled to understand the rich human and supernatural reality of marriage as a sacrament.

Pope John Paul II
Familiaris Consortio (81)

PRECIOUS TIME

Delia Smith

The person who truly wants to pray is the person who truly wants to know God more intimately. In the beginning it's probably best to abandon the word prayer altogether. Prayer is something God does. We are merely on the receiving end and since He transcends our world it is a total waste of time even trying to figure out what he may or may not do from a purely human perspective.

This is difficult because, as human beings, we like to be in the know and have a grip on things. One of the greatest writers on prayer, St. John of the Cross – a Doctor of the Church – is quite specific: 'to come to a knowledge you have not you must come by a way you know not'. It's therefore much better and far more liberating to abandon trying to figure it out and simply concentrate on getting on with it and actually doing it.

What, then, must we do? Begin by getting right down to the radical nitty-gritty and quite simply exchange the word prayer for another word: time. It really is starkly simple: if you truly want to know God and experience that close familiarity you were created for then you must give him more of your precious time. Time is not negotiable here and it cannot be evaded.

It's far easier to evade the word prayer because 'it's not my thing' or 'I don't understand it' or 'I'm not into that kind of realm'. But you can't talk your way around time. It's there staring you right in the face and will reveal in the depth of your being what it is you really want. And, if right in those hidden depths it's God you want, then you will quite certainly find the time. Understanding that time is all you need can be quite liberating – no qualifications needed here, just a willingness to become silent and still in the presence of God each day and – as we mentioned last time – 'be taught by God Himself'.

Yes, you will need a massive amount of trust because you will not be in charge of all this and won't know what God is up to. This kind of absolute trust can at first be a rather wobbly affair. Being still and silent within what the unknown author called 'the cloud of unknowing' and not having a clue what's going on needs enormous trust – but this also will be given. The Psalmist in psalm 90 is spot on when he talks of living in the shelter of God under the shade (darkness) or shadow of his wings yet understanding 'my refuge, my stronghold, my God in whom I trust'. Here in the darkness we very gently and slowly begin to perceive something of the unconditional love 'that created us and sustains us' and that we cannot 'live truly and fully until we commit ourselves to Him'.

What was hitherto a notional understanding becomes a full-blown, deadly serious reality. We all start out like Thomas the Twin: however hard we struggle and try, we find it hard to believe in the risen presence of Jesus in our world today. It can only be a notional thing until we can at the deepest spiritual level touch it and then absolutely know it—'my Lord and my God'.

None of this can be acquired by our own efforts, all is pure gift. Our part is to stand back, look at our lives and what we do with our time. When Pharaoh was faced with the God of Moses, wanting to lure the Hebrews out of slavery into the desert, his response was to 'make them work twice as hard so they have no time to listen'. Doesn't that ring all kinds of bells? Are we not slaves too? If our lives are far too busy, pressured and stressful to find real prime time for God, the answer is surely, yes. Where on earth are we going to find time in our overcrowded, busy lives to hike off into the desert every day?

This is the crossover point. This is make-you-mind-up time, where we have to fight for it, work for it and move mountains for it. When you do step back and take a close look, you will find dozens of low-key activities that occupy time: watching a soap or TV for half an hour, going to the gym, reading the paper, talking on the phone, working on a computer. Isn't it strange that doing any of these things, which are all good and part of normal life, aren't actually a big deal. We don't even think about it. Why then should it be such a very big deal to give half an hour to being still and silent in the presence of God? 'He who loses his life, will find it'. So why not just lose a little bit each day? That is all we are required to give to this, the most important relationship we will ever have. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* calls this work. You simply have to work at creating time and God will do the rest.

Why books and articles on prayer (this one included) are so often not very helpful is because the bottom line is you have to do it, know it. Again: 'to come to a knowledge you have not, you must go by a way you know not'. Let's end with more words from this great master and teacher:

O you who were created for union with God himself and whom he is ever attracting to himself, what are you doing with your precious lives, with your time? ... O terrible human blindness. So great a light about you and you do not see it, so clear a voice sounding and you do not hear it. (St. John of the Cross. Spiritual Canticle 39)

A MOTHER'S DIARY.....

..... FIORELLA NASH

My employer used to remark that I had a face like a storybook and was incapable of hiding how I was feeling. Well, I will have to work on my poker face from now on if I am going to survive another mummy and baby sing-along. Not that I actually realised I was attending a nursery rhyme session at the time; I was convinced we were doing baby resuscitation that week. I felt almost as ridiculous as I had done on the previous Sunday morning, when I sat in the porch of the church during Mass to feed my baby and a passing lady offered me fifty pence, thinking I was homeless.

When I realised which way things were going, my look of mortification was so complete that everyone laughed, giving me a few seconds to examine all possible escape routes and find that there really was no way out. I suddenly remembered the sight of my father years ago at a Brownie Guide jamboree he had accompanied me to, sitting red-faced in the audience whilst some beefy Brown Owl with a guitar barked: "Come on now mums and dads, join in after me: On top of spaghetti, all covered with cheese / I lost my poor meatball when somebody sneezed." Stammering my way through a chorus of The wheels on the bus go round and round with Hugh Ambrose on my lap looking distinctly unimpressed, I understood exactly how he had felt. I must be getting old.

"Don't you sing to your baby?" I was asked.

"Oh yes," I promised, feeling like a negligent mother, "but I tend to sing opera and things."

"Oh how marvellous!" [the health visitor is an opera fan too] "Would you like to give us a demonstration?"

"Erm, no." Anyway, E doesn't entirely approve. He was horrified when he got home the other day and found me rocking Hugh Ambrose to sleep to the tune of Dido's Lament. I am not sure what all the fuss is about; a fair number of nursery rhymes ought to come with parental guidance warnings. They are either cruel [could somebody please tell me what Three Blind Mice is in aid of exactly?] or have dodgy social or political origins, whether it is Jack and Jill who were definitely up to more than drawing water, Goosy goosy gander making snide sideswipes at the Jesuits, Ring a ring o' roses listing the symptoms of bubonic plague or the hokey cokey parodying the Mass. And if anyone thinks I am singing Hugh Ambrose that International Planned Parenthood ditty There was an old lady who lived in a shoe, they've got another thing coming.

However, a musicologist friend insists that singing nursery rhymes is essential to develop children's cognitive skills because of the precise pattern of words and music. Well, if Baa baa black sheep is all that stands between my son and stunted mental development, he shall have it sung to him at every possible opportunity - until I am arrested for inciting racial hatred. ∞

Hugh Ambrose was welcomed into the Church shortly after he turned six weeks. The baptistery at Our Lady and the English Martyrs is quite beautiful and Hugh Ambrose's cries resounded through the neo-Gothic church. A friend made him a baptismal candle with the symbol of Hugh of Lincoln [a swan] and the symbols of the Benedictines and martyrdom for St Ambrose Barlow. A good combination of saints - a bishop who had the guts to stand up to the authorities [his logo ought to be a flying pig] and a Lancastrian martyr.

I had forgotten how beautiful the ceremony is and really did feel proud to be a Catholic as the priest said: This is our faith, this is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it - and I felt glad that I could bring my son into the family of the Church in the presence of those who brought us for baptism once.

Later on, I joked about Hugh's persistent crying to a friend. She observed that it can't be very nice to be placed in the arms of some old man who doesn't smell very nice. I answered that the priest was my uncle [well, E's honorary uncle actually] and that there was nothing wrong with his personal hygiene. It never ceases to amaze me the breathtaking rudeness people think they can indulge in when talking about the Catholic faith and in particular about Catholic priests.

I was jarringly reminded of the difficulties Hugh Ambrose will face, growing up a Catholic in a country where a fundamentalist atheist can get away with claiming that people who bring up their children Catholic are worse than paedophiles. If my own experience is anything to go by, by bringing him up a Catholic I may be condemning him to fights in the playground, bullying in the classroom, being endlessly baited at parties/lectures/social gatherings [always by self-professed open-minded liberals] and to seeing his faith lied about and depicted in wholly negative terms by every possible media outlet.

But then, as my Auntie Joanna pointed out, when he gets to Heaven and Edmund Campion asks him what it was like being an English Catholic, being stitched up on TV debates may pale into insignificance compared with being hanged, drawn and quartered in front of a large crowd. And Edmund Campion may indeed remind him that being claimed for Christ was never going to be a comfortable experience.



a mother's diary

letters to the editor

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THE JULY ISSUE OF FAITH

Dear Father Editor,

I have just finished reading the July Faith magazine, cover to cover. WONDERFUL. Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Fr Augustine Hoey Ob. OSB
St Peters, Meadow Lane
Vauxhall, London

INTELLIGENT DESIGN?

Dear Father Editor,

I was interested to read the article on Intelligent Design (ID) in the 'Cutting Edge' column of the May/June edition. I believe that most people accept that ID is not incompatible with Catholic theology, and it is perhaps for this reason that the criticisms to which it has been subjected from the Catholic community have tended to focus on its alleged weaknesses on scientific and philosophical grounds. I am neither a scientist nor a philosopher but I am not convinced that those criticisms are justified.

The article suggests that the manifest mistake in the whole ID approach is that it is just another "god of the gaps" theory; in other words, it identifies aspects of nature that cannot be explained with our current understanding of the laws of science, and concludes from this that those aspects must therefore be the work of an intelligent agent or creator. However, there is a subtle but crucial difference between ID

and "god of the gaps" theories. ID does not say that we cannot explain something; it says that we can explain it, and then proceeds to do so.

The most famous example of this is the solution it presents to the previously inexplicable existence of specified complexity in natural organisms. We know that only an intelligent agent could be responsible for such structures because only intelligence can beget specified information—or, to put it differently, it is statistically impossible for such information to have originated by chance. In exactly the same way, we know that only an intelligent agent can write a novel. This line of thinking is implicitly recognised in the mainstream scientific community. For example, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence project is predicated on the assumption that a message from deep space containing specified information would be incontrovertible evidence of an intelligent agent. It would be ludicrous to criticise this as an "extraterrestrials of the gaps" approach.

There is only a problem with ID if you have made an *a priori* assumption that no intelligent designer or creator could exist, and I think this illustrates the danger of allowing naturalism to set the parameters of scientific enquiry. As Catholics, if we concede this point - that no scientific theory that includes a non-naturalistic explanation can ever be countenanced, regardless of the evidence - we may as well concede that there can be no scientific basis for the existence of God. We will be giving up on natural theology and, to some extent, the very idea that God can be known through reason alone. Indeed, if we took this approach to its logical conclusion, one could equally well argue that the Faith Movement's Unity Law of Control and Direction is, ultimately, a "god of the gaps" explanation, in

that it seeks to explain the apparent order and purpose of the universe by invoking God. The tragic irony of this approach is that we will be making this concession at precisely the time when science is providing overwhelming evidence for the existence of God in so many of its branches.

I turn now to the suggestion that ID implies a tinkering creator, in opposition to the Faith Movement's understanding of God controlling and directing the universe through his universal law. I think that this may be a false dichotomy. Firstly, ID theorists have gone to great lengths to stress that their work says nothing (and is not intended to say anything) about the nature of the designer, and it seems to me that they are right to leave this to the theologians. Secondly, if the Faith Movement rejects the random, undirected process of evolution through natural selection in favour of God controlling and directing the universe, perhaps the specified complexity identified by ID theorists is simply the clearest manifestation of that control and direction.

ID is not a mistaken reaction to randomness - it is the most effective rebuttal to randomness that theists have so far devised. It complements and reinforces the claim that God can be detected in the apparent order and purpose of the universe. Perhaps this can form the basis of a new synthesis of the Faith Movement's Unity Law and the specified complexity of ID. Now that really would have Mr Dawkins quaking in his boots!

Yours faithfully

Clive Copus
Oldridge Road
Balham, London

EDITORIAL COMMENT

We are indeed grateful to the Intelligent Design movement for highlighting here and elsewhere

the undoubted truth that "only intelligence can beget specified information". This is surely at the heart of their success, and is part of the reason for the resultant disquiet of many materialists. Sadly we think they score a significant own goal—and unwittingly support the thrust of atheistic thought—by applying this crucial insight as a priority to "natural organisms" as opposed to the routine properties of matter. This implies that the general run of nature is understood by ID in a very similar way to the agnostics, in that it does not securely point to the existence of a Creator. This becomes even clearer when a distinction is made between some things "being part" of, and other things "not being part" of the normal web of natural causation; only the latter being emphasised as evidence of creation. It is this distinction that seems to come from a certain 'god-of-the-gaps' mentality. This would fit with Mr Copus' talk of "previously inexplicable" factors, as if what has been explained scientifically is not such obvious evidence for God. It would also fit with his unqualified comparison of the ID argument for God to an argument (itself valid) for a tinkering extra-terrestrial intelligence. *A priori*, we cannot rule out such a neo-Deistic God, but *a posteriori* we must conclude the existence of the Judaeo-Christian God upon whose simple Logos the whole of creation depends equally. As our current editorial argues, *all matter* exhibits specific complexity and therefore points to Mind.

INFALLIBILITY

Dear Father Editor,

Your editorial in the July issue is a heartwarming and inspiring joy to read, entirely comprehensible and compelling, with the clear ring of truth in every phrase. It should be read from every pulpit in the land.

Yours faithfully

Francis Reilly,
Glentrammon Gardens,
Orpington,
Kent

Dear Father Editor,

Your editorial on Infallibility fails to address the problem, not just that it can be difficult to ascertain whether or not a particular Church teaching is infallible, but that there have been teachings in the past which would have been generally regarded as "infallible" but which have since been changed or dropped.

Two examples will suffice. For centuries "*extra ecclesiam non salus est*" was understood in its literal sense, namely that it was not possible to be saved if one was not a visible member of the Catholic Church. The formula remains, but has since been redefined to mean that salvation for man is impossible without the existence of the Catholic Church. If the doctrine is infallible, its previous interpretation was certainly not.

My second example is the doctrine of Limbo, whose rejection by the Jansenists caused their condemnation by the Church, and which I clearly remember being carefully expounded to me when being instructed in the Faith many years ago. Yet it receives no mention in the current Catechism, and the Vatican has recently made it known that it is no longer valid. Previous generations would have regarded it as, in effect, infallible, yet we now know it not to be so.

I conclude that we cannot necessarily assume that every teaching contained in the current Catechism is infallible, and that there could well be changes in future; one example is the legitimacy of capital punishment, which recent Popes have increasingly disapproved of. This suggests there is a place for what you refer to as "private

judgment" on matters not already defined as infallible, and this does not imply that one is merely indulging in personal fancies or whims in so doing.

Yours faithfully

Alan Pavelin
Leesons Hill
Chislehurst
Kent

Dear Father Editor,

Your 'Church teaching and parish life' editorial in the July/August issue of FAITH goes some way to explaining why Catholics no longer go to confession (not that to discuss this was your intention). I should indeed welcome some words from you in a future issue on the question of why going to confession is in considerable decline.

Yours faithfully

Damian Goldie
Church Hill
Totland Bay
Isle of Wight

VALUING FERTILITY

Dear Father Editor,

No one can make me feel awkward about *Humanae Vitae* anymore (*A Mother's Diary* and *Letters*, May/July). From our first years at medical school my husband and I experienced the bitterness of some of the generation who had wanted the Church's teaching to change, apparently feeling it was a uniquely burdensome imposition of the Church. Surely as life progressed some of these people must have realized that using NFP cannot be the greatest hardship a couple can face in their family lives. We trained as NFP teachers well before we were married and it has been a source of great wonder to us. We

could cooperate with God to create a new life. It has proved effective in an array of situations. Medical colleagues and obstetricians sadly, on the whole, remained sceptical.

Hopefully its efficacy for us might have had some personal witness for medical staff as well as others we have known. It is indeed a common distress for Catholic couples announcing a pregnancy to have to face long faces and pained expressions even from within their extended family. Pregnant mothers need care and support. They should not have to face ambivalence or hostility from their families, their friends or from health workers. As our family grew we learnt to reply brightly to the question 'is another due?' (like the next bus), 'yes, we haven't had two the same yet!'. I know we have been very fortunate, I had good medical care and we managed to pay for some invaluable help. We have heard those of our age who were in the same position wishing they had had more children. I was 43, when, sadly, for complex reasons our eighth child only lived a week. She was however a little sister for a week and no one can take her from them. We cannot have any regrets for taking every chance of having children. Friends that are closest to my heart are those who share the same reverence for having children. Some had been unable to have large families for various reasons but were always there for us and for the children.

Interestingly, those who found themselves unable to have children of their own (many of whom had faced the rigours of adoption) have often been particularly supportive and understanding. I would encourage couples to value the opportunities they are given to have children and not to delay, especially once 40 looms. (Fertility falls rapidly after that age though blessings do still happen—Pope Benedict was born when his mother was 43). NFP works and we have done what we

can to promote it. There has been opposition, but it is only many years on that we have heard from some who were grateful for the message on *Humanae Vitae*. They say they would never have heard it from anywhere else. Just before sending I came across this sober comment; of all your earthly treasures you can only take your children with you to heaven.

Yours faithfully,

*Dr. Josephine Treloar
Parkhill Rd
Sidcup
Kent*

CATECHETICAL COHERENCE

Dear Father Editor,

Mgr. Barltrop makes out a good case for revitalising the Catholic imagination so as truly to engage with the "modern mind" (July issue), and so make converts. But surely the first essential task is to put our own house in order by making sure that what is being presented is the full undiluted Faith "Once delivered to the apostles" as set out in the Catechisms of the Council of Trent and of our own day. At the moment in our parishes and schools only about two thirds of the genuine Catholic Faith is being taught and practiced. All the unpleasant hard bits such as Hell, Purgatory, mortal sin and damnation, strict sexual ethics etc., to say nothing about the immortality of the soul, are being left out or understated out of existence. They are considered 'too negative' or off—putting, as if people outside the Church were fickle consumers who need astute advertising before they will buy the product.

I would feel it necessary first to give converts a spiritual health warning before surrendering them to modern catechetics with these diabolical omissions. I might even be

tempted at times to steer them in the direction of certain evangelical 'Bible only' groups where the bare facts of salvation are unequivocally spelt out. These people are making converts!

The spectacularly successful St. Francis Xavier warning his converts of Hell and baptising until his arm ached is presented in the article as *passé* (too "black and white") to our modern society. Presumably Our Lord, who warns us of Hell no less than sixteen times in St. Matthew, St. Paul, and indeed the whole of the New Testament are now deemed impossible to 'sell' these days. Oh for another exhausted Xavier preaching the whole Catholic truth and baptising tens of thousands in the Piazza in front of Westminster Cathedral!

I detect a major inconsistency in Mgr. Barltrop's position. On the one hand he rightly deplores modern 'catechetical incoherence', (which must be just about the worst impediment that an evangelical campaign could have), and then, as if there were no connection, expects success from an organisation set up and shaped by the same establishment, I am sorry to say, responsible for that incoherence. Progress will be a massively uphill task without controlling and, where necessary, sacking those heterodox diocesan bureaucrats in sensitive positions, those 'wolves in expert's clothing,' who are slowly bringing the Church to its knees.

Will God, looking down on a Church that is failing effectively to teach coherently and integrally His revelation be willing and able to grant the graces needed for evangelization? A current national average of one and a half receptions per parish *per annum* (*National Catholic Directory* 2004) would seem to indicate not. Let us ponder Apocalypse 2:5: "To the Church at Ephesus.... Be mindful from where you are fallen and do the first works. Or else I will come to you and move

your candle stick out of its place, except you do penance."

Yours faithfully

J Allen
Seymour Drive
Torquay

QUESTIONING AMERICA

Dear Father Editor,

I have yet to read George Weigel's *The Cube and The Cathedral*, but the review of it in the May edition of FAITH does not bode well, since it suggests a heavy and uncritical dependence on the theory that America is more "Christian" than "secular" Europe.

While church attendance figures are much higher in the US than in Western Europe, what does that prove? In itself, nothing at all. What is being inculcated, celebrated and even worshipped is very often a collection of economic, social, cultural and political prejudices that the participants have simply declared to be Christianity (or any specific form of Christianity, including Catholicism), despite their fanatically and even hysterically anti-Christian (and especially anti-Catholic) origins and content, which former is very often denied outright. Churches complicit in all of this might pack them in, but they are ultimately not very different from, for example, the "Catholic" Patriotic Association in China. Lest this seem an overstatement, look at the level of American churchgoing support for the Iraq War. And why? To what end? The reversal of *Roe v Wade*? Believe in that when you see it, and not before.

In Western Europe, by contrast, no country has on paper, and few have in practice, the American system of abortion on demand at every stage of pregnancy (for that, one has to look to America's new best friends in Eastern Europe).

There are 10 sacral monarchies (11 if one includes the Vatican), monarchy being an institution for which no purely secular argument can ever be constructed. National events are routinely conducted in the form and course of church services. Church schools, maintained at public expense, are normal in many European countries, while at least broadly Christian Religious Education and (although this law is widely flouted) a daily collective act of Christian worship are compulsory in all British schools.

In Germany, the churches are actually the largest employers after the several tiers of government, with hardly anyone opting out of the church tax system, with the churches routinely providing numerous services of the kind that provoke uproar when suggested in the US under the rubric of "compassionate conservatism", and with three tiers of government funding an annual Kirchentag (Catholic and Protestant in alternate years) from which no major political figure from Left to Right would dare be absent. Anglican bishops sit as of right in the British Parliament (where they recently played a key role in blocking physician-assisted suicide); and while the House of Lords might one day be abolished entirely, no one seriously suggests that it might ever remain with only the bishops removed. And since when was contraception any less available, or any less widely used, in the US than in Europe?

So one could go on. None of which is to suggest that there is not a great deal of re-evangelisation to be done in Western Europe. However, the last possible way of going about this would be to emulate a country in which the absolute exclusion of religion from public life is written into the founding documents as a first principle (however long it might have taken the courts to come round to enforcing this properly), with

those documents then elevated to the status of Holy Writ, and their rationalist and Deist authors to that of Prophets and Apostles, in the national folk-religion.

Yours faithfully,

David Lindsay
Foxhills Crescent
Lanchester, County Durham

DOUBLE EFFECT AND ARTIFICIAL CONTRACEPTION

Dear Father Editor,

Professor Gormally's excellent article (Mar/Apr 2006) demonstrates convincingly that one cannot use a condom in the performance of the marriage act even when there is a good intention of not passing on HIV to one's spouse.

It is sometimes argued that the principle of Double Effect may be invoked when considering the use of condoms in marriage. After all, it is argued, a wife may use a purely contraceptive pill in order to manage menstrual irregularities. She may further have intercourse with her husband as there is no intention of rendering the marriage act infertile. Surely, it is argued, the same applies in the case of using condoms when the intention is not to render the act infertile but to prevent the transmission of HIV.

However, for the principle of Double Effect to apply, the foreseen side-effect must be wholly unintended. The woman with menstrual irregularities does not effectively say "I must treat my condition and I must be rendered infertile." In contrast, the husband using a condom effectively says, "I must prevent the transmission of HIV and I must be rendered infertile." The second "must" in this sentence means that the principle of Double Effect does not apply. The teaching of the Church on

contraception is intended for those who desire to flourish as human beings. What, then, of those who intend to do evil? It seems to me that the Church has little to offer in such cases. The adulterer who chooses to be open to the gift of life in his adulterous union does not in any way lessen the intrinsically evil nature of his act. The homosexual who wears a condom does not lessen the intrinsically evil nature of his act. It is hardly the business of the Church to issue guidelines to adulterers and homosexuals on minimising the harmful nature of their intrinsically evil acts.

Yours faithfully

*Dr. Pravin Thevathasan
Mayfield Park,
Shrewsbury*

... AND USURY

Dear Father Editor,

May I congratulate you on a truly outstanding edition of FAITH magazine (July/August). The editorial and other articles were first class. I noticed the theme of infallibility throughout—a vital one today. Usury is one issue addressed by the Magisterium. Fr Gary Coulter makes a valiant effort to show that the old teaching is unchanged but now obsolete. He suggests that there has been a “development of justice” so that extrinsic titles to payment on a loan for “loss” can be “assumed”. However, merely to say “society” or “financial institutions” have changed in general terms is, it seems to me, insufficient. The fact that transactions are now done faster, hi-tech, globally and by a bewildering array of financial instruments and ‘products’ does not represent a fundamental change in the nature of financial and commercial transactions. When Pope Benedict XIV concluded in *Vix Pervenit* that there were titles

to payment on a loan extrinsic to the loan contract itself he did not merely mean that modern conditions had changed so as to allow interest where it was before forbidden. I cannot therefore see any justification for Fr Coulter’s assertion that “in the modern circumstances of a widespread free market, extrinsic titles could be presumed without proof”, still less that a “price” for money, the “market rate of interest”, makes interest now allowable. On the contrary, it is precisely the claim to a “price” for money that is condemned.

The claim to an extrinsic title to interest by virtue of loss flowing from the “opportunity cost” in lending is also advanced by Fr Coulter, as it has been by others. However, this title is nowhere mentioned in *Vix Pervenit*, which, instead, says this; “One cannot condone the sin of usury by arguing that the gain is not great or excessive, but rather moderate or small; neither can it be condoned by arguing that the borrower is rich; nor even by arguing that the money borrowed is not left idle, but is spent usefully, either to increase one’s fortune, to purchase new estates, or to engage in business transactions. The law governing loans consists necessarily in the equality of what is given and returned”. (3.II) and this:

“But you must diligently consider this, that some will falsely and rashly persuade themselves—and such people can be found anywhere—that together with loan contracts there are other legitimate titles or, excepting loan contracts, they might convince themselves that other just contracts exist, for which it is permissible to receive a moderate amount of interest.” (3.V)

Fr Coulter prays in aid St Thomas to permit compensation for “lost profit”. But St Thomas seems expressly to exclude this: “But the lender cannot enter an agreement for compensation, through the fact that he makes no profit out of his

money: because he must not sell that which he has not yet and may be prevented in many ways from having” (ST, II-II, q.78, a.2, resp ad obj.1). As St Thomas teaches, usury is so called because it is selling both an item and the use of the item when, unlike durable products, its only use is consumption. The sale of the use is a fraud because the seller sells nothing. Usury also involves the sale of the time that the borrower is allowed to have the money before he must return it and time belongs to no man to sell. However, St Thomas permits what might be called the classic extrinsic title: “On the other hand he that entrusts his money to a merchant or craftsman so as to form a kind of society, does not transfer the ownership of his money to them, for it remains his, so that at his risk the merchant speculates with it, or the craftsman uses it for his craft, and consequently he may lawfully demand as something belonging to him, part of the profits derived from his money.” (ST, II-II, q.78, a.2, resp ad obj.5)

The foundation of the modern economy is simply the development of this medieval joint venture. The joint stock company (with unlimited liability) is the predecessor of the modern corporation (with unlimited liability). Investors are entitled to their profit having risked their money in such a venture. This is a title plainly extrinsic to any loan contract. It would be quite wrong, in my view, to imagine that usury is no longer a problem. Indeed, I tend to agree with the late Fr Holloway that “the burden of Western usury upon Latin America is threatening to bring down governments and also to destabilise the financial institutions of the West”. Many a modern banker will tell you the same.

Yours faithfully,

*James Bogle
The Inner Temple, London*

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comment

ON THE c o m m e n t s



by William Oddie

What may turn out to be the most important Vatican news story this year received a strangely muted coverage, not only in the secular media, but among most Catholic commentators, too. It was the perfect opportunity for an anti-Papa Ratzinger media moment: but nobody, these days, seems to have the stomach for it. The BBC account, by veteran Rome correspondent (and JPII-knocker) David Willey, ran as follows: 'Pope Benedict XVI has chosen a close former colleague to become his new Vatican secretary of state. Italian Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, 71, will replace fellow Italian Angelo Sodano as the Pope's number two. Cardinal Bertone, currently archbishop of Genoa, has long been a trusted collaborator of Benedict. They used to work in the same Vatican department.... The only reason why Cardinal Sodano is leaving is that he is already three years past the Vatican's official retirement age of 75.' *The Guardian* was slightly less anodyne: 'His appointment followed more than a year of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring at the highest levels. Though orthodox in his doctrinal thinking, Cardinal Bertone is known as a genial man with a human touch' (for *The Guardian*, it seems, geniality and orthodoxy are not commonly seen together). Only *The Times* report was something of a throwback to the old kneejerk Popeknocking days: 'Critics,' wrote one Richard Owen, 'said that putting a Ratzinger-Bertone alliance at the top of the Vatican hierarchy meant that the Church would be in the hands of "arch-conservatives" at a time when many Catholics, especially in the Third World, are calling for reform.'

As for those Catholic commentators generally noted for 'calling for reform', they have been remarkably low-key. *The Tablet* said virtually nothing by way of comment; as for the American *National Catholic Register*, its Rome Correspondent, John L Allen Jr, reported simply that Bertone was not a product of the Vatican's diplomatic corps, and thus reflected 'the priority of doctrinal concerns over diplomatic exigencies in the pontificate of Benedict XVI.' His lengthy accompanying column on the subject was simply a lighthearted article on the appointment as an example of 'Salesian chic' (apparently, the Salesian order, internationally, is on the up and up at the moment).

Nearly all these stories reflected either the caution of the moment, or simple ignorance. It is difficult to know which it is with the BBC's David Willey; like many secular Rome correspondents, he doubles up on the Vatican, sometimes with ill-disguised distaste; and I have often suspected that he cannot be bothered to find out what is really going on behind the walls of the Vatican City. How else, for instance are we to explain the extraordinary statement that 'The only reason why Cardinal Sodano is leaving is that he is already three years past the Vatican's official retirement age of 75'? *The Guardian's* man seems to have cottoned on to the fact that there was more to it than that, with his statement that Bertone's appointment 'followed more than a year of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring...'

The nearest any of these commentators came to working out why this may be a landmark appointment was John L Allen, with his throwaway comment that the appointment reflected 'the priority of doctrinal concerns ... in the pontificate of Benedict XVI.' Of this, more later. First, however, it is worth following up the *Guardian's* suggestion of 'behind-the-scenes manoeuvring', for if one thing is certain it is that David Willey could

not have been further away from the truth. In fact, it seems, Cardinal Sodano has been orchestrating a vigorous campaign of support for his remaining in office until his 80th birthday, November 23, 2007. He has been supported in this by curial Cardinals who had formerly been career diplomats: Achille Silvestrini, Pio Laghi, and Giovanni Cheli, whose opposition to Bertone's appointment as secretary of state was based on his lack of diplomatic experience.

But Cardinal Sodano had already, it appears, made it inevitable that this Pope—who is beginning his pontificate as he means to go on—would have to remove him as soon as possible. For, this was not the first little campaign Sodano had waged to frustrate the Pope's intentions. On January 26, Cardinal Sodano, in the Pope's name but without his knowledge, sent the following letter to all the bishops in Italy, with two exceptions: the Pope himself and Sodano's own archrival, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the Pope's vicar and president of the Italian bishops' conference (the CEI)—whom Pope Benedict expressly wished *not* to retire from office at the statutory age of 75:

Most Reverend Excellency,

As you know, next March 6 the mandate of the Most Eminent Cardinal Camillo Ruini as president of the CEI will come to a conclusion.

The Holy Father, who has always appreciated very much the service rendered by the Most Eminent Cardinal to the Italian Church, thinks nonetheless that, in part because of his forthcoming seventy-fifth birthday, a change in the office of the presidency is in order.

To this end it is my duty and privilege to address Your Excellency, asking you to indicate to me, *coram Domino* and with courteous solicitude, the Prelate that you intend to suggest for the aforementioned office.

This consultation, in consideration of its importance and delicacy, is subject to the pontifical seal of secrecy, which requires the utmost caution with all persons.

Finally, I would ask you to return this letter together with your response, without keeping copies of anything.

This manoeuvre (too clumsy to be called Machiavellian) was almost bound to be discovered. Both Ruini and the Pope were soon made aware of it. On February 9, the Pope received Ruini in audience and told him that he wished him to continue in office. As is the custom, no announcement was made. But Sodano's manoeuvres continued. The letter to all the bishops was leaked to the press, with the spin that it represented the Pope's wish for a more 'collegial process'. Intensely irritated, Benedict XVI picked up the telephone and ordered that precedent was to be overturned and that his confirmation of Ruini as president of the CEI was to be made public immediately.

This was not the only reason Pope Benedict wanted Sodano out and a less 'diplomatic' Secretary of State in. One reason was not dissimilar to the suspicions of the Foreign Office traditionally voiced in British political circles: that it is run by people whose instinct is to 'go native'. Sodano, for instance has always pursued a very compliant policy with the Chinese government. He once said that in order to establish diplomatic relations with China, he was ready to move the Vatican nunciature from Taipei to Beijing 'not tomorrow, but this very evening.' This statement was seen as a betrayal of many Chinese Catholics, and in particular by the outspoken bishop of Hong Kong, Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, according to whom religious liberty should come before any sort of diplomatic accommodation. He will now, it is generally thought, have a greatly increased influence over the Vatican's Chinese policy.

John L. Allen's surmise that Pope Benedict's intention in appointing Cardinal Bertone was to give more emphasis to doctrine was, significantly, confirmed by the Pope himself in a letter to the archdiocese of Genoa, in which he interestingly observed that during his three-year tenure as its archbishop, Cardinal Bertone had demonstrated his value by 'combining pastoral care and doctrinal wisdom.'

Those same qualities, the Pope wrote, led him to choose the cardinal for 'this exalted and delicate task' at the Secretariat of State.

But *why* would the Pope want a more doctrinally focused Secretary of State? The answer has to do with another question, often asked in this country. Why was it, when nearly all the present bishops were appointed by Pope John Paul II, that so many of them seemed dedicated to frustrating his intentions? Why, in other words, had he made so many mistakes? The answer is that in recommending a priest to the Pope for appointment as bishop, the Congregation for Bishops in Rome is almost entirely dependent on the information relayed to it by the Apostolic Nuncio of the country concerned, who sends a report of about 20 pages, together with a list of three names (the terna) and his own preference. Why have we had overwhelmingly liberal bishops for the last 30 years? Because we have had liberal nuncios. Who appoints the nuncios? Why, the Secretary of State. Why has 'doctrinal wisdom' been one of the criteria the Pope considered in appointing Cardinal Bertone? Answers on a postcard: but there are no prizes for working it out. Our own present nuncio is said to be an improvement on his predecessor, and he will now, we may suppose, benefit from firm guidance from above on the criteria to be applied in recommending candidates for the episcopate. It will take a good decade to give the English and Welsh Conference of Bishops a radical new look. Cardinal Bertone is an athletic 71 who looks in pretty good nick; fingers crossed.

A postscript on Cardinal Sodano: in my last article, I recounted the disgrace of Fr Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legion of Christ, who has been suspended as a priest after investigations into charges against him of sexual abuse carried out by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. One question frequently asked is how,

given the fact that these charges go back for many years, had he survived as long as he did? The answer usually given is that he was always supported by the late Pope. But why was that? One factor, according to the fascinating website (www.chiesa.espressonline.it) of Sandro Magister of *L'Espresso*—the doyen of Rome's *Vaticanistas*—was the steadfast support of Cardinal Sodano, to whom Fr Maciel has always been close. This may even, have been a factor in Sodano's removal. The present Pope, it seems, has been from the first absolutely determined to cleanse the Church from what he described in one of his Good Friday meditations for the Stations of the Cross as the 'filth... in the Church... even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to Christ'. Sandro Magister points out that Pope Benedict appointed, as his own replacement at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Archbishop William J. Levada, one of the four bishops responsible for the effort against sexual abuse committed by priests in the United States. Most interestingly of all, Magister recounts the following interesting little anecdote, which has about it the ring of truth:

"Two days before the conclave [at which he was elected Pope], on April 16, Ratzinger met Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, a great proponent of his election and an even more decisive supporter of a rigorous approach to purifying the Church of this scourge. Ratzinger assured him of his support."

As George was kissing the newly elected Pope's ring, Benedict XVI told him he would keep that promise. It looks as though we may just have begun an unusually effective pontificate.



sunday

by sunday



22ND IN ORDINARY TIME: B
03.09.06, Mk 7 1-8.14-15.21-23

- For Catholics, the morality of an act lies principally in the object of an action, but also in the intention and the consequences, insofar as they can be known. Thus, it is always wrong to commit adultery or take innocent human life, whatever the circumstances, because such an act is in itself morally wrong. This is not to judge the person who may be caught up in some terrible moral or psychological dilemma, but rather to be utterly clear that such actions can never be justified, even if in some circumstances they can be understood. Compassion only works with moral principles.
- For an act to be moral, all three considerations need to be held in balance – the act itself has to be objectively good, the intention has to be pure, and the consequences not harmful, insofar as they can be known. Intention is an element essential to the moral evaluation of an action. The end is the first goal of the intention and indicates the purpose pursued in the action. The intention is a movement of the will toward the end: it is concerned with the goal of the activity. It aims at the good anticipated from the action undertaken. (cf. CCC 1752ff).
- But a bad intention makes an act evil that, in and of itself, can be good (CCC 1753): "This people honours me only with lip service, while their hearts are far from me" (Mk 7, 6 quoting Is 29, 13). Putting aside the commandments of God to cling to human traditions shows an evil intention, where a self-made human righteousness displaces the righteousness that comes only from God's grace. The demands of the Law can never be subverted without

terrible consequences: "It is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice" (Mk 7, 22).

23RD IN ORDINARY TIME: B
10.09.06, Mk 7,31-37

- It is the sacred humanity of Jesus that saves us, insists St Teresa of Avila. In this gospel we see a practical application of an important truth. We are matter as well as souls, physical as well as spiritual. Our bodies are not a mere drag upon our souls, but an integral and irreducible part of who and what we are. After all, we believe in the resurrection of the body at the end of time. As we are now, so we will be then, though in some sense transformed after the model of the physical resurrection of Jesus.
- Spittle and fingers are the vehicles for divine grace here. Jesus could have cured without touching the deaf and dumb man and at a distance, as he had done in the healing of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7, 30). But his sacred humanity is always at the service of his divinity, and Jesus delights in a humanity that reaches out to others, touching them so that divine healing may be effected in them. The glory of God is man fully alive, and there is a joy in Jesus' work that stuns his audience, provoking unbounded admiration.
- Jesus is not the victim of false modesty when he commands the people to be silent over the miracles he has wrought (Mk 7, 36). They only see a leader who will free them from the Romans. Jesus sees the whole picture, and sees his priority as a victory over the spiritual forces of darkness, which enthrall mankind in the grip of sin and death. "Then looking up to heaven he sighed" (Mk 7, 35). Jesus' battle wearies his humanity, and silence would ensure that his kingdom replaces the rule of Satan more effectively in the lives of men.

24TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B
17.09.06, Mk 8, 27-35

- "Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's" (Mk 8, 33). Strong words for the first Pope, and a severe lesson. It was not as an individual that Peter had challenged Our Lord about the cross, but as leader of the disciples: "But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter" (Mk 8, 33). The force of the Greek word for 'turning' makes it quite clear that Jesus rounded on Peter. Bold and impetuous though Peter was, he must never have been so blatantly confronted. Jesus beats him at his own game.
- But Jesus is not playing games. This is the pivot around which the whole of Mark's gospel swings. For once the disciples have recognized Jesus for who he is, in the person of bold Peter: "You are the Christ" (Mk 8, 29). Up until this time Jesus' public ministry has been a stunning success in outward terms, with people flocking to him to be cured: "And wherever he went, to village, or town, or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak" (Mk 6, 56).
- Now Jesus tries to begin to reveal his inner mission: how he must suffer and die, and rise again on the third day (Mk 8, 31). Peter is appalled, but Jesus has taken them all completely into his confidence, because Peter has acknowledged his true identity. Peter thinks what Jesus' says is an affront to all their messianic expectations, but the Lord is in fact paying them the greatest of compliments by revealing the true heart of his work. From now on, Jesus becomes steadily less acceptable to the people as the shadow of the cross begins to loom.

25TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B
24.09.06, Mk 9, 30-37

- Coping with disability in a child requires heroic levels of patience,

perseverance and sheer love. Yet the grace of God can be more visibly present and tangibly felt in such circumstances than in other more benign situations. In many cases, outside agencies often prove unreliable or even downright hostile. In the end, only grace suffices. The only constant is a friendship with Our Lord, which grows all the more as other services fail: "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me" (Mk 9, 37). We need to pray for families who struggle with disability.

- Many people say that a child should not be baptised until old enough to make its own decisions. This sounds responsible, but is really the exact opposite. True enough, a child must make its own choices in adulthood, but we don't just feed and clothe babies when they apply for it. We naturally care for our children and make loving decisions on their behalf as part of our duty as parents. Not to do so would amount to neglect. If this is true for the physical needs of the child, how much more for his or her spiritual welfare?
- Children in this gospel symbolize the weaker members of society, whom we tend to overlook. Jesus is not advocating a wholesale return to childhood, but is rather pointing out that the true Christian leader will embrace and serve those who are weak. In doing so, that leader will welcome Christ directly, not indirectly. Jesus goes out of his way to identify himself with the poor and marginalized. We are led to realize that we will be judged on the content and quality of our loving, not the content of our bank accounts or the quality of our superior knowledge.

26TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B
01.10.06, Mk 9, 38-43.45.47-48

- Bl Marmaduke Bowes of York obeyed the word of God literally, as reported in the gospel here (v 41). He chanced on a gentlemen sitting outside a pub near York, quite

exhausted by his travels. Marmaduke fetched him a glass of water, just before he was arrested for being a Catholic priest. Bowes was appalled at this and followed the crowd to court, where he so robustly defended the gentleman before the judge that he himself was condemned for harbouring a priest. The sentence was carried out instantly, and Bowes was still wearing spurs when they strung him up.

- Not all of us aspire to heaven as quickly and completely as that holy man, but Our Lord does insist on the absolute priority of letting nothing come between us and our salvation. Elsewhere Jesus warns of the dangers of over attachment to family (Mt 10, 37ff). Here he leaves no doubt as to the grave consequences of our personal sins (v 43), especially if they cause us to lead others astray (v 42). This last is one of Jesus' harshest sayings - our fall will be like the fall of a man with a millstone round his neck.
- Many priests working with mentally ill people dread this gospel. Too many will find in it a divine excuse to self harm, rather than allow for Our Lord's use of Hebraisms to emphasize the radicality of the requirements of the Kingdom. Sin can play no part in the plan of God, and there can be left no stain of sin in the hearts of any who enjoy the Beatific Vision. But the purgation is God's, not ours. We must never forget that one injunction in the gospel can never gainsay another. We must always love our neighbour as ourself.

27TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B
08.10.06, Mk 10, 2-16

- It is interesting that St Mark links the account of Jesus' teaching outlawing divorce with his love for children: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs" (Mk 10, 14). Critics may debate whether these two incidents were originally separate, but the Holy

Spirit, using the heart and mind of the evangelist, assures us they should be taken together. For the sanctity of marriage and procreation of children are inextricably linked. The wiliness of the Pharisees contrasts with the innocence of the children.

- The ends of marriage are offspring, furthering the Catholic faith and the sacrament itself. Each must be earnestly desired by the couple if a marriage is to come about in the eyes of God. Thus, if a couple have no intention of having children, or despise the Faith, or hold the notion of a sacrament in contempt, then no marriage can possibly take place, no matter how grand and meaningful the wedding. It is the couple who convect the sacrament between themselves, or not. We pray for a great increase in reverence for such a sacred institution.
- Our Lord takes his authority for challenging the Law of Moses back to the creation of man. This shows us at the very least that marriage is not external to human nature, but integral to human living together, human happiness and social integration. Male and female are made for each other in a bond before God that gives them the freedom of the Garden of Eden. This is not just an earthly paradise, but a heavenly one too: the place where mankind communes with his Maker and finds delight in his partner. Sin corrupts this, but Christ restores it.

28TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B
15.10.06, Mk 10, 17-30

- Avarice is a sin that grows by stealth. Like gradually heating a frog in water, it does feel the danger until the water boils and it dies. Our Lord wages constant war on those who would substitute or tone down the demands of the Kingdom for the sake of bodily comforts or social prestige. Most shocking of all is his flat rejection of any necessary link between the possession of riches and the blessing of God. For Jews, wealth appeared a

self-evident blessing from God, and even the disciples are appalled by what Jesus has to say. But Jesus goes further.

- Not only are riches not a sign of blessing, they are also a substantial hindrance to entering the Kingdom of God. Part of Our Lord's argument with the Pharisees was that they loved wealth at the expense of righteousness, and made void the spirit of the Law with a welter of manmade traditions (Mk 7, 7ff; Lk 11, 37ff). There can be no real power in one's love for God or neighbour if our real treasure is not the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. Riches will choke the word of God in us. Only in God is life.
- It is easy to outdo the Pharisees in self-righteousness by becoming smug about their sins without reflecting on our own. Jesus loved the Pharisees, although he saw through them and disliked much of what they stood for. Jesus loves us too. So what is our excuse for not doing what he asks us? Maybe we do not want to listen when we feel he's calling us not to buy a new car, book another holiday or upgrade our wardrobe? Riches are morally neutral, but what they do to us is more deadly than we realise. Now is the hour to change. Wisdom lies in generous actions, not in beautiful intentions.

29TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B 22.10.06, Mk 10, 35-45

- We should never pray if we do not want God to answer us. James and John want God to acquiesce to their extravagant demands, but Jesus uses their enquiry to make clear that the road to paradise is hard. Ironically, they are guaranteed the martyr's crown from the lips of Our Lord, but at the expense of all the vainglory they no doubt entertained when trying to establish their claim: "Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all" (Mk 10, 44).

- Jesus is about to be immersed in suffering through his passion and death. James and John have no idea what they are talking about, but the Lord does ask them to be baptized in the same way ('*baptizein*' is Greek for 'immerse'). They accept his challenge, but their minds are only fixed on a vainglorious prize and not on the means of achieving it. They do not realise what they have agreed to. James will be the first apostle to die for the Lord, John the last. The sons of thunder must submit to executioners for Jesus' sake before they gain paradise.
- The apostles' reaction to the brothers shows how similar they are to their colleagues (Mk 10, 41), and how far from the demands of the Gospel. With his Passion looming, one wonders how Jesus ever put up with them. They are about as much comfort as a woollen overcoat in the desert! Yet he does love them, and opens their eyes to the radical demands of humility (Mk 10, 44). Only the joy in store for humanity at being ransomed from sin and death spurs on the exhausted Messiah.

30TH IN ORDINARY TIME: B 29.10.06, Mk 10, 46-52

- "Master, let me see again" (Mk 10, 51). How many times have we repented of our sins, only to fall back into them again through weakness, habit, or sheer hardness of heart? Cardinal Newman once remarked that the English are possessed of a profound self-contemplation, which leads them to be wretched over their sins and not repentant. We are the heirs of Pelagius when we kick ourselves and say, 'How could I have let myself down so?' Rather, we should be like blind Bartimaeus and brook no delay or opposition in throwing ourselves at the feet of Our Lord.
- Repentance is a gift, the heart of which lies in grief at the offence done to Jesus by our bad behaviour

and contempt for his person and teaching. It involves guilt at the violation of our conscience, but does not rest there. We must journey back to the one we have offended and apologise, overcoming a proud reluctance to humble ourselves and admit our need of forgiveness. This can be a slow process, requiring grace. Our contrition is rarely perfect, though it should be. Only when we admit our creatureliness do we find our true place within the universe.

- Confession is the greatest mercy God has ever provided for us, given the fallen state of human nature. In essence very simple, requiring confession, contrition and satisfaction on behalf of the penitent before a Catholic priest with faculties from his bishop, confession is the practical difference between heaven and hell. None of us gains heaven by our own efforts; only submission to the loving embrace of Jesus crucified and risen fits us for so unmerited a glory. Our own efforts lead us to hell, where ignorance will be no excuse. May the courage of Bartimaeus live in our hearts.





A MONK'S ALPHABET. MOMENTS OF STILLNESS IN A TURNING WORLD
by Jeremy Driscoll OSB, DLT,
144pp, £9.95

While studying in Rome a few years ago, I was fortunate enough to meet Fr Jeremy OSB. He was preaching a day retreat for the household of Benedictine sisters with whom I was living at that time. I remember him as a bright, engaging and very thoughtful retreat master. The opportunity to review this book has confirmed my first impression of him and deepened my appreciation of him as a spiritual guide.

The book is a small, slim volume (about 140 pages). It consists of alphabetically ordered thoughts, observations and questions inspired by the everyday world and the Benedictine vocation of the author. Both the size and format of this work are attractive; it is a convenient size to slip into a pocket, to take out for a quiet read (something I have done recently while on retreat) and the bite-size, non-consecutive entries invite one to dip in at random.

Therein also lies part of the book's success: its approachable format belies the depth of its contents. One is tempted to 'bite' a small morsel, and finds one has a lot to chew over. This is one part of Driscoll's genius as a teacher and sharer of the faith—he manages to engage the reader in such a way as to provoke one to think, to grapple with the issues oneself, and not just to gulp down the author's own insights or reflections.

As Abbot Christopher Jamison has commented on the back cover, this style of meditation follows an ancient tradition, that of the "sayings of the Desert fathers". These collections of

stories, and wise sayings of some of the earliest Christian ascetics have long been recognised as an ideal form for meditating on the mystery of our life in Christ. Driscoll adapts this form by musing upon our, and his own, personal contemporary situations, relationships, observations, memories and insights. The result is a modern *Pensées* which also has a lightness and wit that delights and engages.

Apart from his own references to the fact, it is easy to see from his use of language that the author is a poet. He reflects with grace and ease upon such varied subjects as the 'Inwardness of Things', 'Moose', 'Pimple' and 'Fear of the Lord', to list just a few. Such variety creates a collage effect which is also imitative of our experience of faith in the business of our lives. Our 'spiritual' experiences are intermeshed with the more prosaic, earthy ones. Of course, in exploiting this, the author is teaching us again the mysteries of the Incarnation: God became man, and meets us again today in the gritty reality of our day to day ordinariness.

Another effect of the randomness of subject and the directness of Driscoll's questions and observations is that it allows us to be caught off guard, to be surprised, and this too is a way in which we can encounter the working of the Holy Spirit in us. In other words, this book is not a 'how to' guide; read with average curiosity and attention it is almost impossible not to get caught up and find oneself reflecting, responding, questioning and thereby 'doing theology', that is, 'writing' one's own alphabet, searching for God in one's own life, and being drawn into a deeper personal relationship with Him as a result.

As the title of the book indicates, these are the reflections of a monk, and this fact is also writ large in the subject of many of the entries. As a fellow religious it is hard to guess if the average person would find this distancing; I do not. On the contrary,

some of its 'otherness' may hold a mystique and attraction.

Typically for a Benedictine, Driscoll's love of liturgy and nature is very evident. However, it is the entry 'Listening' that best expresses for me the heart of the man, and the spirit of this work. In this entry he reflects upon the injunction that begins the Holy Rule of St Benedict: "Listen." He reflects, "Monastic life is a way of life devoted to the practised art of listening." And this, he goes on, applies not only to spiritual instruction, but to all things, to where one is and what one does; to listen with the ears of the heart, to listen for God everywhere, finding Him above all in Scripture, but also hearing His message in all creation.

This is an invitation of hope to us all: for we live our redemption in working, praying and creating a culture that speaks of what we have heard. This small book is a valuable contribution to that proclamation.

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THE JESUS INQUEST: THE CASE FOR—AND AGAINST—THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

by Charles Foster, Foreword by Lord Mackay of Clashfen, Oxford & Grand Rapids, Monarch Books, 299 pp.

Forty years ago a teenager, brought up an Anglican, was finding the question of what to believe very difficult. Mulling over the nature of the Christian faith, he realised that the resurrection was absolutely fundamental. It was also very shocking to human reason and very difficult for an educated person to accept. This was his stumbling-block: could he ever bring himself to accept that Christ had really risen from the dead? Then it was that a marvellous book came into his hands, a book that he found totally convincing. It

was the classic *Who Moved the Stone?* by Frank Morison, a lawyer who had gone out before the War to the Holy Land with the express aim of collecting conclusive proofs that the resurrection had not happened. However, patiently studying the evidence on the spot, he had been driven to the opposite conclusion. He returned a changed man, and wrote this book to demonstrate that all the available evidence pointed to the truth of the claim that Christ had risen from the dead.

That teenager was me, so when *The Jesus Inquest* landed on my doormat recently, memories of my encounter with Frank Morison's book forty years ago flooded into my mind. Once again a lawyer was entering the fray to argue the case for the resurrection: for although it looks at a huge range of objections, *The Jesus Inquest* ultimately comes down strongly on the side of resurrection. But I am not quite the same person that I was; twenty-five years ago I became a Catholic, and that brought a new fundamental factor into the equation for me—the Church. The decision to become a Catholic was an expression of trust in the reliability and truthfulness of the Catholic Church and what she taught, and this was now the foundation of my life and my faith. Charles Foster however is an evangelical Anglican, a member of the celebrated Alpha Course church, Holy Trinity Brompton, in London. Although I no longer stand in the place where he is standing, my experience enables me to understand all too well where he is coming from. For evangelical Protestants, the faith stands or falls on the veracity of the Bible text, so this kind of quest is of fundamental importance to ordinary believers, whereas for Catholics our priority is to enter deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the Church and identify with her as completely as we can, for she is the guarantor of our faith as well as the living presence of Christ in the world.

Charles Foster is a most remarkably gifted man, with expertise in both veterinary medicine and law and experience of expeditions all over the world. He is a barrister who teaches medical ethics and law at Oxford. It is an immense encouragement for ordinary folk that such exceptionally gifted individuals think it important enough to write in defence of Christian truths as a labour of love. They are not clerics paid to do a job or theologians who love this kind of argument, they are individuals so possessed by the Gospel that they must speak out in its defence. This certainly impressed me very greatly with Morison when I first read him. The question I was asking as I read Foster's book was—do we need this when we already have Morison?

Well, in the first place, Morison's book is now very old—a classic it may be but it was first published as long ago as 1930, so I think it is excellent to have a new updated version. We live in another world now and Charles Foster is extremely well qualified to address the world of the twenty-first century. He is an impressive combination of multi-talented academic and hands-on explorer, and this gives a special weight to his testimony. The book itself is divided into eight chapters; individual chapters are devoted to a discussion of the historical sources of information available to us, then to the death, the burial, the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances. Foster scores over Morison not just in being our contemporary but also in a number of other ways. In particular he is well aware that belief in the actual physical resurrection of Christ has been powerfully challenged over the past fifty years from within the theological community. Large numbers of biblical scholars, mainly from within the Protestant community, have paraded their preference for the idea of a 'metaphorical' resurrection—Christ having risen in the hearts of the faithful—as against a physical one.

Foster shows a hugely impressive knowledge of the scholarly debates on this topic and addresses this audience as well as the wider non-Christian world. Furthermore, he is also aware of the wide-ranging studies pursued over the past century into the wider world of the time of Christ and the Early Church, and of the claims made by some that the resurrection accounts demonstrate the penetration of contemporary cultural influences into the early tradition of beliefs about the fate of Christ. In other words, where Morison's book was addressed to sceptical laymen, Foster's book is addressed both to them and to the theologically literate.

The Jesus Inquest can be read straight through as a narrative, but I think it will prove especially useful as a source-book for those looking for material for the defence where the evidence for the resurrection is being questioned. Interestingly, there is an appendix on the Turin Shroud, traditionally a 'Catholic' issue. Foster is clearly fascinated by the mysteries of the Shroud and feels that it is an additional piece of testimony worthy of consideration. His book is to be warmly welcomed as an impressive and indeed exciting addition to the range of apologetic material available to defenders of the reliability of traditional Christian claims about Christ.

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THE REVENGE OF GAIA
by James Lovelock, Allen Lane/
Penguin Books, £16.99

During the last few years there has been increasing evidence for the reality of climate change attributable to human activities. The steady rises in average world temperature and in

the sea level, the shrinkage of the Arctic ice, the retreat of glaciers, the spreading of deserts, the death of rivers and lakes, and the increasing frequency of the more severe hurricanes are just a few examples. In many cases positive feedback effects are increasing the rate of change, so that the changes are taking place faster and faster. We are destroying the earth on which our lives depend. Within a few decades this is likely to have devastating consequences; our situation has been compared by James Lovelock to that of people in a pleasure cruiser enjoying themselves just above Niagara Falls, unaware that the engine is about to fail.

This looming threat to our very existence is far more serious than all the other problems that face humanity. It urgently demands our full attention. It is very probably too late to avoid a catastrophe, but at least we can try to reduce and postpone it. There is of course no hope of raising the standard of living of the poorer peoples of the earth to that enjoyed by the affluent nations.

To tackle this situation detailed scientific studies are essential, and there is no better guide than James Lovelock. He is a very distinguished scientist who has made detailed studies of the physics, chemistry and biology of the earth, and of the ways we are destroying it. He is responsible for the concept of Gaia that sees the earth behaving "as a single self-regulating system, comprised of physical, chemical, biological and human components. The interactions and feedbacks between the component parts are complex and exhibit multi-scale temporal and spatial variability".

Lovelock has already written several books on Gaia, and this one provides an up-to-date and detailed account of the effects of our activities on the earth and the possible ways of mitigating them. It makes compelling and horrifying reading. The very existence of humanity depends on an

adequate supply of energy, and in all but the poorest societies this means electricity. Lovelock evaluates all possible sources of energy and shows that only the fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and nuclear can supply energy in the amounts needed. However the fossil fuels are responsible for the carbon dioxide emissions that are poisoning the atmosphere and bringing about climate change, so that leaves nuclear as the only viable possibility. The renewables can do no more than supply a few per cent of our needs as well as being costly, unreliable, dangerous and destructive of the environment. He therefore comes out unequivocally in favour of nuclear power as the only way of saving the earth. This has dismayed the Greens, who had long admired him as a guru, and he appeals to them to be realistic in their laudable desire to save the earth.

This is a situation that deserves the urgent attention of the Church. It is a moral problem and Church leaders are in a strong position to affect the way we live our lives. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences arranged a study week in 1982 where over thirty very distinguished experts on the relevant fields studied all aspects of the problem of supplying the energy we need. Most of what they said, notably the necessity of nuclear power, is still valid today, though the increasing evidence for climate change has given their work increased urgency. The result was published in a massive book entitled *Humanity and Energy: Needs—Resources—Hopes*. This was given additional authority by being chosen as the submission of the Holy See to the International Conference on Energy in Vienna in 1982. This valuable study has since then been almost entirely ignored by Church leaders and the Press. Subsequently Pope John Paul II again and again emphasised the importance of conserving the environment, but again almost nothing has been done to put his words into practice. All

those who still suffer from this suicidal myopia and want to do what they can to save the earth should read this book.

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FROM A PARISH NEWSLETTER

"He Gave Them Power"

During the week a parishioner rang me, and asked: "Father, I have been reading the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, and I would like to know, when he says of Christ 'but to as many as did receive Him, he gave them power to be made sons of God...', does it mean power and strength to get on with the work of becoming truly holy, or does it mean some inward power of status?"

Well, I can resist any temptation except theology, so I was delighted to explain. It means an inward power or status. It means more than power and help from God to persevere in holiness and goodness of life. It means that Christ communicated to as many as did receive Him, an organic power, a new form of being and existing, by which there is extended to us, if we will have it, the very Being and Nature of Christ Himself. It means that because of our relationship to Him as 'Son of Man' and also our Saviour and Redeemer, there is communicated to us, by gift and the love of 'adoption' that which Christ has by very nature and being, in His relationship to the Father as 'Son of God'.

It does not mean that we become God literally and in fact. You just cannot become God, you either are, or you never can be. The gap between the created and the uncreated is infinite. What it does mean is well expressed in St. Peter's breathtaking phrase, which we could consider blasphemy if it had not been spoken by the prince of the Apostles (2. Peter. 1.4.) '...to be co-sharers in the Divine Nature'. It means that God loves us with the same love as He loves Christ, and this fills out our very being in eternity with a sharing in the same divine love as links Father and Son by their very being. We are made an extension of Christ, so to speak, and the love which exists by very nature between

the Father and the Son, is extended to us by charity and gift.

There is no other or lesser order of happiness and fulfilment for us. We will either make that grade in the end, through perhaps a very long purgation of spirit after death, or we will not make any grade at all. St. Peter expresses the same tremendous thought also in his First Letter, in chapter one, verse 22, where he says to the new Christians who were formerly pagans: 'You have been born again, not of mortal seed but of immortal seed, through the living and abiding word of God within you'. This is only an echo of the same thought in St. John's Gospel, which also answers our parishioner in his question: '...who were born not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God'.

It fits in very well with what I told you last week about the meaning of the inner grace of God. The personality of Man has no natural or 'equal' purpose and meaning in nature around. The only end and purpose of human nature and personality is in the possession of God and the enjoyment of God as God is in Himself. We cannot reach up and take it, God must bend down and give it.

We are not fully intelligible, we do not make full sense except in the order of the divine charity, the gift of God. We don't have all our meaning and purpose in life and nature around as do the beasts of the field and the plants of the ground. We are made to grow up, and to grow into God. We can refuse it, but there is no other joyful alternative for us... unto all eternity.

Edward Holloway
Parish Newsletter for Sunday October 13th 1985
Church of The Holy Name, Esher, Surrey

notes from across the

Atlantic

by Richard John Neuhaus

DO WE HAVE A TRUCE?

America says there is a valid concern that the priesthood should not be composed "predominantly or exclusively of gay men". I confess that I do not know how to construe the editorial position of *America*, the official weekly magazine of the Society of Jesus, as anything other than an in-your-face rejection of the instruction from Rome, issued by the explicit authority of the Pope, and of the magisterial teaching on which the instruction is based. In the absence of a vigorous and visible response from Rome, it would seem that we are confronted by a "Truce of 2005" comparable to the "Truce of 1968" with respect to orchestrated dissent from the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. If that is the case, and we must pray it is not, it is difficult to overestimate the grave consequences for the effective leadership of the still-young pontificate of Benedict XVI.

A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

Greenwood Press is publishing an interesting series for classroom use on various religions under the generic title "The American Religious Experience". There are, for instance, the Buddhist, African-American, Protestant and Muslim experiences in America. And now there is *The Catholic Experience in America* by sociologist Joseph A. Varacalli. The book provides an informed overview of Catholic history in this country, with particular attention to controversies and conflicts since the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. The final chapter, "What Lies Ahead?", charts possible scenarios for the future of Catholicism in this country: 1) dissolution; 2) an "American" Church; 3) sect-like retreat; 4) neo-orthodoxy; 5) formal schism; and 6) "pluralism". Although he doesn't

come right out and say so, Varacalli clearly favours number 4, which he identifies with the vision of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Protecting his reputation as a social scientist, he doesn't lay odds on which is most likely to prevail. Since I am free from that professional inhibition, I venture that the serious contest is between numbers 2, 4 and 6. In this case, "pluralism" (note the quotation marks) means an increasingly dispirited status quo in which Catholicism is a loosely associated amalgam of accommodations to spiritual consumerism. In my book *Catholic Matters*, published by Basic Books, I discuss these possibilities in terms of whether the accent is placed on being "American Catholics" or "Catholic Americans", pointing out how the adjective tends to control the noun. Varacalli's typology is suggestive, however, and *The Catholic Experience in America* warrants a close look by high school and college teachers, and by others curious about the past, present and future of Catholicism in this country.

THE MONEY FACTOR

"Think low." That is the advice that Midge Decter has had occasion to give me many times over the years. She's right. My problem (well, among my many problems) is that, when somebody does or says something really dumb, I assume it is a failure of understanding and they just need to have the matter explained to them. I am averse to looking for ulterior motives, especially pecuniary motives. Part of that is charity and part of it is, I suppose, naiveté. "Think low" is closely related to "Follow the dollar". All this was brought to mind by readers who said they greatly appreciated my critique of the New American Bible (NAB), but then added that I had overlooked the money factor. "The Catholic Biblical Association is surely at fault for so much that is wrong with the NAB," writes a reader who is in a position to know, "but the reason

that abominable translation is foisted on the faithful at Mass has more to do with the budget of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops" (NCCB). There is undoubtedly more than a little to that. A number of companies supply the Mass guides (called, ugh, "missalettes") that are used in every Catholic parish, and that is a multi-million-dollar business. Unlike those who hold the copyright to the Revised Standard Version and allow it to be used at little or no charge, the NCCB charges an arm and a leg for the use of NAB. Mandating that the suppliers of Mass guides use the NAB is a major source of income for the bishops. Interestingly enough, in its own publications the NCCB tends not to use the NAB. Presumably because they don't want a third-rate translation, and also because there is little point in paying exorbitant fees to themselves by using the NAB. So it is, for example, that the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the more recent Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church use the Revised Standard Version. The NAB, on the other hand, is good enough for the people at Mass. Plus, there is all that money from the publishers of Mass guides. I really do not like to think low, but sometimes explanations are less than edifying.

CATHOLIC LITERATURE IS TIMELESS

As mentioned before in these pages, Loyola Press is doing a very good thing by bringing out in handsome paperback format a number of staples in the Catholic literary tradition, appropriately titled "The Loyola Classics Series", under the general editorship of Amy Welborn. Among them are *The Devil's Advocate* by Morris West, *The Edge of Sadness* by Edwin O'Connor, *Helena* by Evelyn Waugh, *The Last Catholic in America* by John R. Powers and *Saint Francis* by Nikos Kazantzakis. Each volume carries a new introduction by a contemporary writer, and that's where I noticed an odd thing. I recently had the excellent

company of *The Edge of Sadness* on a long flight. Edwin O'Connor is best known for *The Last Hurrah*, an agreeably sentimental account of the last years of the Irish Catholic political establishment in Boston. His later novel, *The Edge of Sadness*, published in 1961, won a Pulitzer Prize. The story is told by Father Hugh Kennedy, a recovering alcoholic, and turns around the character of Charlie Carmody, a humorously mean-spirited octogenarian who made his pile as a slum landlord. His zest for life is in tyrannising all around him, beginning with his family. But here's the odd thing: in his introduction, Ron Hansen notes the "intensely honest and unsentimental perspective that gives resonance to Edwin O'Connor's novel even today". The key words are "even today". In this and other introductions in the series, the sharp contrast is drawn between the Catholicism prior to the Second Vatican Council and the Catholicism of what came after. An elegiac note is struck about what once was and will never be again. The books are frequently recommended as interesting period pieces that should not be ignored "even today". There is a defensive tone that one would not expect in the recommending of literature that is confidently thought to be of lasting consequence. There is the feel in the Loyola Classics that these books have been retrieved from the dustbin of an insular and parochial world, and that world has to be explained to readers if they are to understand why these books were once thought to be worth reading. That is, I believe, quite unfair to most of the books in question. They stand on their own as quality literature. Their neglect is due to changing literary fashions, influenced in part by Catholics who are eager to forget—or to remember only to pillory—the "pre-Vatican II Church".

A wag recently remarked that the greatest Catholic contribution to literature in recent decades is the

production of so many ex-Catholic writers. There is something to that. It was not always so. Today there are hints of a possible revival in Catholic literature. But the hints are few and far between. Perhaps the eclipse of Catholic literature can be attributed to a sensed loss of "apartness" that is still the inspiration, and burden, of Jews. I suspect the truth is that most non-Catholic Americans, unlike Catholics who assume their unqualified cultural assimilation, still view Catholicism as something strange, even exotic. That is evident in the continuing flow of novels and plays of a distinctly anti-Catholic bent, usually written by ex-Catholics. But now there are no Catholics of the stature of J.F. Powers or Edwin O'Connor writing from within the Catholic experience. First Things' junior fellow Mary Ruiz has joined with others to help that happen. They have launched *Dappled Things*, an online literary magazine for young Catholics that is trolling for talent. Years from now an Edwin O'Connor may look back and recall how he got his start with *Dappled Things*. Meanwhile, we are indebted to Loyola Press for making available again books such as *The Edge of Sadness* which are splendid reading anytime, and not "even today".

SCRATCH A LIBERAL ...

In liturgical worship, you either surrender yourself to the exploration of the unknown or are critically alert to whatever may happen next. That's what rules and rituals are for, and that's why it is so disedifying when priests take liberties with them. A friend says he recently attended the Red Mass at Villanova University and left less than edified. The Red Mass is the occasion for a big annual bash, and is of special importance to the university's law school. Villanova is run by the Augustinians and, of the more than sixty priests there, only one showed up for the occasion. Our friend was most particularly put off by

the notice in the glossy programme that "Roman Catholic assemblies celebrate the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist and the communal body." Well yes, Christ, being Lord of all, is truly present in the people present, as he is truly present everywhere. But that is not what the Catholic Church means by the Real Presence (upper case). And then there is the statement of the liturgy committee of Villanova, "Postures during Eucharistic Liturgy". The statement notes, "In general [the General Instruction of the Roman Missal] asks the faithful to kneel during the consecration—but then adds 'unless prevented by lack of space, large numbers or other reasonable cause'." The statement then gives Villanova's reasonable causes for preventing anyone from kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer. For instance, one of the prayers thanks God for counting us worthy to "stand" before Him. (Those Augustinians are such literalists.) Moreover, kneeling induces a "sense of passivity, inferiority and exaggerated unworthiness". Some might prefer the word "receptivity" to "passivity", but it is true that we sinful human beings are averse to acknowledging our inferiority to God and do not take kindly to any exaggeration of our unworthiness. The statement ends on this note: "In all these decisions the Villanova community favours the spirit of community and mutual affirmation; any competitive and legalistic preference in the matter of liturgical practice tends to be divisive and is not considered helpful to communal celebration." In the spirit of mutual affirmation, unity and our communal abhorrence of legalism: *You vill not kneel!*



cutting/edge

A special feature keeping us up to date with
issues of science and religion

THE LANGUAGE OF GOD

"...it is rare for a scientist to offer a testimony of faith in God. For that scientist to be one of the world's most renowned is rarer still. For his testimony to be so lucid and compelling, combining reason and revelation, science and spirit, is unheard of." So says the blurb on the back cover of *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, by Francis Collins and published in July by Free Press. It is a suitable acclamation for a remarkably good book on faith and science, which comes to publication providentially ahead of Richard Dawkins's autumn offering, *The God Delusion*. It is interesting that the book's first quotation is from Dawkins, against whose way of thinking ("that a belief in evolution demands atheism") Collins fires an immediate and robust broadside. The significance of the book has not been lost on the Sunday Times (June 11th) and Nature (July 13th), both of which publications have commented on its arrival with enthusiasm.

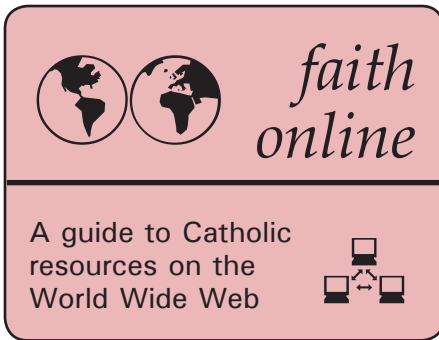
Dr Francis Collins is a prominent geneticist, who heads the U.S. National Human Genome Research Institute, which led the international Human Genome Project to unravel the whole of human DNA. In June 2000 he and Craig Venter of the rival commercial project were able jointly to announce the entire sequencing of the human genome. It is highly significant, then, that this scientist of world-wide prominence has now chosen to write a book debunking the myth, often centring on Darwinian evolution, that faith and science are in irreconcilable conflict. Collins, not overly religious as a child or young adult, came to a strong Christian faith later in life, as a doctor, and he

recounts this conversion, and what led to it in his professional career. As a genetic scientist, he has marvelled ever more at the beauty of creation, manifested particularly in the human DNA sequence. He is quoted as saying, "When you have for the first time in front of you this 3.1-billion-letter instruction book that conveys all kinds of information and all kinds of mystery about humankind, you can't survey that, going through page after page, without a sense of awe. I can't help but look at those pages and have a vague sense that this is giving me a glimpse of God's mind."

Collins is very keen in his book to explain how a number of other viewpoints with regard to the faith-science debate are untenable. He first tackles atheism and agnosticism, giving special attention to rebutting Richard Dawkins' arguments for considering religious faith as anti-rational. The second option that he dispels is 'creationism,' or, more precisely, 'young-earth creationism,' that is, a literal reading of Genesis which sees all of the material universe coming into being, complete, in six days of twenty-four hours' duration. He mounts an impassioned appeal to advocates of young-earth creationism, urging them to see that abandoning an ultra-literal reading of Genesis and embracing the body of scientific evidence in favour of cosmological and biological evolution need not threaten in any degree their faith in the Creator. The third option that, again, he argues against most vigorously is the so-called Intelligent-Design proposal. Discussing at length three biological structures that ID supporters cite as evidence of 'irreducible complexity' (and therefore the need, they say, for divine intervention), Collins shows how ID remains no more than a modern version of a 'god of the gaps' hypothesis, which posits a "clumsy Creator, having to intervene at regular intervals to fix the inadequacies of His own initial plan for generating the complexity of life" and therefore

completely unsatisfactory. Elsewhere in his book, Collins explains why Stephen Jay Gould's idea of science and faith avoiding conflict by staying out of each other's way—his so-called "non-overlapping magisteria"—is unacceptable too, since it "inspires internal conflict, and deprives people of the chance to embrace either science or spirituality in a fully realized way." Collins adopts a fourth option: "the possibility of a richly satisfying harmony between the scientific and spiritual world views". His idea is essentially 'theistic evolution'—belief that God has established evolution as the mechanism by which He has introduced complexity and diversity into the biological sphere of life on earth. Collins coins his own term for this idea: 'BioLogos', a clumsy term, perhaps, but intended to express the harmony between the biology and the idea of Creation by the Word of God.

He addresses the issue of the so-called 'randomness' of genetic mutation in the Darwinian evolutionary process—as we have also in previous editions of this column and in our November 2005 editorial. But he seems to trip himself up here. He asserts that since we do not know the future, "evolution could appear to be driven by chance, but from God's perspective (outside of space and time) the outcome would be entirely specified.... Thus, God could be completely and intimately involved in the creation of all species, while from our perspective, limited as it is by the tyranny of linear time, this would appear a random and undirected process" (ch. 10). Once again we would say that the idea of any lack of 'entire specification'—that is a lack of intrinsic intelligibility in matter—is flawed. The concept of 'the future' arises from the *contingency* of created existence—it implies that material entities do not contain within themselves the realisation of their own potential— but it does not mean fundamental unintelligibility.



The links to all the websites mentioned in Faith Online are included in the Faith Website at www.faith.org.uk

A CATHOLIC WRITER FOR OUR TIMES

"In all my work I seek to contribute to the restoration of Christian culture." Michael D. O'Brien is the best-selling Canadian author of Father Elijah. As well as a novelist, he is also an essayist and painter.

There is a gallery of his unusual artwork which is inspired by his faith (see for example 'St Joachim and St Joseph' or 'the martyrdom of St Thomas'). His articles reveal him to be a writer of power and sensitivity and a fighter for the orthodox Catholic vision.

www.studiobrien.com

EVANGELISING AMERICAN STUDENTS

The Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) has grown rapidly since its foundation in 1998 into a highly successful means of forming Catholic undergraduates. Teams of 4 students give up two years as apostles on campus.

They work through bible studies, leadership training and one-to-one discipleship. There are also summer camps. As Monsignor Swetland writes: "Their contagious dedication to excellence and dynamic orthodoxy is providing the atmosphere where future leaders... sanctify their work through a Christ-centred world view."

www.focusonline.org

SOCIETY OF CATHOLIC ARTISTS

This has grown from the Guild of Catholic Artists, founded on the centenary of Catholic Emancipation in 1929. It includes both amateur and professional artists and craftsmen who put their work at the service of the Church. Some of the artists on the index provide a small gallery of work; it would surely be helpful to increase this.

www.catholicartists.co.uk

CHARTING THE LIFE OF THE UNBORN

An interactive online tutorial on human development. At around 8 weeks, all essential external and internal structures are complete. At 10 weeks, the baby can make sounds, and at 18 weeks a girl baby's ovaries already contain all the eggs she will have for her entire life.

Such knowledge may well be familiar to many readers and on the other hand it may carry a terrible burden of realisation for others who read it, yet it can only further bolster the pro-life cause.

www.visembryo.com

ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH CONTEMPLATIVES

Approved in 1994, it provides a directory of women contemplatives, giving a flavour of each charism.
www.abc.mydom.co.uk

C.S. LEWIS ONLINE

Articles, quotes and interviews on the man from a new Californian organization.
www.lewissociety.org

THE CONFRATERNITY OF PENITENTS

Fulfilling the Catholic Church's Call to Penance and Repentance in the modern world.
www.penitents.org

FILM REVIEWS FOR CATHOLICS

Appreciation, information and criticism informed by faith
www.decentfilms.com

HAVE WE GOT COMPETITION!?

Have a look at the magazine for the Catholic diocese of Lansing, Ottawa.
www.faithmag.com