

# faith

March and April 2015  
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Bishop John Keenan of Paisley

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Stan Wocial

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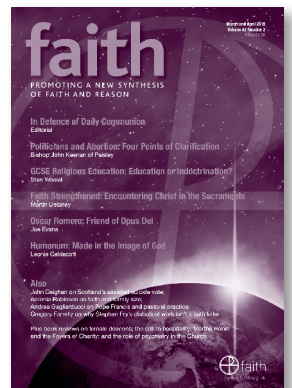
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# faith

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# In Defence of Frequent Communion

## Editorial

**“This supernatural bread and this consecrated chalice are for the health and salvation of mankind”** *St Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, third century*

Follow the money. The movie *Fifty Shades of Grey* grossed \$76m in its opening weekend. That was in the United States alone. In 56 other countries, including the United Kingdom, it also topped the box office charts. The film is produced by Universal Pictures. Universal is owned by Comcast, the largest broadcasting and cable company in the world by revenue. Last year the firm’s chief executive, Brian Roberts, received a pay packet worth nearly \$41m.

What’s the lesson? That for many big corporations the bottom line is the bottom line. Nothing more. Nothing else. As Pope Francis says in his robust critique of modern-day political economy, “unbridled capitalism” often promotes a “logic of profit at any cost” and “exploitation without looking at the person”. This is most obvious in the recent rise and rise of pornography, an “industry” that now grosses an estimated \$97bn a year worldwide.

There was a time when a family could metaphorically and literally bolt the front door to shelter from such corrosive cultural crosswinds. No longer. Thanks to smartphones, laptops and tablets, amoral big businesses can reach you and your family whenever and wherever they want. Pursuing sanctity in modern society can, for many, be akin to keeping clean in a dustbin.

So where is our hope? As ever, our hope is in the Lord. And where is the Lord to be found? He is to be found in the Eucharist. And when is He to be found there? Every day if we are suitably disposed to receive Him. Aye, but there’s the rub. All the historically significant spiritual writers who advocate frequent communion – one only has to think of the great St Francis de Sales in the late 16th and early 17th century – also stress the necessity for frequent confession and serious preparation.

Thus the problems that are sometimes associated with frequent communion – laxity and irreverence – must be resolved not at the altar rails but in the confessional box. It is there that we should suitably prepare ourselves to receive Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. As St Paul warns the Church of Corinth: “For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself.”

As Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York told the 2012 Synod of Bishops on New Evangelisation: “The primary sacrament of the New Evangelisation is the sacrament of penance.” The straight-talking American prelate lamented the fact that while the Second Vatican Council had “called for a renewal of the sacrament of penance”, what emerged “sadly, in many places, was the disappearance of the sacrament”. Indeed, he recalled, the conclusion of the Council in 1965

was followed by a series of demands for the “reform of structures, systems, institutions and people other than ourselves” – when, all along, the answer to the question “What’s wrong with the world today?” is, as Chesterton put it, “I am.”

Underlying all of this, of course, is the need for better catechesis. We can’t love what we don’t know. After several generations of seemingly fruitless lamentations, the firm evidence from across the Western world is that the religious instruction of the young, and the not so young, is improving. The situation is not entirely without concern – witness the article by Stan Wocial on p4 – but now numerous examples can be found in Scotland, Ireland, the United States, Canada, England, Australia and elsewhere where dioceses are meeting this challenge with orthodoxy and imagination.

*“Pursuing sanctity in modern society can, for many, be akin to pursuing cleanliness in a dustbin”*


Which brings us back to the source and summit of any effort to catechise and re-evangelise: the Eucharist. It is perhaps worth re-reading the words of the Council of Trent regarding the frequent reception of Holy Communion:

*The Holy Council wishes indeed that at each Mass the faithful who are present should communicate, not only in spiritual desire, but sacramentally, by the actual reception of the Eucharist.*

It was this passage that Pope Saint Pius X took as his mandate in his 1905 document on the frequent and daily reception of Holy Communion, *Sacra Tridentina*:

*These words declare plainly enough the wish of the Church that all Christians should be daily nourished by this heavenly banquet and should derive therefrom more abundant fruit for their sanctification.*

The saintly Pius anticipated the cultural tumult of the modern age and the necessity for survival of being close to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Hence he also lowered the age at which young people would make their First Holy Communion.

The frequent reception of Our Lord in the Eucharist is a pious practice which should be widely recommended. For anybody aspiring to be a saint in the modern world it is nigh-on a necessity. 



# Politicians and Abortion: Four Points of Clarification

*By Bishop John Keenan of Paisley*

## The Unborn Child is a Human Being

If you accept this simple seven-word statement then certain personal and public consequences inevitably flow from it. That is true for all of us. Politicians included.

Science tells us that the unborn child is a human being. Take a look at the photograph on the right. That is the face of a child in the womb. Only three months old and yet his or her tiny face tells us all we need to know; it is the face of one of us! Indeed, if this little one is not human then no one is human.

Medicine tells us that the unborn child is a human being. From the day of our conception, our unique DNA and genetic information are set down. Within our first month of life our hearts are beating with our own blood. We have eyes, ears and a tongue. Our arms and legs are beginning to push out.

Within two months our brain is working. Our teeth are growing and we are swallowing. Our eyelids have formed. Already we look just like a miniature baby. There are still seven months to go before we are born but we are already, undeniably, a human being.

There is no getting away from it; the unborn child is a human being and part of the human family. Our Christian faith merely confirms these factual realities.

## It is Never Justified to Take the Life of an Innocent Human Being

Once you accept the fact of the humanity of the unborn, certain logical consequences flow. First, you cannot take their lives – just as you are not permitted to take the life of any innocent human being.

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to life”. This applies to every member of the human family. Not just those of us outside the womb.

## Politicians are Not Morally Permitted to be Pro-abortion

It is to be applauded that politicians feel obliged to follow their conscience rather than their party on serious ethical matters. However, they must also develop a conscience which is fully informed.



**In January the Leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Jim Murphy MP, declared himself to be both Catholic and pro-abortion. In response, his local bishop felt compelled to give the following clarification.**

In the case of the unborn child, this should take account of scientific and medical fact. The question for the conscience of a politician, then, is as previously posed; is the unborn child a human being and part of the human family?

A politician who says “no” is taking flight from both scientific fact and common sense. A politician who says “yes” is duty-bound to protect the unborn as an unavoidable legislative duty. No motive whatsoever can override this duty or free politicians from it.

So the politician who votes in favour of abortion really does formally co-operate in a very serious ethical offence: the killing of innocent human beings who are part of our human family.

## Catholic Politicians are also Not Permitted to be Pro-abortion

Catholic politicians are no exception to this universal ethical duty. The teaching of the Catholic

Church does not impose any extra duties upon them. It merely reminds them of the simple facts outlined above; that the unborn child is a human being and part of the human family.

“A politician who says No to the question ‘Is the unborn child a human being and part of the human family?’ is taking flight from both scientific fact and common sense”

The Church also asks all politicians – Catholics included – to keep this reality before their eyes and close to their heart as they undertake their democratic duties with a view to upholding the common good of all within our community.

## Conclusion

These four points above needed clarification. Maybe I could end with a fifth. I am convinced that sometime in the 21st century the pro-life cause will win this epochal battle for the soul of humanity, pro-abortion laws will be consigned to the dustbin of history, the unborn will again be free to live their lives to the full, and those who stood for them and were their voice when they were voiceless will be remembered as the heroes of the new millennium.

# GCSE Religious Education – Education or Indoctrination? *By Stan Wocial*

Can Catholic parents presume that Catholic schools will teach their children the Catholic faith? Concerned that his two daughters were not receiving such an education, Stan Wocial set out to discover the truth about GCSE RE.

This is what he found.

*"I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of elementary textbooks."*

CS Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

In conclusion to an article in this magazine on GCSE religious studies (*Faith*, Nov/Dec 2011), Fr Hugh MacKenzie reiterated the poor state of Catholic schools in terms of passing on the faith and especially their general inability to present adequately the Church's teaching on sexual morality. He suggested that one response might be for dioceses to produce authentically Catholic text books to act as a primary resource for teachers, as long as they did not "compromise the principles and syllabuses of public examining boards". Given the current Ofqual subject criteria and exam board specifications, there is no need for these principles and syllabuses to be compromised.

There is an understandable secular bias to the exam board specifications related to controversial issues. They reflect the attitudes of society as a whole, while conforming to political requirements on topics such as equality and discrimination. Although the Ofqual subject criteria are necessarily generalised, the exam boards translated them into a concrete syllabus with specific content which contains a degree of bias and unacknowledged assumptions. However, the Roman Catholic module exam questions almost invariably allow the Catholic view to be stated; therefore it is important to teach a robust apologetic for the Catholic world view, while also critically presenting the opposing arguments of contemporary society and liberal Christianity.

## The Value-Neutral Approach

The Ofqual requirement for learners to "reflect on and develop their own values, opinions and attitudes in light of their learning" has been interpreted as having to present both sides of an argument without appearing to favour either side. However, this apparent neutrality can also be a form of indoctrination into relativism. An honest apologetic that presents rational arguments for a particular religious world view is less likely to indoctrinate than a superficially neutral presentation that contains hidden assumptions and bias. A student can rationally engage with the former and be free to

agree or disagree, but he or she may easily be deceived by the latter.

This is one of the hardest points to convey to those who just look at the content of the text books. It is natural to take the books at face value and consider the balance of "facts" they contain. What can be wrong with that? Surely the students must be presented with both sides of the argument? It is true that Catholic students need to be faced with the beliefs and arguments of those opposed to Church teaching. However, it is essential that they are given a thorough grounding in what the Church teaches and especially the reasons why it does so and with what authority.

In the official course books, any social norms which are opposed to Catholic moral teaching are treated as "controversial" and presented with a range of views for and against. The presentation of each viewpoint may have varying degrees of bias, but the fact that each viewpoint is presented uncritically leaves it without any intrinsic moral value beyond the impact it has on the emotions of the student. The act of presenting different Christian views, for and against, subconsciously tells the student that it is acceptable to choose whichever they prefer since they are all "Christian" views. On the topic of abortion, this approach is intrinsically pro-choice, because you are pro-choice, even if you are personally pro-life, so long as you don't impose your beliefs on others.

There is also a strong tendency to equate what is legal with what is moral. For example, the official course books feature an uncritical presentation of the 1967 Abortion Act. This in itself sends a pro-abortion message, even though it is just a factual presentation of the conditions for a legal abortion. There is no suggestion that some people believe the Act should be repealed; at most there is reference to the debates about lowering the age limit, since some babies could survive if delivered before 24 weeks. Thus the apparently balanced presentation of abortion is not neutral at all, but profoundly pro-abortion.

Other life-related issues such as euthanasia, artificial insemination, IVF and surrogacy are all presented as controversial issues with widely differing opinions among Christians. The situation is similar for most aspects of human sexuality, including sex before marriage, contraception, homosexuality, cohabitation, civil partnerships and divorce. Many of these are reinforced by group activities based on values clarification, which tend towards rejecting external moral restrictions and setting up the individual as the judge of what is right and wrong for them. A typical question might be:

*What do you think a Christian should think about when deciding whether abortion is wrong or right?*

The Ofqual requirement to teach Catholicism in the context of the beliefs and practices of other Christian denominations further undermines the presentation of Catholic teaching in



## “Catholic moral teaching is not just for Catholics: it flows from a proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”

the official course books, especially when other denominations concur with secular society against the Catholic position.

### Unquestioned Secular Values

While the official course books treat topics like abortion and euthanasia as controversial issues for which there is no definitive judgement of right or wrong, they all have a range of topics which are presented as moral absolutes. These include opposition to prejudice or discrimination against anyone based on age, religious belief, disability, gender, race or sexual orientation; promotion of equality and social cohesion; opposition to climate change and the obligation to protect the environment.

The list above is intended to make the point that the course books endorse several unquestioned moral commandments and explore how to put them into practice. This is not to question their merit, although several are debatable, but to emphasise that contemporary culture, as influenced by successive governments and the mainstream media, has its own set of moral absolutes, usually underpinned by legislation.

In effect, the course books map out areas of commonality and division between secular society and the Catholic faith. All of them use the current values of secular society as the point of reference against which to present the moral teachings of the Catholic faith. Values that are held in common are treated as moral absolutes; values that are opposed by certain Christians are presented as controversial, and a neutral stance is adopted regarding which view is right or wrong. This approach is especially poisonous when examples are given of Christian views on both sides of the argument, as this leaves the impression that you can be a Catholic and support either side, because Catholics are Christians.

### A Catholic Approach

Nothing in the GCSE religious studies subject criteria explicitly mandates a secular perspective, so it would seem reasonable to suggest that authentically Catholic course materials could be produced using the Catholic world view as the point of reference rather than the values of secular society. For example, abortion would be treated as an absolute moral evil; the reasons supporting that belief would be presented, while reference would be made to those who support abortion and their arguments critically appraised. Such a resource would be specifically for Catholics, but anyone could use it to follow the arguments given and be free to agree or disagree.

Producing an independent Catholic text book to support GCSE religious studies on contemporary issues would be a difficult and politically sensitive undertaking. However, the 2012 *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* (3-19) from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales strongly encourages the use of apologetics to support Catholic students in exams. There would appear to be a clear

opportunity for a Catholic publisher to provide materials to address this requirement identified by the bishops of England and Wales. For example, there are CTS booklets which already cover many of the topics and could be used as a resource for teachers. The content of the booklets could be consolidated into a format that more closely matches specific course specifications, such as the popular Edexcel Unit 3, and supplemented with topic summaries, sample questions and exam tips, as in the current course books.

The internet offers the possibility of a low-cost alternative to printed material. It also provides an opportunity to present an in-depth critique of the secular course material, which would not be viable any other way. There is a need to draw attention to the bias and hidden assumptions contained in the text books – and not just in religious studies, but in subjects across the curriculum where political indoctrination is taking place. Examples include misinformation regarding the alleged danger of overpopulation in geography; a negative presentation of the medieval period and the role of the Church in history; and the various attempts to promote sexual licence and undermine the family under the guise of sexual health education. The internet also provides the opportunity to set up a religious studies revision notes website; this could present a Catholic apologetic in an easily accessible form, while also providing a critique of the various counter-arguments presented in the course material.

### Not Just for Catholics

Catholic moral teaching is not just for Catholics. It flows from a proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It corresponds to the deepest stirrings of the human heart and offers guidance for genuine growth in holiness and virtue. Such terms may be alien to the secular mindset, but they fit perfectly with the aims of the current Ofqual subject criteria in religious studies, which are to enable students to engage with religious beliefs intellectually and respond personally, and to enhance their spiritual and moral development.

Catholic schools take a risk in covering moral and philosophical issues at GCSE, since they are constrained by the secular agenda. Nevertheless, it is vital to accept the challenge of teaching the controversial aspects of the Catholic faith, while it is still legal to do so. The Catholic faith needs to be handed on in its fullness and integrity, without compromising under the pressure to conform to the standards of contemporary secularism. Catholic moral teaching is not an arbitrary moralistic code, but an integrated expression of what it means to be fully human, as revealed in Christ. It presupposes a sound formation in the fullness of the Catholic faith, nourished by the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. ✚

*Stan Wocial is a recent MA graduate in pastoral and educational studies (apologetics) from the Maryvale Institute. He has been married to Patricia for 21 years. They have two teenage daughters.*

# Faith Strengthened: Encountering Christ in the Sacraments

By Martin Delaney

We began this series of talks by considering the text of St Paul's letter to the Romans (16:25), in which he speaks of the "revelation of a great mystery, hidden from endless ages". Together with the opening line of the Letter to the Hebrews ("In ancient times God spoke to man through prophets and in varied ways, but now he speaks through Christ, His Son..."), as well as many other biblical texts, this passage reveals to us a startling truth. In Christ, God desires to communicate with us: He desires to enter into a relationship with us!

It can be difficult enough for us to accept this in our own life. How could God, who made the whole universe, be interested in me? When we do accept it, however, we begin to understand that it follows that God does not desire to enter into a relationship with one single human being, but with the whole of humanity. This is the meaning of the Church: she is the privileged place where God calls all of humanity together and speaks to them. She is also the place where God's message can be interpreted authentically, allowing a genuine dialogue, a genuine relationship, to take place.

Everything that we have said so far presupposes a fundamental idea. If God desires to speak to human beings, he must do so in such a way that he can be understood. In other words, God must communicate with humanity in a way which respects how we have been created. There would otherwise be no point even attempting to communicate; it would be like speaking a different language and expecting to be understood. It is also important to note that this is not a case of human beings imposing any necessity upon God. God, after all, has created us as we are and, in doing so, has imposed the conditions upon Himself.

The question we must now ask, then, is this: how has God created us? The simple answer, of course, is that He has created us body and soul; He has given us both a material and a spiritual component. This composition, in fact, defines man and his place within the world. He is neither pure spirit, like God and the angels, nor pure matter, like the animals and plants. He is a composition of both. For this reason, all human communication takes place in a way that respects this spiritual and material composition. The physical parts of that communication between humans would be the voice, physical gestures, writing etc. The spiritual part would be the idea which is being communicated. The ultimate goal of any communication is for that idea to be transmitted from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the listener. For this to take place, however, the physical means is absolutely necessary.

Over 200 students gathered for the Faith Winter Session held at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire in December 2014. Inspired by the works of Pope Francis, the theme of the three-day conference was "The Joy of the Gospel: Proclaiming Christ with Courage and Compassion". The first talk was given by a young Scottish priest, Fr Martin Delaney, who explored the joy of a life rooted in the sacraments.

And so it is with God. When God desires to communicate with us, He must do so in such a way as to convey the (spiritual) idea by a physical means. In this we can begin to see the meaning of the Incarnation. God takes upon Himself a human nature so that he can communicate to us "the mystery hidden from endless ages". The Second Vatican Council tells us that, in His earthly life, Jesus "manifested his Father and himself by deeds and words" (*Dei Verbum* 17).

After Christ's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, the Church, which has its origins in the Trinity itself (cf *Dominum et Vivificantem*), is

sanctified through the sending of the Spirit in order that she can be "Christ's continuing presence in the world". This means that the "revelation of the mystery hidden from endless ages" which had taken place in the Incarnation of Christ continues to occur through the "deeds and words" of the Church. In other words, as the continuing presence of Christ in the world, the Church continues to communicate the mystery of God's love and mercy, not only to a specific group of people (in time and space), but to the whole of humanity (cf *Lumen Gentium*).

It stands to reason, given all that has been said already, that this communication too would require to have both a material and spiritual dimension if it is to be effective. The principal means which the Church uses to communicate this mystery to the world are her seven sacraments. It can not be repeated too often that the Church and the sacraments are not a novelty within the Christian experience. Along with the Incarnation, they have always been an essential part of God's plan to communicate His great mystery to the whole of humanity.

Through the celebration of the sacraments, we are able to have a genuine encounter with Christ. In the classical definition, the sacraments are "outward signs of inward grace". They have, therefore, an outward, physical part (the rite) and an inward, spiritual part (the communication of grace, the encounter with Christ Himself). These material and spiritual parts are inseparable because the "outward sign" actually causes the "inward grace" to be communicated (just as the voice causes the idea to be conveyed). These signs are not arbitrary. They are in some way related to the meaning of the specific grace communicated in the sacraments.

Washing in water, for example, is the outward sign of the sacrament of baptism. This outward sign is easily linked to the meaning of that sacrament, which brings about a cleansing from original sin and the giving of new life. The fact that the sign is often constituted by a natural substance, such as water



## “The beautiful passage about the Samaritan woman at the well reveals to us what happens in our own life when we truly encounter Christ”

or oil, points to the goodness of God’s creation. In total, there are seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, holy orders, marriage, and the sacrament of the sick.

It must be stressed that these sacraments are not arbitrary inventions on the part of the Church. Rather, each of them is, in its own way, the continuation of Christ’s presence and ministry in the world. We would not require an exhaustive knowledge of the New Testament to call to mind occasions in which we see Christ communicating the mystery through deeds and words in ways which remind us immediately of the sacraments. We can think of Jesus healing and strengthening (eg Jn 5), forgiving (Jn 8), as well as sending out and calling (Lk 5). And, of course, we think of the great Paschal Mystery itself, brought to completion through Christ’s salvific Death and Resurrection. All of these moments are represented in the seven sacraments. This allows us to appreciate clearly that the sacraments truly are the principal means by which the Church continues Christ’s own mission in the world.

“The sacraments are an essential part of God’s plan to communicate His great mystery to the whole of humanity”

In all of this talk of the Church as “Christ’s continuing presence in the world”, we cannot be blind to the many faults which we can often perceive in the Church, in her ministers and in her members. While it is certainly true that we, as members of the Church, often fail to live up to our primary vocation to be the presence of Christ in the world, we also recognise that the Church is of divine institution. In other words, the Church is first and foremost the “body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27). In baptism, we are united to that body and become part of it. While we might fail in our calling, Christ always remains as the “head”, and so he guarantees that the Church is always his presence in the world. For that reason, the celebration of a sacrament always results in an encounter with Christ, if the recipient is well disposed, because the encounter itself does not depend on the holiness of the minister (usually the priest).

Thus far, we have attempted to justify the claim that the seven sacraments of the Church constitute an encounter between the recipient and the person of Christ. If this is so, then it should follow that the effects of the sacrament are the same as the effects of an encounter with Christ. To illustrate this point, we shall briefly consider what is surely one of the most eloquent descriptions of such an encounter: Jesus’s meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (Jn 4). (Much of my own appreciation of this passage comes from reading Jean Vanier’s book *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*.)

Unlike the other women, the Samaritan woman approaches the well at the hottest time of the day. She does this to avoid

the other women who come in the morning, when it is cool. She is clearly an outcast within her own community and she feels ashamed. She is surprised to find Jesus at the well at the same time. Not only is he a man, but he is also a Jew, with whom Samaritans do not get along. She ignores him. He, on the other hand, is the first to speak to her. He engages her in a conversation. He begins, so to speak, a relationship with her. After what we might describe as some light-hearted banter, Jesus reveals the source of her shame. “Go,” he says, “and bring your husband”. She is forced to reply: “I have no husband.” Then we find out about her history of broken relationships. This woman has sought time and again to be loved and affirmed by a man. On each occasion she has been abandoned and rejected. Her heart is truly broken.

In Christ, however, she meets a man like no other: the perfect, sinless one. After this encounter, she is strengthened, healed, restored to her community. She runs to those whom she had been avoiding only a short time before and declares: “Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Christ?” This beautiful passage reveals to us what happens in our own life when we truly have an encounter with Christ. All of us, in different ways, share in this Samaritan woman’s history of brokenness, as each of us has sought love and affirmation in human relationships. Christ is the only one who is truly able to love us unconditionally and so provide the security that we need to face the reality of our own selves and even become missionaries, proclaiming him to others.

The experience described in this Gospel passage can also be described in more technical terms by a word which we hear used frequently, but perhaps rarely stop to consider its meaning. That word is salvation (from the Latin *salus*), and it has two closely related meanings. The first has to do with being saved from our sin. To understand this more deeply, we must return to the book of Genesis, where the tragedy of human sin is presented to us. The serpent tells Eve that upon eating the apple, she and Adam will be “like God”. But they were created “in God’s image and likeness” – they were already like God! In their desire to overreach themselves, they disfigure that image of God which they bear within themselves. That is the real tragedy of sin. Only through a genuine encounter with God can fallen humanity rediscover that image, and so be restored to its likeness to God. Through an encounter with Christ, then, and so through the sacraments, man can be restored to the image of God and so saved from his sinfulness.

The second meaning of salvation has to do with health and well-being. Salvation in this context means the fullness of life. This can be clearly seen in the story of the Samaritan woman, as she is restored not only to a relationship with God through her encounter with Christ, but also to a relationship with her community. She comes to experience the fullness of life, and this is true also of the encounter with Christ which takes place in the sacraments. At first glance, it might seem that we are making grandiose claims for these sacramental rites. But if

## Faith Strengthened: Encountering Christ in the Sacraments

continued

we follow the argument, we can see that this makes absolute sense. God desires to communicate with us so that we might experience his love and salvation. These rites are the effective means by which men and women from the furthest ends of the earth are able to experience this encounter. Rather than becoming sceptical, we should marvel that the instances we can so easily take for granted (receiving communion, for example) actually bring us to such a close relationship with God in Christ!

“It is above all because the sacraments are a personal encounter with Christ that we are able to witness authentically and credibly to the person and mission of Jesus”

Among the seven sacraments, there are those which can be received only once. These are baptism, confirmation and holy orders, and they are said to confer a character (or seal) on the recipient. This means that they cause a change in the person's soul which, in some way, disposes them to receive a certain grace (or graces) throughout their life.

Of the four remaining sacraments, two are received regularly throughout life and are intimately connected; these are penance and the Eucharist. These two sacraments can be understood as closely linked to the two-fold meaning of salvation which we have already considered – penance leading to the forgiveness of sin committed after baptism, and the Eucharist leading to the fullness of God's own life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that the sacraments

also reflect the stages of our spiritual life. Throughout our life, we need to encounter Christ in different ways at particular times. At the outset of our relationship with Christ through the Church, we receive baptism. Throughout our life we are forgiven and nourished day to day in the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. As we mature, we receive the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit in confirmation; these gifts ready us to bear witness to Christ in the world as full members of his body, the Church. As we settle upon a state in life, some of us will receive holy orders or embark upon the sacrament of marriage. As we reach the end of our earthly lives, we will be prepared for death by the anointing of the sick.

These stages of our spiritual life mirror those of our physical life, and this further reinforces the fact that we all need to experience the ministry of Christ in all of its aspects throughout our whole life. These seven sacraments allow us to genuinely encounter Christ again and again, as we require for our good and the good of the Church.

To summarise, the sacraments are genuine and personal encounters with Christ. God speaks to us that we might experience his love and mercy (his salvation!), and be strengthened to proclaim joyfully the meaning of the Gospel. It is above all because the sacraments are a personal encounter with Christ that we are able to witness authentically and credibly to the person and mission of Jesus. Finally, we must always remember that though we may turn away from Jesus, he will always be ready to welcome us into a life-giving encounter through the Church and the sacraments. ✚

*Martin Delaney is a priest of the Diocese of Motherwell.*

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# The Joy of the Gospel

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# Oscar Romero: Friend of Opus Dei

By Joë Evans

Romero was a holy archbishop who witnessed to Christ in turbulent times in the Central American republic of El Salvador before a gunman took his life while he was celebrating Mass on 24 March 1980. Pope Francis has now unblocked his beatification process, which had been held up for “prudential reasons” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and a Vatican decree has declared that he was martyred in *odium fidei*, “out of hatred of the faith”. The beatification is expected sometime in 2015.

What many people do not know is how much spiritual support Archbishop Romero received from Opus Dei. Indeed, the day he was assassinated, he spent the morning at a recollection for priests organised by Opus Dei. Afterwards he was accompanied by Fernando Sáenz, a Spanish Opus Dei priest who was a close friend of his and who would later succeed him as archbishop, to the church where he was to celebrate Mass. Sáenz recalls: “They killed him during the offering of the bread and wine. It was, as it were, a marvellous external sign of his having offered his life for his people, for the poor, for justice, for peace.”

Opus Dei’s founder, Saint Josemaría Escrivá, and Archbishop Romero had known each other since 1955. In 1970 Romero came to Rome and had several conversations with the future saint. Escrivá was concerned that the Archbishop should have the opportunity to rest during his stay in Rome, because he realised the tense situation he faced back in El Salvador.

After Escrivá’s death, Romero was one of the first bishops to write a letter to the Holy See asking for his canonisation. In this letter he said that he was grateful for having known Msgr Escrivá personally “and for having received from him encouragement and strength to be faithful to the unchangeable doctrine of Christ and to serve the Holy Roman Church with apostolic zeal”.

And he continued: “Personally, I owe deep gratitude to the priests involved with the Work [Opus Dei], to whom I have entrusted with much satisfaction the spiritual direction of my own life and that of other priests.”

Sáenz says that Romero’s spirituality was nourished by the spirituality of Josemaría Escrivá and that he read *The Way*, Escrivá’s great spiritual classic, frequently.

In his *Diary* entry for 6 September 1979, Archbishop Romero wrote that Opus Dei “carries out a silent work of deep spirituality among professional people, university students and labourers... I think this is a mine of wealth for our Church—the holiness of the laity in their own profession.”

On hearing the announcement of the beatification, the current head of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, declared in a public statement: “I am sure that Archbishop Oscar Romero is going to be a deeply beloved saint. ... He was a pious person, detached from his own interests and dedicated to his people. His struggle for sanctity was palpable.”

The relationship between Romero and Opus Dei shows how empty “left” and “right” labels are when talking of spiritual realities, and particularly the Catholic Church. To depict Romero as a “left-wing” hero is to misunderstand profoundly the man and his mission. And such a “labelling” mentality would also misunderstand Opus Dei, whose members are as free as any other Catholic to follow whatever political option they consider best, as long as it does not contradict Church doctrine or moral teaching.

When Archbishop Oscar Romero is beatified sometime this year, it will not be because he is the “Liberation Theology” hero some have tried to make of him. Rather it will be because he was a man of God who proclaimed the gospel courageously, even at the cost of his life.

At a time when Marxist guerrillas were pitted against an authoritarian military regime, Romero sought a peaceful solution. And though his opposition to the junta finally caused his death (he was killed by a hit squad working for the government) and he was outspoken in the face of social injustice and political oppression, he knew that neither Marxism nor class struggle offered any solutions. In a homily in 1978, he said: “Since Marxist materialism destroys the Church’s transcendent meaning, a Marxist church would be not only self-destructive but senseless.”

As Filip Mazurczak explained in a *First Things* article in 2013, “Romero avoided the blinkered anti-communism of Argentina’s bishops and defended the vulnerable against military violence, seeing the hypocrisy of rulers who claim to be Christians yet persecute the people. At the same time, he understood the dangers of Marxism, condemning the Marxist guerrilla movement that terrorised El Salvador’s ruling class. Ernesto Cardenal, the Trappist monk who in the 1980s was a minister in Nicaragua’s Sandinista government, wrote that before becoming a Christian, one first must become a Marxist-Leninist. Romero rejected this: his personal hero was Pope Pius XI for resisting fascism and communism at the same time.”

Thus the future Blessed Oscar Romero can inspire us to be active in standing up for social justice, while reminding us that our efforts must be rooted in a deep relationship with Christ. To this end Romero found support from the spirit of Opus Dei, whose members will be among the first to seek his intercession in their own efforts to mould society according to Christian values. ✚

*Fr Joseph Evans, a priest of Opus Dei, is Catholic chaplain to King’s College London.*





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# Assisted Suicide

**Members of the Scottish Parliament will vote on whether to legalise assisted suicide in May. John Deighan now explains why it's crucial for the common good of society that Holyrood's parliamentarians vote against the proposal.**

"If you really, really want something then that should suffice for justifying it." That pretty much summarises the position of the advocates for assisted suicide. The Scottish Parliament is considering a bill which would legalise those with a "life-limiting condition" having assistance in killing themselves. The assistance would be provided by the proposed new post of a suicide facilitator. The Humanist Society Scotland has already indicated that it has members eager to fulfil the role. It would require a doctor to agree that a patient met the requirements of the bill before they are helped to die. The so-called safeguards include the approval of a second doctor and thus the process for ending a human life could very quickly be further embedded in our society.

England and Wales are facing similar proposals that are being pushed by Lord Falconer. Inevitably, we have all been subjected to the hard sell by the BBC and others, who have used the cases of people such as Tony Nicklinson, Debbie Purdy, Kay Gilderdale, Terry Pratchett, Anne Turner, Diane Pretty to promote their agenda. So unstinting has been the effort to portray as virtuous the ending of the lives of the weak that it brings to mind Pope Benedict's words to the College of Cardinals in 2012: "We see how evil wants to dominate the world," he said, and how it uses cruelty and violence, but also how it "masks itself with good and, precisely in this way, destroys the moral foundations of society."

The evidence delivered to the Scottish Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the bill has emphatically exposed the dangers of assisted suicide. Yet media coverage has poorly reflected that fact. Public opinion polls show that the majority would favour laws that permitted assisted suicide. Troublingly, this majority includes many who describe themselves as Catholic. Some hope was offered in a more sophisticated poll commissioned by Christian Action Research and Education, which invited respondents to consider five arguments against assisted suicide to see if these changed their views.

Different concerns chime with different people, but cumulatively the considerations resulted in support for legalisation dropping to 43 per cent. Ignorance is indeed our enemy, and we face the task of informing a public hindered by media that typically favour anything perceived as "respecting autonomy". But the belief in absolute autonomy is quickly shown to be ill-founded. The impossibility of detecting coercion is one factor. In Oregon, where assisted suicide has been legal since 1994, families have been known to coach elderly relatives how to ask for

help ending their lives, especially when an inheritance is at stake. The Scottish Parliament heard evidence of one family who appeared very attentive to their elderly relative but suddenly lost all interest when the lady concerned reached an age at which her insurance policy would no longer pay out on her death.

Laws typically aim to protect citizens from those who might do them harm. Assisted suicide laws, however, enable those who are determined to die to have help to do so, while at the same time creating a system by which people can be ushered towards their death, not through their own choice but because circumstances push them in that direction. Dr Sally Witcher of Inclusion Scotland, a disability rights group, argued that "coercion is unlikely to take the form of somebody hitting somebody else over the head with a blunt object – that is not what happens.

It is much more indirect than that; it is about the messages from the culture that surrounds us. We are part of that and we absorb the messages about our life being worth less, about being scroungers and all the rest of it. We absorb messages about being a burden on the taxpayer. We could say that that is not coercion, but there is that pressure and culture, alongside the fear of becoming disabled." Coercion can take countless subtle forms, but a good palliative care specialist understands that expressing a wish to die is often a proxy for asking: "Do you care about me? Am I worth anything?" Getting the wrong response can be what pushes a person to depression and despair. We know too that depression is a key contributor to suicidal thoughts. Implicitly, we know that suicide is wrong. Yet we are in danger of creating a system whereby we would be saying to some people that they are mistaken in wanting to die while affirming that others are making the right choice and we'll help them.

It has taken a considerable effort to dull the natural abhorrence of suicide to the extent that people now talk about it being legal to commit suicide and argue for a right to suicide. This loses sight of why an assisted suicide act was passed in Westminster in 1961 which removed the criminal punishment for those who attempted suicide. Far from accepting the rightfulness of the choice, the act was grounded in a compassionate recognition that those who attempted suicide needed help rather than being dragged through the courts to end in jail. Why else did the Suicide Act include a hefty sentence almost on a par with homicide for those who assisted suicide?

No doubt the efforts to make suicide acceptable are a symptom of the culture of death, which has grown with individualism. As social bonds and structures weaken, so too do the support structures that give us meaning for living and also the reason for caring. Radical autonomy, to the extent of insisting that I can dispose of my life, is part of a vision of human life in which we exist for ourselves and our



**“Expressing a wish to die is often a proxy for asking: ‘Do you care about me? Am I worth anything?’”**

personal enjoyment. When the enjoyment apparently falls below an acceptable level, what is the point of hanging around? Or so goes the theory.

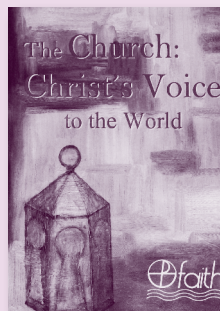
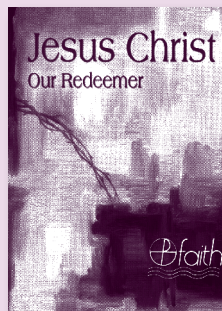
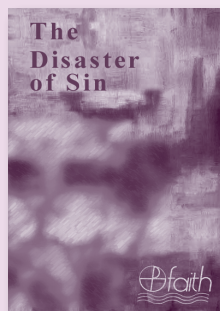
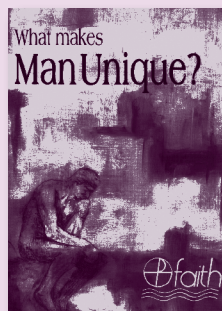
Attempts to legalise assisted suicide can perhaps be forestalled for the moment because politicians are still considering the arguments. Meanwhile, the scale of the damage and destruction caused by legalisation is evident in Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, where the pool of candidates for death continues to grow and the reasons for requesting it include simply being tired of living. But there are politicians who, as part of a powerful, articulate, highly autonomous cohort, see the attractions of assisted

suicide for themselves and thus become increasingly deaf to the concerns of the weak, who are much more likely to end up victims of unwanted assisted suicide in ways that the strong can never imagine will happen to them.

Let us hope that they remain in the minority, but to ensure they do will require an effort to build a culture that once more esteems every human life. The crucial vote on assisted suicide in the Scottish Parliament is likely to be in the first week of May. ☩

*John Deighan is the parliamentary officer for the Bishops Conference of Scotland*

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# Breeding Like Rabbits? Faith and Family Size

A late starter at marriage and motherhood, I used to desperately wish for a large family. What a “large family” means for someone with one sibling is of a rather different magnitude than for someone who grew up in a family with eight or nine or 10 children. I prayed fervently to be blessed with what for me seemed like a large family. “Dear Lord,” I pleaded, “please can I have four children before I’m 40.” Really. That’s what I prayed with my firstborn son in my arms. I was 33.

God has a funny way about these things. I had a second child, then a miscarriage, then a third child, and then, when I was 39, the fourth. Two more pregnancies at 40 and 42 never made it beyond the start of the second trimester, and now at 45 I can feel a bit more serene about it all. I see the futility of making any assumptions about fertility, about wishing for any more than God has given, and I can shake my head in wonder at the audacity of the prayers of that first-time mother. I have four children here on earth and three in Our Lady’s care.

One of the first things that I learnt as a trainee breastfeeding counsellor was never to judge a woman’s mothering experience on first impressions. An older woman presenting with a newborn might be a first-time mother, or she might be rejoicing in the blessing of a “blackberry chick” – an unexpected babe late in life, after older children have left home. A mother with one baby may have had a previous child who died, or may have had a series of miscarriages before this first live-born baby. Judging a mother by what we see can be immensely deceptive.

The same goes for family size. Pope Francis’s much misquoted rabbit comment has generated much discussion about the “right” family size for a “modern” Catholic family, but to discuss what a family’s size should be is to miss the point. Every family is different, and it can be deeply misleading to make assumptions based on the number of visible children. I know families with one or two children who would dearly love to have had more. These precious children, conceived naturally after medical advice deemed it impossible, are almost miraculous. Yet, despite being completely faithful to the teachings in *Humanae Vitae*, these parents have suffered from the presumptions of others that their small family is a matter of choice – a result, surely, of their not living as “proper” Catholics.

The badge of a true Catholic family is not its size, but its fidelity to the Gospel of Life. The conflict between openness to life and the material constraints of the world are what prompted the Holy Father’s comments. So how can this fidelity to the Gospel of Life be faithfully maintained by a husband and wife without necessarily leading to lagamorphical rates of conception?

Natural Family Planning is often touted as the answer. In itself, NFP is morally neutral. It is essentially a toolbox of knowledge; it is how we choose to use this knowledge that makes it licit or

illicit. The truth is that it is often implicitly “marketed” as “Catholic contraception”, perhaps as an attempt to appeal to couples currently using artificial means of contraception in the hope that they’ll change to a morally “better” method.

NFP is useful but trying to control fertility with the explicit intention of avoiding conception goes against the spirit of *Humanae Vitae*. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if there was something licit, even positive, that could suppress fertility naturally as a side-effect and be synergistic with NFP? Well there is: it’s called lactation.

This is about following natural law. God’s perfect plan for families includes breastfeeding. Lactation suppresses the hormones that control fertility in much the same way as artificial contraception. It is nature’s way of spacing babies. It’s nature’s way of ensuring that the mother’s body has time to recover, that the nursing baby is strong enough and mature enough to deal with a sibling, that everyone has time to catch their breath between births.

Reputable, large-scale studies demonstrate that natural-duration breastfeeding suppresses a return to fertility for an average of 14 months post-partum for most first-world women. This means that a gap of less than two years between siblings is highly unlikely. Continuing to breastfeed for the minimum two years recommended by the World Health Organisation keeps the average woman sub-fertile and therefore less likely to conceive. Without taking breastfeeding on board, NFP is a scientific nonsense: lactation and fertility are inextricably linked, and breastfeeding is possibly the most important mechanism by which God gave us the means to control our fertility and limit our family size.

Yet in Catholic parishes, we’re teaching people how to avoid their fertile period while not talking about breastfeeding at all. We are creating, or at least condoning, an artificial rupture with the natural order.

This is obviously a gross over-simplification: the full implications of the relationship between fertility, NFP and breastfeeding deserve a far more detailed treatment than is possible in this column, but the connection is real and should be more widely understood, particularly by Catholics. An excellent starting resource is the book *Breastfeeding and Natural Child Spacing* by Sheila Kippley, an NFP practitioner and breastfeeding counsellor who is herself Catholic.

Meanwhile, seven pregnancies, 10 years of breastfeeding and four children later, Pope Francis’s comment that we don’t have to “be like rabbits” leaves me feeling wistful. Despite the feminist dogma that has been absorbed into society’s subconscious, many of us would love to be “like rabbits” and would welcome more children with a joyful heart. ☪

*Antonia Robinson is a home-educating mother of four and lives in Kent.*



# Humanum: Made in the Image of God

By Leonie Caldecott

What does it mean to be human? The question lies at the heart of the anthropological vision of Saint John Paul II, a vision which has done so much to elucidate the immemorial teaching of the Church for the modern world. As he put it in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*: “The way of man is the way of the Church.”

In the developed world, we inhabit a culture that is in effect moving towards what CS Lewis called “the abolition of man”. It has therefore become increasingly imperative to develop this contribution of John Paul II’s, which has been developed and confirmed by his successors, for our fast-moving times. There is an urgent need to examine what is happening in the culture through a fully informed understanding of what man is: a creature made in the image of God and thus only fully him or herself in fruitful love.

Thus the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family has created the Centre for Cultural and Pastoral Research (CCPR), now under the direction of the PIME missionary priest Fr Fabrizio Meroni, and its online journal *Humanum* ([humanumreview.com](http://humanumreview.com)). This invaluable resource, which can be accessed free of charge, had as its founding editor my late husband, Stratford Caldecott. Throughout his last illness, from 2011 when he was diagnosed with cancer till close to his death in 2014, Strat poured his considerable editorial experience, not to mention his vision, into *Humanum*. Now we who remain are carrying the work forward in the same spirit, in a transatlantic partnership made possible both by the internet and by a communion of hearts and minds.

The first issue of *Humanum* had as its theme “The Child”. This is fitting because the child is the template of what it means to be a human being, in both its potentiality and its extreme vulnerability. As Strat wrote in that first editorial: “We have barely begun to count the cost of the assault on the child, in social let alone in psychological or spiritual terms.”

The CCPR is particularly focused on the needs of the vulnerable, and so this theme has been developed in subsequent issues: “The Children of Divorce” (drawing on an important conference the CCPR organised on the issue), “Assisted Reproductive Technology”, “Same Sex Unions”, “Absent Fathers”, “A Mother’s Work”, “Technology in the Home” and “Home and Neighbourhood”. Most recently *Humanum* has covered a series of topics relating to modern medicine, culminating in “The Ability of Disability”.

This year *Humanum* is exploring the theme of education. The first issue, which will go online sometime in March,

**Last year the much loved Oxford-based Catholic intellectual Stratford Caldecott died of cancer. The journal he launched in his final years, however, continues. Stratford’s widow Leonie now tells *Faith* magazine why *Humanum* is an important part of her husband’s legacy.**

deals with what it means to educate the person as a human being. The role of the family as the first educator of the child will be examined, as well as the educational theories of St John Bosco, Sofia Cavalletti and Luigi Giussani. The second issue will deal with schooling: what is an authentic pedagogy, the revival of classical education, home-schooling and new types of schools and colleges. The third issue will deal with sex education, and the fourth with education and technology.

Running through all the issues is the concept of *paideia*, education that cultivates the virtues.

Each issue of *Humanum* contains a background article, and a number of reviews of the relevant literature. Strat believed that we must make a careful and credible case for discerning the meaning of the challenges thrown up by the mainstream secular culture: “There is a place and a time for making a stand, but there is also a place and a time for considered reflection, especially if there may be some hope of attacking the disease at its root. What *Humanum*, and the CCPR, hope to contribute to this debate, as we survey the vast field of relevant publications, is to establish such a time and a place: an oasis for considered reflection.”

“There is an urgent need to examine what is happening in the culture through a fully informed understanding of man as a creature made in the image of God”

A new development, to be introduced next summer, is ArteFact, which will look at how literature, film, theatre and art in general reflect the crisis of contemporary culture. Questions which the body politic or the academic world are unwilling to confront head-on are often dealt with through the medium of, say, science fiction: think of the *Matrix* films, or a novel such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.

Each issue of *Humanum* also reproduces a work of fine art, which carries the resonance of the human spirit that informs the discussion of issues in the journal. For *Humanum* is concerned with the specificity of human experience, seen through the prism of human culture at its best. Just as Karol Wojtyla undertook a phenomenologically saturated analysis of modern human experience, so must we try to dig deep for an understanding of what is happening under the surface of the events of our own time. 🌺

You can visit *Humanum* at [humanumreview.com](http://humanumreview.com)



# Emails to the Editor

Contact: [editor@faith.org.uk](mailto:editor@faith.org.uk)

## CREATION AND A WORLD-SOUL

Dear Editor,

With general acceptance by scholars that our universe began in the Big Bang, and that life on Earth evolved, is it not time to consider the probability that Original Sin, with the Fall, is a transcendental catastrophe embracing the whole cosmos? Eden, as depicted in Genesis, was then a transcendental paradise, perfect and immortal.

The universal life force in all matter-energy caused its organisation into forms: first elementary particles, then atoms, and finally living forms, the highest being *Homo sapiens*, but each living form minute in size both in space and time, compared with the whole cosmos. We can regard this life force as a World-Soul. Indeed, Karl Rahner referred to matter as frozen spirit in the image of the resurrected body of Christ as a spiritual body.

The World-Soul of the whole universe then produces our personal bodies animated by personal, rational souls. With Original Sin considered as an initial, transcendental catastrophe, the fallen World-Soul is blemished throughout, and thus the stain in us is then personal in our souls, but both

personal and universal in our bodies. We then have to think about the initial, transcendental state of humanity, which sinned and fell. If it began as living knowledge, non-divine in itself, generated in the divine living knowledge, which is the Word, many problems are answered. It is generated in the hypostatic union of the Divine Humanity. Adam and Eve are personal and universal humanity as one great living idea, many-ideas-in one, male and female, in love in the image of the Trinity.

This great idea rebelled against the divine will for its actualisation, in all except the idea of the Word becoming Incarnate, the Alpha-Christ, and the Unblemished Idea, who is Mary. All matter-energy, animate and inanimate is blemished in the World-Soul, and humanity is also blemished in our personal souls. The only exceptions are Jesus and Mary, who are always immaculate, both in the World-Soul and in their personal souls, in their persons.

Baptism is then the invisible change, from blemished to immaculate in our personal souls, leaving the World-Soul in our bodies still blemished, because the stain there is universal as well as personal, and so there is concupiscence in us, but never in Jesus and Mary.

Transubstantiation is also an invisible change. At the words of consecration, by Jesus and the priest: "This is my body...", Jesus removes the stain from the World-Soul in ordinary bread (and afterwards in the wine) and the blemished bread becomes Living Bread, which is Himself. He is simultaneously present in heaven and on earth, "down

from heaven", such that we can see, touch, taste and eat Him. As Living Bread the appearances, or accidents, of ordinary bread are literally those of Jesus in the Eucharist – as so well discussed by Fr Stephen Boyle in this magazine (*Faith*, Jan/Feb 2009).

However, Jesus is also truly transcendental, so each consecrated Host embraces the whole universe. He sets aside aspects of the finite space-time laws of our fallen state, and is in multi-location on all altars of the world. He also set aside the limits of time at the Last Supper, as He was present as a man at the table, and on the table as consecrated bread and wine, before His death and Resurrection. Some of the saints have also experienced bi-location and levitation, in the image of Christ.

The original idea of Creation was unfolded to itself in the Alpha-Christ, so it had full knowledge of God's will and perfect freedom in committing so grave a sin. Now the actualised idea is again unfolded as the universe and life ascends via evolution, redemption and resurrection, to become one in the Omega-Christ, as Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper (Jn 17).

The Immaculate Conception of Mary is originally the Immaculate Concept (Idea) – so the whole thesis of a transcendental fall is the basis of a new synthesis.

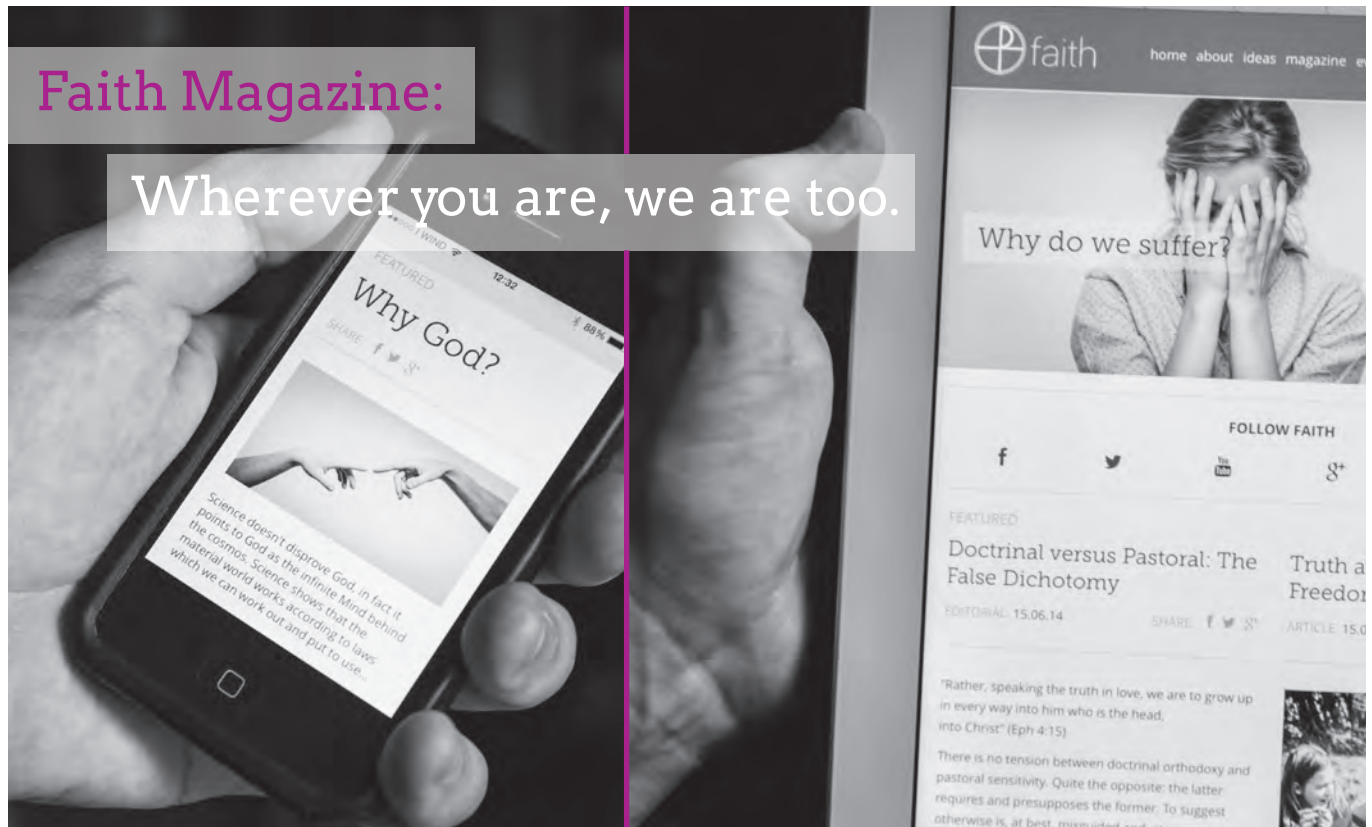
Yours faithfully,

*John J Rooney is an emeritus professor of science at Queen's University, Belfast*



Faith Magazine:

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JESUS CHRIST IS THE MASTER KEY TO THE MEANING OF THE UNIVERSE

# Francis and the Primacy of Pastoral Practice

The creation of 20 new cardinals in February may represent a turning point in Pope Francis's pontificate. The Pope's choices not only show his sensitivity towards the world's peripheries and a certain pastoral approach, they also indicate a change concerning the pivotal issues at stake in this papacy. This change cannot be underestimated.

Before the arrival of Pope Francis, the main themes of discussion in the Church had solid theological roots. Even the questions concerning the pastoral care of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, and of homosexual couples – both topics of heated debate at last October's Synod of Bishops – are in the end based on theological foundations, and deal with the application of doctrine. The criticisms aimed at the Pope's plan for curial reform, the other issue at stake in this pontificate, are also founded on theological and juridical grounds.

Nevertheless, Pope Francis demonstrates that he is moving on completely different grounds. It is not by chance that one of his favourite quotes about ecumenism is taken from the conversation between Blessed Paul VI and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras: "If we were to close ourselves off in a room together and leave the theologians outside, we would accomplish ecumenism in one hour." In similar fashion, leaving theological discussions aside, Pope Francis wants to propose a model of a Church that evangelises through attraction, and not because of the strength of its concepts.

His choices in two consistories mirror this intention. Beyond choosing a few candidates with strong institutional ties, Pope Francis has selected as cardinals mainly bishops whose primary interest is not in some theological position, but in pastoral practice. The Pope bypasses theological discussion and aims to go straight to the heart of the people.

These new cardinals will all bring their own perspectives to the consistory the Pope has convened to discuss reform of the Roman Curia. The reform seems to be stuck. The first comprehensive draft was heavily criticised by Vatican dicasteries, and there is a real risk that the structure will remain as it is for the moment, in expectation of a definitive change that will not take place before the end of this year – as Pope Francis has admitted. But there is another option, which one insider designates "St Peter's option".

It can be explained this way. During the construction of the current Basilica of St Peter in the 16th century, the old basilica was gradually dismantled, step by step, while its replacement was being built. This is the way Pope Francis works, by establishing new structures around the existing one, which is then removed once the new structure is complete.

Through this lens we can better understand the process by which the Vatican first hired expensive external commissions and then established the Secretariat for the Economy, the Council for the Economy and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. These bodies were born without statutes

and they set to work while waiting for their specific powers and competences to be drafted.

This is the way curial reform will be carried out. During their recent ad limina visit, the Lithuanian bishops reportedly asked Pope Francis about the reform. He replied that two super-congregations would be established: one for Justice and Charity, the other for Laity and Family. How the competences of the many minor dicasteries that will be subsumed into these new congregations will be arranged is yet to be decided. But establishing them is a first step toward the much anticipated reform of the Curia.

The rationale is that the curial structure must be reduced in size to bring it closer to the people. Beyond the theological discussions that characterised the major curial reform begun under Bl Paul VI and concluded under St John Paul II, Pope Francis's reform is mostly intended to be functional, allowing the voice of the Church to reach to "the end of the world", as he referred to his own native land when he was elected. For Francis there is no need for structures; instead, there is a need for credible witness.

This rationale is reflected in his choices of new cardinals. Several keys to reading these decisions have been suggested. It has been argued that Francis wanted to privilege the geographical peripheries of the Church, or that he wanted to combat careerism, and that for this reason he was not awarding the red hat to bishops in dioceses that have always had a cardinal by tradition, or else that he wanted to make the College of Cardinals more international.

All of these reasons are intriguing, and even true if one glances at the cardinals' profiles from the perspective of their assignments or their geographical locations. Nevertheless, these interpretations may be misleading and may even betray Pope Francis's spirit.

Broadly speaking, the Pope selects bishops whom he appreciates for their pastoral touch. In a recent interview, the archbishop Soane Patita Mafi of Tonga, a surprise pick among the new cardinals, emphasised that he would take with him to Rome the cry of the poor of his country. He is not the only one. Cardinal-designate Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij of Bangkok, Thailand, is working to foster Christian communities in a country where Christians are a small minority.

Pope Francis got to know many of these new cardinals during the last Synod of Bishops. He appreciated their human touch and their pastoral sensitivity. The impression they gave when they took the floor at the synod, the way they defended and supported mercy and closeness to people – these were more crucial to their selection than what they were currently doing in their homeland.

Still, no theological preference seems to drive the Pope's choices. Instead one finds a human touch, a peculiar instinct



## “The rationale is that the curial structure must be reduced in size to bring it closer to the people”

that guides him in understanding who the prelates are with whom he feels more at ease.

Renunciation of worldliness may also imply for Pope Francis a renunciation of intellectual debate. Pope Francis wants shepherds who live with the smell of the sheep, and he has been clear about that since the beginning of his pontificate. Other qualities do not seem to matter so much to him; they seem to be mere add-ons that he applies to his discussion of bishops when it suits him to do so.

These new cardinals (Pope Francis has chosen 40 so far) will have an impact in this coming week's consistory on curial reform. Now that the Council of Cardinals has met eight times, the Pope is seeking a turning point, and to bring this about he is filling the College of Cardinals with people who he believes share his vision.

Although the reform issue might be solved through the so-called “St Peter's option”, the struggle looming in the forthcoming synod seems more complicated. Again, the Pope's intention is to free the Church from an over-dependence upon doctrine in order to find a pastoral approach that will bring the Church closer to people. But how can doctrine and pastoral practice be reconciled?

This continues to be a hotly debated topic. The discussion evidences a strange convergence between the Roman Curia and some local churches, many of which, as it happens, are on the peripheries. Not by chance, Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, underscored in an interview with the Italian weekly magazine *La Settimana* that the strong points of the last Synod of Bishops were the doctrinal framework, the Gospel of the Family, and the push for young people to receive an education about love.

But these issues were included in the synod's final report only after the small groups (*circuli minores*) strongly criticised – and pushed for a substantial rewriting of – the synod's midterm report. Cardinal Baldisseri's words signalled that the synod war had already begun, and that – despite the slogan “We don't turn back”, which accompanied the presentation of the next synod's guidelines – the majority of bishops do not endorse a pastoral practice that is completely detached from doctrine.

And Francis would probably not support such an approach either. The Pope is always very orthodox in his declarations. This fact has been demonstrated several times. Francis backed the Slovakian bishops in their commitment to promote a referendum to defend the traditional family in their country.

He invited Filipinos to be wary of the ideological colonisation of the family. He expressed a strongly negative judgement on gender theory, which he also defined as “demonic” during a meeting with Austrian bishop in an *ad limina* visit. Taken together these interventions indicate that Pope Francis is anything but progressive.


So, who is the real Pope Francis? The one who supports liberal bishops and priests, or the one who speaks in an orthodox way? The answer may be more obvious than expected.

Simply put, pastoral practice is more important for Pope Francis than any given theological debate, because the latter, in the end, may be no more than a worldly exercise. Perhaps his famous declaration about preferring a “poor Church for the poor” may be interpreted to mean that he prefers a Church light in structure, and with limited emphasis on philosophical debate, but rich in pastoral love.

But such an approach is not new. Benedict XVI spoke in almost the same terms about the need to escape worldliness and to move beyond the self-referentiality of ecclesial structures. And he underscored the value of mercy, as is evidenced in the homily he delivered at the Mass for the inauguration of his petrine ministry. Time and again Pope Benedict preached about a Church that should not be constructed on ideas, but should be engaged in lively evangelisation.

Nevertheless, a shift is taking place. Pope Benedict was convinced that a solid theological background was needed so that the Church's pastoral practice would be correct. In fact, the search for truth was pivotal in his pontificate. Pope Francis, on the other hand, sets aside any given theological problem in order to seek immediate, personal contact with people.

Bishop Eduardo Horacio Garcia, who was Cardinal Bergoglio's auxiliary bishop in Buenos Aires, recounted shortly after Pope Francis's election that “at the end of the Jubilee Year, for which Cardinal Bergoglio had called a missionary year, we priests of the archdiocese asked Cardinal Bergoglio to call a synod in order to discuss how to harvest the fruits of our mission and draft guidelines. But he responded that a synod was good only for producing useless documents, while the only thing we need to do is to continue our missionary efforts and to remain in a state of permanent mission.”

These words perhaps explain better than anything else the inner sense of this pontificate. Pope Francis is putting everyone in a state of permanent synod in order to understand each bishop's perspectives. But the direction of his reforms will proceed from a pastoral approach, and nothing else. Perhaps this is the real change of paradigm. 

*Andrea Gagliarducci is the Rome correspondent of the Catholic News Agency.*

# Worlds at War

We are in a war of world views; some believe that our universe is meaningless, or even, like Stephen Fry, positively malevolent. In such a situation, all we can do is to construct systems of meaning, or relationships and identities around ourselves, to warm and to illumine in this dark and cold world. Yet others hold that we have to be “heroic” in the face of meaninglessness and face squarely its bleak implications.

Views of the universe as a closed system, which consists only of observable, material causes and their effects, have certainly led us to observations of regularity and of predictability, which have been useful for experimental science, but these abstractions have also robbed the world of its “enchantment”, its spontaneity and the possibility of moral and spiritual change.

Against this, a Christian world view, which is truly catholic in scope, understands the world in personal terms. It has been brought about through divine action and there are other agents in it who can also act

meaningfully on their environment and bring about real change for better or for worse. Because of the absolute freedom of God and the limited freedom of his creatures, the world is not a monotonous, predetermined system but is dynamic and full of surprises. There is moral and spiritual accountability here, but also the possibility of redemption. We can certainly say, with the hymn writer, “Change and decay in all around I see,” but we know also with Gerard Manley Hopkins that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil”.

With Jesus, and the Christian mystics of all ages, we know that the “inside-ness” of things, and especially of people, is more important than their outward appearance or external relationships. What is it that gives us vision and direction in life? Do we see the universe as simply ending in a whimper, even if it came into existence with a bang, or do we see it as capable of renewal and transformation? Scripture tells us that the renewal and direction of our lives is, indeed, linked with the destiny of the universe (Rom 8:18-25).

An acknowledged feature of our world is the sense of alienation which many feel. As a young woman said to me about her village, it is as if people were closed in on themselves, so self-absorbed that they were unaware of the other. Not only are we strangers to one another, even in families, but there is an inner cleavage within us so that the

different aspects of our personhood remain unintegrated and we cannot be the persons we know we could be.

We are constantly anxious about the precariousness of our existence, about the state of the world and about the wrongness in our own lives. This can lead to depression and even suicide unless ways are found to establish

ourselves in our contexts, to help us with the integration of our personalities, to “at-one” us with what is at “sixes and sevens” without and within.

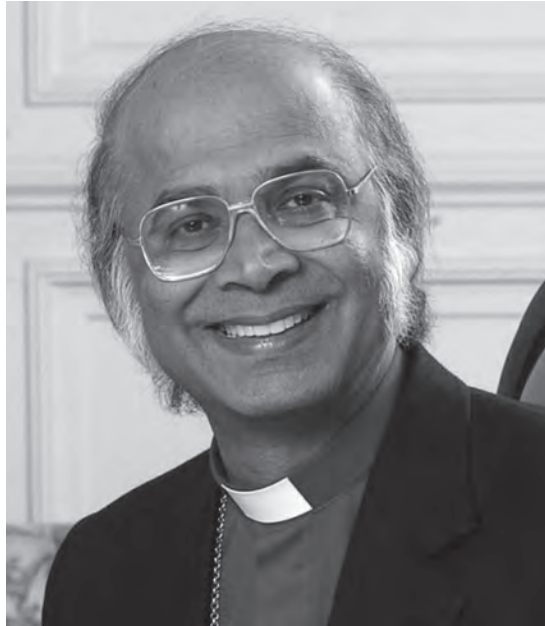
Both alienation and anxiety lead precisely to a sense of “aloneness” in an unfriendly universe, from which Fry-like counsels of despair, the personal and social constructivism of post-modernity or quixotic heroicism in the face of comic tragedy all arise, though in different ways.

Often the anxiety turns to anger, repressed most of the time, but bursting out at the unfamiliar, at perceived injustice or violation

of territory. It is destructive both for the inward self and for our relationships with others. Loneliness and anxiety can also lead to addiction of different kinds, not only to drugs, alcohol or tobacco but to cars, fashion, housing, shopping; almost anything, in fact. The American pastor Tim Keller writes of our addiction to power, success or sex. The Bible repeatedly speaks of this kind of greed as idolatry. What we are addicted to is, indeed, a god for us without which life would be intolerable.

In these circumstances, what is good news for people today? We have to begin with friendship. If alienation is a characteristic of our age, the Gospel is about friendship. Because of what Christ has done for us, we can be friends again with God, the very source of our existence. We could not take the path to this friendship ourselves, so badly have we gone astray; but Christ, by his Cross, has shown us the way back. This also means we can be at peace within ourselves. God’s acceptance of us and his guidance for us helps us to reintegrate broken parts of our humanity, once again restored to wholeness. This is an “ever-widening circle of an ever-deepening reconciliation”. The Church must be a community of friendships and this must extend well beyond its visible boundaries.

Friendship is a Christian value which is hugely underrated. It is not enough, for instance, to demand abstinence from those experiencing same-sex attraction, if the Church



**“Biblical scholars have shown us that the primary meaning of faith is putting our trust in God who is faithful”**

cannot draw people into genuine friendships with families and groups who will love them and care for them. Friendship, even with God, can be damaged and broken. There has to be a way back. In fact, there is always a way back. The Church is a company of forgiven sinners who have to keep asking for forgiveness. This is why the ministry of reconciliation is such an important gift of Christ to his Church. We are called not only to ask for forgiveness of God but to forgive those who have wronged us: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.”

However difficult this may be, it is part of our Christian vocation to keep on forgiving, as Jesus said to St Peter (Matt 18:21,22). This does not mean, by the way, that the State should not punish those who have wronged us, nor does it mean that we should not defend the weak, the aged, the very young or the sick, but it does mean we should not seek vengeance, because that is the Lord's prerogative (Rom 12:19).

Biblical scholars have shown us that the primary meaning of faith is putting our trust in God who is faithful. A sure sign that we have done so is our own faithfulness or trustworthiness with what we have been entrusted. This is why trustworthiness must be at the heart of good business practice. Our word must, indeed, be our bond. We must be responsible in our dealings, knowing that we are accountable not just to our bosses or the authorities but to a faithful God who calls us to faithfulness.

It is not only clergy and religious who have a vocation. Every Christian has a vocation to the work to which he or she has been called. As the great pastor and poet George Herbert wrote: “Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws, Makes that and the action fine.”

**“Friendship is a Christian value which is hugely underrated”**

The crisis in the financial world has largely been caused by greed replacing a sense of vocation, accountability and faithfulness. It is time to reclaim these virtues in the name of, and for the sake of, good business.


A significant emblem of faithfulness in our world is the family. It is founded on a covenant between a man and a woman of mutual esteem and the recognition of dignity in one another. Such faithfulness is necessary for the creation and nurture of the basic unit of society, especially the bringing up of children. The unity of the family reflects the unity of the Church with Christ. That is to say, it is organic and not merely a collection of discrete entities. In this sense, we can also say of marriage that it is a sacrament of unity. A Christian world view will be about celebrating life. Jesus came so that we may have life in all its abundance.

Our stewardship of creation will show respect for both the living and the non-living creation. The welfare of animals is part of the mandate we have been given in creation. Most of all, of course, it is the sanctity of the human person which we are to uphold at every stage of development, at all times of vulnerability and of suffering, but this must be accompanied by love, care and the relief of suffering, whether physical, mental or spiritual.

In an age where the word “love” has become debased, Christians will want to continue distinguishing between the different kinds of good love: among friends, between man and woman and, of course, God's love for us, which leads us to seek the highest good of our fellow human beings. They will also continue to recognise love that is according to God's plan and purpose, and love which has, as St Augustine says, become “perverse”, that is to say, distorted from its original purpose of respecting people for themselves and not simply as a means of satisfying our desires.

**“God's law, both inscribed on our hearts and revealed in the Bible, shows us how far we have fallen short of God's call on us”**

The priority of grace is unquestionable, but what we have become by grace through faith should result in good works for God's glory and in the service of our fellows. As Pope Benedict has pointed out in his book on St Paul, Luther was right on Paul's teaching that we are justified by faith alone, provided this is a faith that works itself out in love (Gal 5:6). God's law, both inscribed on our hearts and revealed in the Bible, shows us how far we have fallen short of God's call on us and so impels us to cast ourselves on God's mercy; but it is also a standard of love by which those who are united to Christ by faith can order their lives by God's grace. It reveals, as well, what we are to commend for the common good in every society in which we find ourselves, praying and working for its welfare (Jer 29:7).

Such a world view is dangerous for the fashionable and the powerful. This is why it is so fiercely resisted. 

*Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali is the Anglican bishop-emeritus of Rochester. He has both a Christian and a Muslim family background and is now president of the Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue.*





# Book Reviews

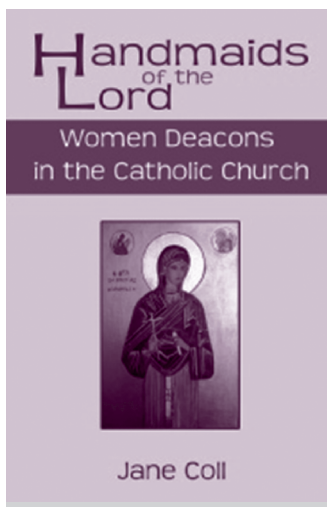
## A Female Diaconate?

*Handmaids of the Lord: Women Deacons in the Catholic Church* by Jane Coll, Gracewing, 422pp including appendices and index, £20.00

Jane Coll is surely right: one major topic for the Church today concerns the role of women. Coll is also sure in her method. She appeals to the central pillars of the Church – Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium (though not reason or natural law). Using Cardinal Newman’s “diagnostic tools” of discernment, she is keen to differentiate authentic development and deviation from Church tradition.

Coll says that she has three main aims in her book. First, she wants us to understand the teaching that bishops have the fullness of the sacrament of ordination and so to understand the relationship between bishop, priest and deacon. Secondly, and with a significant leap, she thinks that from this we can understand the role of women within this sacrament, in order to find an official office for women that is recognised by all, with its own liturgical rite and duties described in Canon Law. Thirdly, she believes that ordaining women to the diaconate would go some way to marginalising the debate on women priests, thus helping to end the scandal of division among Christians (p xxi).

Coll’s extensive research leads her to conclude that while women cannot be ordained priests, as part of this authentic development, the Church could “ordain” women as deacons. To support her conclusion she offers three answers to “areas of concern”.



First, she claims that the sacrament of ordination to the priesthood would not be threatened since “the unity” of the sacrament resides in the bishop: Scripture gives him the authority to delegate as necessary, and Tradition allows for several grades within the sacrament. Secondly, she claims that the diaconate and presbyterate are “quite separate roles”: the diaconate does not involve the duty of governance, and the deacon does not act in the person of Christ, and so does not have to be male.

Thirdly, “the deaconesses of the early Church were ordained according to the meaning of the word at the time and therefore can be so again”. Here Coll presumably means a commissioning for service (pp205-206) rather than a definition of ordination in terms of the liturgy of the Mass and “its relationship to the Eucharist” (pp171, 214). Fourthly, “the relationship between male and female deacons can be worked out in a spirit of obedience to the bishop. Their specific duties are not important; as with priests, it is what they are, not what they do that is significant for the life of the Church” (pp341-342). In essence, she argues that change can only come from within the Church, she accepts that Canon Law would have to be changed, and that this change must be compatible with Church teaching.

Coll’s answers to these concerns are not as full or as clear as perhaps they

might be, and at times there is some inconsistency. Starting backwards with Coll’s fourth point, that it is what deacons and deaconesses are rather than what they do that is significant for the Church, Coll explains that on the issue of ordination generally, the “ontological” versus “functional” debate continues (p207). However, despite Coll’s fourth point, her view on this debate also appears undecided.

Coll sees priestly ordination as conferring the grace needed for a man to act in the person of Christ, in other words to bring about an ontological change (p211). However, it is unclear whether she links the tradition of ontological change only to the “newer” (that is, from the 11th and 12th centuries onwards) and “narrower” (pp205-206) interpretation of ordination, for she suggests that an ontological change took place in both St Peter and St Paul symbolised by their name changes in the New Testament (p47).

Yet, her third point is that ordination of deaconesses is in the tradition but is ordination according to the meaning of the early Church, a commissioning or a conferring of a specific place in society (p206). This brings in Coll’s second point, that the diaconate and presbyterate are quite separate roles. Coll herself says that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council saw the diaconate as part of the sacrament of Holy Orders but made no clear pronouncement on the character conferred by the sacrament (p237). She admits that there is debate over the role of deacons and she accepts that some of their liturgical duties seem to blur the distinction between them and priests (p234). Moreover, she says that there have always been problems of deacons “misjudging” where their duties end and those of the priest begin (p235).

Where there is already confusion in the minds of people – and many lay people do not appreciate that deacons are not co-workers since they do not share in the ministerial priesthood, nor can they consecrate the Eucharist or administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation or the

## “Using Cardinal Newman’s ‘diagnostic tools’ of discernment, Coll is keen to differentiate authentic development and deviation from Church tradition”

Sacrament of the Sick – it seems that the introduction of deaconesses may simply add to the confusion.

This inevitably leads into the first point, that ordination of deaconesses would not threaten ordination to the priesthood. Given that the diaconate in itself is ambiguous – and, as Coll rightly points out, Vatican II restored the permanent diaconate but did not definitively rule on its status, so that debate on its sacramentality and character continue (p233) – it seems rather naive to suggest that ordination, or simply the institution of deaconesses, would marginalise the debate on women priests. And it seems disingenuous to think that instituting a female diaconate would redirect people’s energy away from women priests, and into ending “the scandal of division among the various Christian bodies”, when the author spends just two pages looking at the Anglican arguments, based on a conversation with “a female priest from an Anglican background” (pp309-310).

As for the structure of the book, Coll divides her book into four sections: Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium and the Analogy of Faith. She tries to fit a discussion of priesthood, ordination, Our Lady, and women into each of the four sections. However, this strategy risks not only repetition but also digression. Coll’s book contains a strange mixture of information. For instance, Chapter 15 on the laity begins with a broad discussion about how the Church grew, covering the establishment of monasteries and convents, Mass in Latin, the removal of rood screens and the history of the Reformation; while Chapter 16, on Our Lady, goes through the titles given to her, in order to answer criticisms that these titles and honours cannot be supported by Scripture.

These are just two of many examples of what appear to be digressions. Certainly Coll tries to demonstrate the relevance of these passages, but in a book that is over 400 pages long, and for those who are interested in the

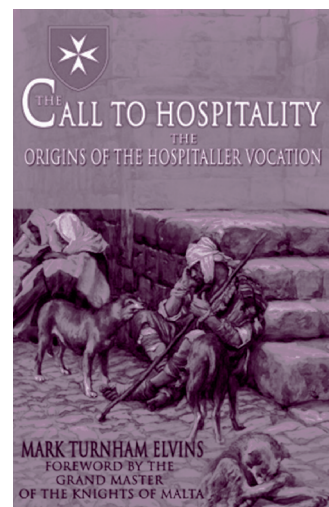
subject matter of the book, namely women deacons, this proves to be a considerable distraction.

As Coll tells her reader in the opening sentence of Chapter 10, and by this time we are on p157, we are only just approaching “the subject at the heart” of her work (Chapters 15 and 16 run from pp251-261). This illustrates one of the general problems with the book: the author does not seem to be clear about her target audience, so she includes information ranging from the basic to the specialist. The result is that the book loses focus and risks irritating the reader. Chapters are uneven: Chapter 13 on liturgy is only two and a half pages long and that includes the footnotes; the following chapter on the Sacrament of Ordination is some 50 pages long and has no less than four separate summaries. There are seven appendices and a reading list that includes very general reading, from a textbook on the Old Testament to one on basic Christian theology.

One final point. On the role involved in the diaconate, Coll explains that deacons have liturgical and pastoral duties, though not oversight of the community. She says that they have a ministry of service as assistants to the bishop, “but this does not limit their activity to menial tasks” (p236). Perhaps this is one of the major stumbling blocks when considering the role of women in the Church and in the world in general. Some of the many services that women provide are not valued; they are regarded as menial, that is to say lowly or degrading.

However, as Saint Thérèse of Lisieux shows, no task done with Christ in mind can be dismissed as purely menial. From the practical spirituality of the flower arranger and Church cleaner to the visitor to the elderly, the offertory collector, the catechist, the reader and the Eucharistic minister, women are active and evangelising in the Church. Perhaps it is time to acknowledge and celebrate some of these roles.

**Pia Matthews**



### A Challenge to Our Hearts

*The Call to Hospitality by Mark Turnham Elvins, Gracewing, 180pp, £12.99*

In the first instance, this book offers a history of the Knights of Malta. The Sovereign, Military, Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta was founded 900 years ago. A group of Italian merchants established a hospice to care for travellers in Jerusalem during the 11th century. One of the early wardens was Blessed Gerard. You need to look up a footnote (p62, no9) to hear of his faith. The footnote provides what I found to be the most fascinating anecdote in the entire book.

Gerard was inside the walls of Jerusalem during a siege by Crusaders. In a reversal of our usual understanding of what happened during such events, Gerard threw bread out from the city to the besiegers, who were themselves starving. He was arrested, and brought before the Arab governor. When he was examined the bread had turned to stones.

The initiative that God takes comes across strongly in this book by the Capuchin friar Fr Mark Turnham Elvins. Nowhere is this more wonderfully illustrated than in this account of the origins of the Hospitaller Order. Gerard was the warden who subsequently



## Book Reviews continued

succeeded in securing an independent status for the Brethren of the Hospital of Jerusalem, as the order was known to begin with.

More widely, the book offers a historical survey of the place of charity to travellers. It ranges from the care of the poor in the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, to monastic hospitality, early guest houses for pilgrims, the work of the Order of the Hospitallers, and the history of the Christian social conscience in England. This approach makes the book somewhat uneven, relying as it does on some earlier writing by the author. Nonetheless, it is important that we develop a sense of history in these matters.

In pre-modern times, it was one's family and friends who met your needs when sickness hit. They may not have offered much medical treatment, but care, certainly, would have been provided. We can easily forget what it would have been like to fall ill while travelling as a pilgrim. Certain situations in life give rise to particular needs, when our frail bodies find themselves defenceless before the violence of others or the ravages of disease. It is no accident that the parable of the Good Samaritan focuses on a travelling stranger.

The book charts how Christians joined together to care for poor and sick travellers. The Knights were formed as a close community, with a rule of life. One joined them as a vocation, in response to a call from God. The role of bishops is also given due prominence. There is a contemporary angle here, as the author provides an agenda for the present day Church:

*The reform of the episcopal and priestly ministry is a thorny topic and rarely addressed, and yet for social doctrine to be made known there must be reform in order to reveal the practical side of evangelism. ... Renewal in the Church perforce requires a restoration of first principles, principles by which the early Christians, under their bishops, taught the world about poor relief. (p26)*

The book further incorporates a history of social conscience in England. Mark Elvins highlights how the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII removed the primary source of food and shelter available for those in need. A series of Acts of Parliaments and government initiatives followed to try to deal with the resulting problems. Great cruelty followed in many places, as people sought to ensure that the numbers who took up any care were as low as possible. In time, if you refused to enter the workhouse, you gave up any prospect of other relief. Penny-pinching responses were common. Government cutbacks have been with us from Elizabethan times to the 21st century! Is someone in need an idle beggar or a brother or sister who has fallen on hard times? Mark Elvins points out that in mediaeval times it was clear that almsgiving required compassion for the person in need as much as bodily help. As a theological virtue, charity requires the grace of God.

In the UK we think of hospitals as government business, as exemplified by the wonderful National Health Service that ensures each sick child is tucked into bed by an angelic nurse, as the opening ceremony for the London Olympics had it. But hospitals were not invented by governments; they were

formed by Christians eager to serve their Lord. Hospitals were originally places to care for poor or sick travellers. The next time you lie in a hospital bed, remember that clean linen was a practice pioneered by the Knights of Malta. They also first introduced private cubicles for those receiving care. Well, you can't have everything, it seems, when things are directed by the State!

The Hospitaller Order was partly conceived as a military order of chivalry, involving a code of service to a liege Lord. Blessed Gerard was certainly something a hero himself, as well as a saint. A sense of chivalry was associated with the Knights of Malta from its very origins, encouraging its members to go to great lengths in acting for the good of others. There are plenty of similarities here with the Franciscans. There is a romance that comes with a call from God. How can we respond in our own day to the needs of those who are unable to care for themselves? Who knows what new social institutions or practices might arise when Christians join together to serve those in need? In this book Mark Elvins issues a challenge to our hearts. Is it one that we will accept?

Peter Kahn

## Got a comment? Get in touch.

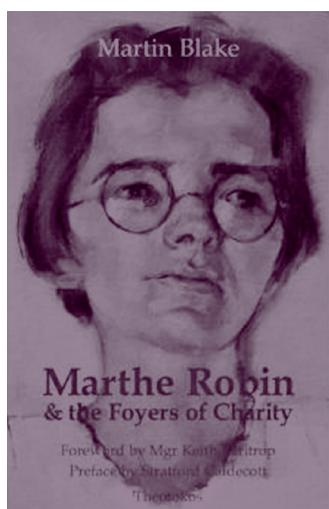
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**“As Stratford Caldecott wrote in his preface, ‘There is a crying need for holiness, among both clergy and laity, a holiness which takes the example of Christ himself as its source’ ”**



## Centres of Holiness

*Marthe Robin & the Foyers of Charity*  
by Martin Blake, Theotokos, 152pp,  
£7.95 paperback or £3.22 Kindle

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Faustina, Saint Pio of Pietrelcina and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta: on the very first page of the first chapter of his book, Martin Blake lists these 20th-century figures and confidently ranks Marthe Robin alongside them. Either Blake is portraying his protagonist as punching way above her weight or the reader is about to encounter a quite amazing soul. Which was it to be?

The book develops as a linear biography for the first four of its 13 chapters. Marthe, born in 1902, was the sixth child of “not particularly religious” parents. Although she had a solid prayer life, by the time she had completed her formal education at the age of 12, there was nothing about her that would make her stand out in a crowd.

By the age of 19, her health had declined, she’d spent 17 months in “a coma of some sort” and received a vision of the Blessed Virgin. Her health further declined between the ages of 21 and 23, while she struggled to accept the cross of her suffering, “torn between giving all to God and hoping for a normal life”. Then, in 1925, she “dared to choose Jesus Christ” and

made a private act of abandonment. By 1930, Marthe was paralysed in her legs and arms; she neither ate (apart from the Eucharist) nor drank, never slept and bore the stigmata.

At this stage, Blake devotes some space to formal verifications of her stigmata but I find it curious that he does not comment on her lack of nutrition and absence of sleep (this latter is, to medics, even more extraordinary than living without nutrition). From this time, until her death in 1981, Marthe experienced Our Lord’s Passion every Friday.

Thus emptied, Marthe set up – through supportive friends and priests – a school for girls at Chateauneuf and then, with the particular support of her spiritual director Fr Finet, the first “Foyer of Charity”. At this stage in the book, it was hard to grasp what was meant by the term “foyer”, perhaps because Blake carefully limits his vantage point to the movement’s conception in 1936. Clearly it wasn’t a lobby or narthex, so I wondered if the term meant something more specific in French?

A French parishioner readily identified the term with the fruits of Marthe’s apostolate and told me that, for her, “foyer” meant a place where people go to make silent retreats, usually young people discerning their vocation. This tallied with what a “Foyer” is now to people in 45 countries over five continents where 75 Foyer communities are hosts to thousands of retreatants each year. But on this small island, we are still largely strangers to this new movement. It is to redress this shortcoming that Blake has written his book.

Much of the rest of the book is devoted to Marthe’s encounters with particular individuals. This provides striking personal and authentic witness to her life and works but has the unfortunate side-effect of repeating some biographical and anecdotal detail already given in the first four chapters. It also means that the book reads a little

like a “review of relevant literature”. If at times the descriptions of Foyer communities conjured up images of kaftan communes of the 1960s, these were held at bay by repeated assertions of Marthe’s adherence at all times to the Church’s Magisterium, of each Foyer opening only at the invitation of the local bishop and of snippets of Marthe’s such as “Mass is not an obligation... it is a necessity!” Any remaining misconceptions were dispelled by this description of a typical five-day Foyer retreat:

*Retreatants arrive on a Sunday afternoon, listen to three conferences a day from the retreat conductor, pray Morning and Evening Prayer and the Holy Rosary daily, and of course attend a daily Mass... On Thursday night there is usually the chance to spend an hour or two keeping vigil with the Blessed Sacrament exposed...*

What’s not to like?

So was Blake over-selling Marthe Robin by comparing her with those great holy souls of the last century? I confess to having thought so at first, but no: I’m sold. Foyer retreats are available in Britain (in Dalmally, Scotland), but as yet there is no established Foyer community. As Stratford Caldecott wrote in his preface: “There is a crying need for holiness, among both clergy and laity, a holiness which takes the example of Christ himself as its source, and it seems to me that it would be most helpful to have such ‘centres of holiness’ in this country.”

Imagine a time when the word “foyer” no longer brings images of lobbies to the mind of the general public but rather signifies a “place where I once spent five amazing days in silent retreat”. Blake’s book is an important step towards achieving that goal.

**Jane Critten**



## Book Reviews continued

### Psychiatry and the Church

*Catholicism & Mental Health* by  
Dr Pravin Thevathasan, Catholic Truth  
Society, 67pp, £2.50

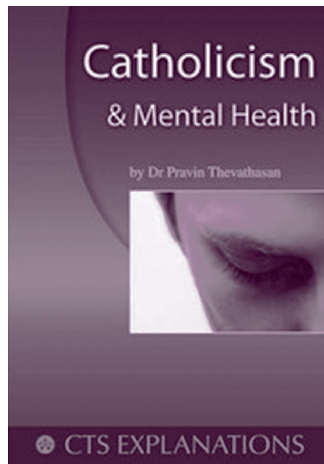
This fascinating booklet begins with a clear statement of intent, explaining that it is not a self-help guide or treatment manual; rather, it aims to show that there is no conflict between Catholicism and psychiatry. The Church is, of course, not anti-science and there is a wonderful quote from Pius XII on the first page which illustrates this:

*If mental health enjoys such esteem in Catholic thought and practice, it is only right that the Church looks with satisfaction at the new path being opened by psychiatry ... all that Sacred Scripture says in praise of human wisdom is an implicit affirmation of the importance of mental health.*

The first chapter gives a brief overview of the history of psychiatry, beginning in ancient Greece, describing how mental illness has been regarded and treated through the ages; along the way, it debunks the myth that the early Church saw all mental illness as diabolic. Understanding of the problems of the mind in the ancient world was more sophisticated than we might think. Note this quote relating to depression from Aretaeus from the second century AD:

*Those affected with melancholy are not every one of them affected according to one particular form.... [T]he patients are dull or stern, dejected or unreasonably torpid.... [U]nreasonable fear also seizes them, if the disease tends to increase ... they complain of life and desire to die.*

Apparently King James I contributed to the persistence of the belief that many mentally ill people were witches by ordering the burning of a seminal work by Reginald Scott, published in 1584. Scott, author of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, was following Catholic scholars of the 15th and 16th centuries who condemned witch trials and urged humane treatment of the mentally ill.



One cannot write about psychiatry without an examination of the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung in the 20th century. Though now out of fashion, the writings of these men have had, and continue to have, a huge influence on popular beliefs regarding how human beings “work”.

The author therefore analyses the main ideas of these men in a chapter entitled “Where psychiatry and Catholicism conflict”. Most often, there is conflict where psychiatry oversteps its bounds and claims to be the sole qualified interpreter of human behaviour. A quote from Professor Andrew Sims sums up this issue well:

*Psychiatrists have not increased the credibility of their speciality in the first three-quarters of the 20th century by posing as the universal experts on the experience of life and how it should be led. Expert knowledge of the abnormal does not preclude ignorance of the normal and the psychiatrist can never generalise from the sample of people selectively referred to him to the whole of mankind.*

Dr Thevathasan presents a lucid history of the thought of Freud and Jung, and the circumstances which led them to develop their often bizarre theories of human behaviour. In the popular mind, these men have been accorded a far greater knowledge of the human condition than they actually had or possessed with accuracy – resulting in immense damage to individuals. I have

often thought, particularly when working in the diocesan marriage tribunal, that our acknowledgement of the fact of Original Sin gives us such a head start when it comes to understanding human nature, and why people act the way they do. The booklet shows that when this truth is denied, the strangest explanations are offered as a substitute. Interestingly, both Freud and Jung seem to have had some exposure to or interest in the occult. Certainly, both came from “disturbed” backgrounds.

The chapter headed “Where psychiatry and Catholicism agree” is similarly enlightening, as the Church can find confirmation in secular science for her teachings on marriage and family life, and the negative impact of parental separation and divorce.

Finally, Dr Thevathasan provides an introduction to some of the more well-known psychiatric disorders. As with physical illness, for example heart disease, if the cause of an illness is correctly identified, the correct treatment can be offered. And vice versa. The conditions of depression, OCD and scruples, schizophrenia, addictions and suicide are described in very readable and non-technical language for the non-medic to grasp.

Most importantly, these are looked at through the lens of revealed truth, which only Catholicism can provide. The author opines, rightly, how useful it would be to construct a synthesis of mental health treatments and authentic Catholic spirituality, fleshing this out with some brief case studies. The danger of side-lining the spiritual dimension when treating mental illness becomes transparently clear.

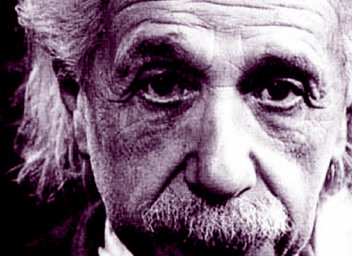
This is a wise and balanced overview which I found enlightening and which will be pastorally useful. Truth can never conflict with genuine science: as the author says, “our understanding of mental illness can be more complete if we draw upon the insight of both medicine and Catholicism”.

**Stephen Brown**



# Cutting Edge

## Science and Religion News



By Dr Gregory Farrelly

### **Catholics and Science**

An interesting and rather unusual article by Richard de Grijs in the January edition of *Physics World* concerns the Jesuit mission in China in the late 16th century. Fr Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was the Jesuit missionary famed for his linguistic, mathematical, musical and cartographic skills; it was he who produced the first known map of China. Johann Adam Schall von Bell was a Jesuit who became the imperial astronomer.

De Grijs, writing as a non-believer in a secular journal, has this to say about them: “Despite their underlying aim of converting the local population to Christianity, many of these priests were genuinely interested in a two-way exchange of information.”

This is, to my mind, at the heart of the apostolate of the Faith movement. As Catholics we need to engage in works of love with our fellow men and women in this secular, anti-Catholic world, but we also need to exercise an intellectual apostolate, one that must begin with the sort of two-way exchange that the Jesuits undertook in China.

Having listened to the views of secular or lapsed Catholic acquaintances, we should be able to give a defence of our faith that shows that natural science itself implies a belief in a fundamentally meaningful, ordered universe, and that the Catholic church has itself played a part in the development of scientific thought.

In the first half of 2015, Pope Francis is expected to produce an encyclical concerning the environment; it will be the first major teaching document by a pontiff to be dedicated exclusively to ecology. The aim is to influence world policies, such as those to be drafted this September at the United Nations meeting on sustainable development.

Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of

Sciences, recently said that Pope Francis wants to convene a summit of faith leaders to discuss ecological issues after the encyclical comes out.

### **Beagle 2**

The late Professor Colin Pillinger, of the Open University, was somewhat ridiculed when his pet project, the Beagle 2 mission to land a small space probe on Mars, appeared to have failed on Christmas Day 2003. In January this year, it was announced that the lander had been identified in images taken by Nasa’s Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter in 2013; these showed the lander as a glinting object, just a few pixels wide, about 5km from the intended touchdown site. The images can be seen at [http://www.esa.int/Our\\_Activities/Space\\_Science/Mars\\_Express/Beagle-2\\_lander\\_found\\_on\\_Mars](http://www.esa.int/Our_Activities/Space_Science/Mars_Express/Beagle-2_lander_found_on_Mars).

It seems that some of the solar panels failed to open, either because of a faulty motor or because the craft was damaged by an unlucky bounce. As a result the radio antenna was unable to work and so no signals could be sent back to Earth. Describing what had happened, Professor Mark Sims of Leicester University, who was Beagle 2’s mission manager, said: “It’s like dropping a tin of baked beans and denting it, and then trying to get the lid off.”

Pillinger had hoped that the probe, named after HMS *Beagle*, the expedition ship of Charles Darwin, would bring about a “quantum leap” in our knowledge of Mars, just as Darwin had forever changed our understanding of life on Earth. The mission was largely funded by private donations and money from unconventional promotional campaigns led by Pillinger. Beagle 2 was supposed to sample rocks and soil, seeking out signs of life by looking for carbon signatures in a similar way to Philae on the Rosetta mission.

During pre-mission tests, the probe’s air bags had burst and the landing

parachute had to be redesigned. The European Space Agency (ESA) considered not allowing Beagle 2 on board its Mars Express mission, yet Pillinger was a persuasive, indomitable figure.

However eccentric he was, and whatever one’s view of the wisdom of such “small” missions (Beagle 2 cost a mere £66m, compared with the \$1.6bn which Nasa spent on its Mars Reconnaissance Rover), Pillinger’s enthusiasm to find out if there is evidence of alien life is a sign of the intellectual curiosity that lies at the heart of all good science. As noted in previous editions of this column, this intellectual characteristic is spiritual. The spiritual soul has the properties of intellect and will, knowledge and love.

### **Stephen Fry’s Diabolical Worm**

Stephen Fry’s video, railing against a God who can permit a worm “whose whole life cycle is to burrow into the eyes of children and make them blind” has become viral. In fact, the African Loa loa worm in question affects very few humans (not that this mitigates the suffering). What Fry did not state is that diethylcarbamazine has been shown as an effective preventive for this infection.

This example is, indeed, a problem for creationists, who view all creatures as uniquely and individually created and designed by God, without evolution. The Faith movement’s perspective is, rather, that the “laws” of nature are a result of God’s Unity-Law in matter; they have their own dynamic and evolve in time and space, resulting in living and non-living things that, from a human perspective, may be harmful or beneficial.

Unlike other animals, however, we have a God-given intellect that enables us to use our scientific understanding of these laws to prevent, alleviate and sometimes cure disease. ☸

*Dr Gregory Farrelly is a physics teacher at Cambridge Tutors College, Croydon.*



# The Last Word

By Fr CJ McCloskey

## A Call for Catholic Leadership

Where have the Catholic leaders gone, long time passing? Sound familiar? It should. I've borrowed and adapted it from a Pete Seeger ballad made famous by the American folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary, in 1962.

The lyric came to me as I was reading a wonderful book, *Jan Sobieski: The King Who Saved Europe*, by Miltiades Varvounis. It is about the life of the great Polish king and warrior responsible for saving Europe at the gates of Vienna from the hordes of the Ottoman Empire. If the Christian West had lost in that confrontation, we might today be under Islamic control, living at best under a form of sharia law.

Who can save what is left of the West today? Not the Pope or cardinals or bishops or priests or pastors. Rather, it is lay people, and particularly Catholic statesmen. Consider the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the role of the laity:

898 By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will.... It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be affected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.

899 The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life. This initiative is a normal element of the life of the Church. Lay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them the Church is the animating principle of human society. Therefore, they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the common Head, and of the bishops in communion with him. They are the Church.

So where are today's Catholic leaders in the mould of the 20th century's Charles de Gaulle of France, or Alcide De Gasperi of Italy, or Konrad Adenauer of post-war Germany, not to mention the 17th-century Sobieski?

Out of curiosity, I Googled Catholic political leaders recently and found only the great Al Smith, the governor of New York who ran for president in 1928 (and lost, alas!). Happily, the search did not turn up JFK – may he rest in peace, but he was certainly no model of a Catholic leader.

The United States has never been a Catholic country, of course, and today we are not even truly a Christian country, given the continuing collapse of traditional Protestantism – graphically demonstrated by the legalisation of abortion and the breakdown of marriage. In addition, there is the presence

of pornography in the culture at all levels, degrading women and destroying families by the millions, not to speak of the Pill, which both poisons the woman and prevents new life.

But do not be dismayed at this parade of horrible things. It should energise you either to become a Catholic leader or to support real Catholics who will bring the faith to the public square as legislators or congressional representatives or governors or members of the Supreme Court. This is your job, not mine. My business is the care of souls.

There are currently 26 Catholics in the Senate, although many are Catholics in name only. The House of Representatives lists 142 members who claim to be Catholic – the greatest number in our history, and at a crucial period of moral peril. But where is their witness to natural law, religious freedom, and enduring moral truths?

Happily, several (faithful) Catholics are considering a run for the presidency. We should hope that would include both parties. What a wonderful moment it would be if our once-great country were to produce a number of great Catholic statesmen ready and able to confront the great crises, moral and civilisational, threatening our nation (and the world) today.

Alexis de Tocqueville's shrewd observation about Americans in the first half of the 19th century apply just as well to our own times:

*At the present time, more than in any preceding age, Roman Catholics are seen to lapse into infidelity, and Protestants to be converted to Roman Catholicism. If you consider Catholicism within its own organisation, it seems to be losing; if you consider it from outside, it seems to be gaining. Nor is this difficult to explain. The men of our days are naturally little disposed to believe; but as soon as they have any religion, they immediately find in themselves a latent instinct that urges them unconsciously towards Catholicism.*

*Many of the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church astonish them, but they feel a secret admiration for its discipline, and its great unity attracts them. If Catholicism could at length withdraw itself from the political animosities to which it has given rise, I have hardly any doubt but that the same spirit of the age which appears to be so opposed to it would become so favourable as to admit of its great and sudden advancement.*

The Church is interested in the application of truth based on natural law. It has little interest, as Tocqueville noted, in political parties. Pray and get involved. It's up to you. ☕

Fr CJ McCloskey is a priest of Opus Dei based in Chicago. This article first appeared on *The Catholic Thing* ([www.thecatholicthing.org](http://www.thecatholicthing.org)) in February 2015.

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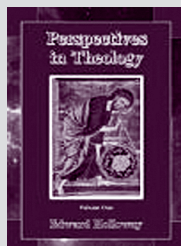
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