

# faith

Promoting A New Synthesis Of Faith And Reason

## Advent Christmas and the Incarnation

Is God a "she"?

*Editorial*

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*Praying for the dead in November*

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### Truth, Joy and the Marriage Debate

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# Advent, Christmas and the Incarnation

There has been no shortage of good copy for newspapers this year, but back in the early summer, somewhere between the General Election, and before terrorist horrors in Tunisia, there were a brief few days when not much seemed to be happening. And so a rather obscure campaigning group was able to get some headlines by announcing that God should be addressed as “she”.

The thing had a faintly ‘70s flavour – *Daily Mail* headlines sounding appropriately shocked etc. – and the story, as it emerged from the layers of cliché, was not particularly impressive. Something called the “Transformations Steering Group” had announced that Anglican bishops should promote more “expansive language and imagery about God”. The Transformations Steering Group turns out to be a gathering of lobbyists from groups with 70s-style acronyms, the C of E’s website informing us that “The Steering Group comprises two representatives proposed by each of the constituent groupings (DARC, NADAWM, WATCH & AWESOME) plus a senior woman from the Northern Province.”

## An Opportunity To Explain

And these good ladies had items in the newspapers and on the internet, the *Daily Telegraph* announcing that: “Hilary Cotton, chair of Women And The Church (WATCH), the group which led the campaign for female bishops, said the shift away from the traditional patriarchal language of the Book of Common Prayer is already at an ‘advanced’ stage in some quarters.” And so on.

So far, not so very newsworthy. We really have had an awful lot of this. But perhaps it does offer an opportunity to explain again to a tired Western culture, that has a sort of exhaustion about it, the great reality of God. They have become bored with God, in part precisely because His transcendent glory has been blurred and muddled in their minds by the noise from groups with trendy acronyms.

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*“They have become bored with God because his transcendent glory has been blurred in their minds.”*

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They have been given stones instead of bread and, still hungry, are now searching elsewhere. People are tired and a bit lonely – and because the great reality of our sexual differences is something they do know about, and suspect may be of greater

significance than the dear ladies of DARC and WATCH and NADAWM and so on can fathom – they think that the truth of God is too remote and bleak and can never really be discovered.

But He isn't, and He loves us – loves so much that He sent his only Son, born of a woman, to come and live among us, to live as one of us, to be one of us, to suffer and die for us. We belong with Him and to Him, and, yes, the whole male/female "thing" is all part of this.

## God Has Revealed Himself To Us

Because, dear ladies, God is not a "she". From the beginning, He has spoken to us, and revealed Himself to us – first through the prophets and then, in these latter times, by Himself. And Jesus Christ was incarnate as a male, and no, this wasn't a mistake, and it wasn't without meaning. The whole message is a nuptial one – the whole plan from

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*"We are male and female because  
God and his Church are united in a  
marriage bond."*

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"the beginning" (Gen. 1:1, Jn. 1:1) to the glorious marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9) is a message that is also written into the Incarnation, and also, awesomely, into our own lived experience. We are male and female because God and his Church

are united in a marriage bond. The male/female imagery isn't just important – it's central.

Alas, the notion that God somehow got the timing wrong for his Incarnation, is now quite often regarded as somehow standard. Discussions begin with "Of course, if Jesus were alive today...", and there is a sort of assumption that this is in itself a really profound statement, a sort of deeply-held wisdom. But it isn't. Because, of course, as our Evangelical brethren put it rather well, if sometimes rather sentimentally: "He IS alive!" – and, more to the point, His Bride, the Church, is alive too. We are all caught up in this drama, living together in the Lord's own era, knowing Him, loving Him, serving Him and awaiting His return in glory.

## New Clichés

Another cliché – this one a bit newer: "It's just a no-brainer!" This was said, in, I think, genuine bewilderment, to the writer of this feature, during a discussion about same-sex marriage. The young lady – an RE teacher, no less – just "couldn't see any problem" with two men getting married, and couldn't see any need to think about it too deeply – no brain action required on this one at all. Easy. Obviously, you accept the current line. Obviously. I mean, everyone's been wrong about that for, like, centuries. I mean, like, for ever. Right?

But we do need to use our brains. This male/female thing is deeper than we thought. This Bridegroom/Bride thing matters a lot. There were pagan priestesses of old – every religion in the area around the Middle East had priestesses; God’s own chosen people, the Jews, were unique in not having them. God had His own plan, His truth, His way, His life. And because from the beginning the plan was that, in His love, He would actually join in with His own creation and infuse it all with His love and His truth, He actually wrote the plan into our very bodies, creating us as male and female in His own image, so that we would understand, so that we would be able to grasp the truth when it was revealed to us.

## You Do Need To Think About It

It’s a bit of a “brainer”: you do need to think about it. You do need to “watch”, you do need to find it “awesome”. Not all those acronyms are wrong. If the ladies of WATCH and AWESOME and the other less pronounceable groups would like to do so, we could have a rich and useful discussion about all of this. There is always more to learn about God, and the learning is exciting. Such learning begins with prayer and the Scriptures, it unfolds with pondering the vast riches of the centuries of study that have gone before us, it deepens in thought and contemplation, it enlarges the mind with much reading and listening and questioning.

It doesn’t wholly eliminate lobbying, it even allows the odd cliché. Usefully, it certainly takes note of the “signs of the times”. It relishes answering new

questions and echoing old ones. It assumes that Truth is to be found, and that God is not hiding it from us, that the Church is no mere human institution, that God is bigger than human mistakes. It allows for the truth and drama of the Incarnation to assume the dramatic central role it must assume if the thing is true.

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*“There is always more to learn about God, and the learning is exciting.”*

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## Development of Doctrine

If God really became one of us, if human beings matter that much, if God really was a baby in a woman’s womb, then this male/female thing really matters. His maleness matters. Mary’s femaleness matters. The Church matters. Development of doctrine often emerges with the assistance of questions raised as heresies – only because of Arius did we get the Nicene creed, only through Nestorius the richer insights into Christology. Shorn of its trite clichés, the question “Is God a she?” isn’t unhelpful, but it’s a question, not an answer. Mother Church enjoys her children’s questions, and knows that in answering them much can be learned and fresh insights gained. She

wants her children to work on their scholarship, she enjoys their efforts, she has authority to discern what is useful and what is not, she insists on a certain rigour. Allow her to get this into focus.

The Transformation Steering Group might like to take a break. The task of attempting to transform God can be a bit tiring. There is also a need to step back

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*"His maleness matters. Mary's femaleness matters. The Church matters."*

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from a task and question its usefulness. A child tapping on a window-pane may think he is making the rain stop. Our studies and reflections must be of a different order. God transforms us, not the other way round. His reality has been revealed

to us, and for a purpose. Take time out to ponder, ladies (and gentlemen), as we all should. Enjoy Christmas and encounter Christ anew.

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

# Purified in Love:

## The Experience of Purgatory

JAMES TOLHURST

The main difference that is noticed in a modern Catholic funeral is the abundance of flowers and candles, (which have become the universal mark of condolence) and almost in inverse proportion, the scarcity of Mass cards and Mass stipends. Thirty years ago it was the other way round. We need to ask if people still believe in praying for the faithful departed and that it is “not a fond thing vainly invented”. The practice was strongly endorsed by the Council of Trent in 1563 precisely to counter the arguments of the Reformers. There is a Memento in every Eucharistic Prayer, and the 2nd November and the subsequent month is dedicated to the Holy Souls. Has it just withered away in people’s minds?

Pious remembrance is better than nothing, but it easily slides into a certain agnosticism. We can wonder whether we wander disembodied in the next life, ‘having passed over’ or maybe dwell in some alternate universe. Perhaps we console ourselves with the thought that our dead are all with God in heaven, like the angels - which of course is an impossibility, as we are a different species. Cardinal Basil Hume visited Jennifer Patterson (of the BBC cookery series *“Two Fat Ladies”*) in hospital, as she lay dying of cancer, and said as he was leaving, “Well, Jennifer, see you in heaven.” To which she is supposed to have replied, “No, Eminence, but I hope we meet in Purgatory.”

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*“We need to ask if people still believe in praying for the faithful departed.”*

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### The Meaning of Purgatory

Yes, there is heaven (and hell) and “there is also that place we call Purgatory,” said Pope Innocent IV in 1254. We need to keep it in mind, as it is the destination where we hope to arrive when our own life is over. The problem is the word itself: purgatives were one of the painful medical interventions which our ancestors had to undergo when they were ill. The emphasis therefore is on the painful atonement for sin which has been built up during life and for which the settlement must be made: David, having repented for his sin, was still punished for it (2 Sam. 12:13–14). There is a painful side to purgatory. It is termed “temporal” punishment (not that



there is any concept of time in eternity) which is the basis for the Church's almost overlooked, because unexplained, teaching on indulgences – no longer time-limited in days, months, quarantains and years (like bail bonds), but since *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* of 1967, partial or plenary (total). The emphasis is now placed more firmly on the merciful love of God and the merits of Our Lady and the Saints to hasten the pilgrimage that the Holy Souls undertake.

Such pain suffered is not a vengeful imposition, “to be appeased in wrath, dear Lord” – using the words of Fr. Faber's hymn – in the same way that there is much less emphasis on corporal penance, as purgative of sin. The importance is now placed on purification: “He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord.” (Mal. 3:3). The Church has replaced the word purge with purify in its most recent documents (Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* n.49, 50, 51 and The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1030, 1032). Purgatory is seen as a purifying process.

### The Soul Is Already Filled With Light

But this purification even if it is not punitive, is not yet heaven. Writers would describe it in terms of an imprisonment; Newman's hymn says “in prison for the debt unpaid”. Theologians would express this in penal terms. Some, like St. Bonaventure would say that it exceeds by far all the pains of life; others like St. Thomas would talk of a lesser

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*“He will purify the sons of Levi and  
refine them like gold and silver.”  
(Mal.3:3).”*

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penalty, “even if minimal”: the *mitissima omnium poena* (the smallest punishment of all). Interestingly they use the same language with regard to limbo – but that is another subject which can't be gone into at the moment.

Van Noort would argue that the souls would have “something of the pain of hell and the joy of heaven”, ingenious, but theologically, an oxymoron. Both Trent and The Catechism of the Catholic Church as well as the 1979 Letter on Certain Questions concerning Eschatology make the point that any sense of punishment “is altogether different from the punishment of the damned”. The reason of course is that as St John Paul II put it in 1991, “the soul is already filled with light, certitude, joy, because the person knows that he belongs forever to God.”

### In The Hope of The Resurrection

We need to banish from our minds any spectacle of souls writhing in agony in pools of fire, “letting the fire wear out their stains...” However St. Cyprian talks of being purged



for a long time by fire and St. Clement of Alexandria mentions a fiery trial. Eusebius talks of “passing over the fiery river and that fearful water, the drops of which are fire” and Newman would talk of the ‘penal waters’ in *The Dream of Gerontius*. These are images not so much of Purgatory but of Hell, even if you say it is only temporary, or the pain is just about bearable.

This created problems for the Orthodox delegates at the Council of Florence in 1444 and it was agreed that the fire could be dropped as part of a *quid pro quo*, with the Greeks agreeing to some suffering; with the truly righteous being immediately beatified. St Justin had earlier maintained that “the souls of the pious are in some better place” and St. Catherine of Genoa would affirm, “No greater joy could be compared to the joy of the pure soul in Purgatory than the joy of the blessed in paradise.” St Bernard added that those in Purgatory are happier than those on earth.” They “have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection” (Eucharistic Prayer II).

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*“The soul is filled with light, certitude, joy, because the person knows that he belongs forever to God.”*

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### Who Shall Stand in His Holy Place?

But we must not simply dismiss the images of the prison or the fire; instead we should set them against the understanding that nothing unworthy can enter the presence of God. The encounter with the All-Holy God was an awe-inspiring experience (Ex. 3:5. 20:18-19; Lev. 19:2). For who could say, “I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin”? (Prov. 20:9). Isaiah had to exclaim “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts” (Is. 6:5). “Who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who desires not worthless things,” says the Psalmist (Ps. 24:3-4).

The Levites had to be cleansed for their ceremonials. “He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord.” (Mal. 3:3) Certain rituals and kosher laws were demanded of God’s holy people (Lev. 11:14; Num.19:11): “the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh” (Heb. 9:13).

Yom Kippur was set aside for self-examination and atonement for sin. Before Passover we are told “Many went up from the country to Jerusalem, to purify themselves” (Jn. 11:55). The man without the wedding garment is not admitted to the bridal banquet in the parable of the kingdom (Mt. 22:11) and Jesus reminds us that we must “be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect,” (Mt. 5:4) so that we are worthy to enter that kingdom where “nothing unclean shall enter” (Rev. 21:27).

## Lord I Am Not Worthy

It is a truly painful and undeniable fact that we are all sinful and unclean. We are “but dust and ashes”, and we rightly proclaim with the centurion every time we come to Communion that we are unworthy for the Lord to enter under our roof. When faced with the prospect of heaven there has to be that remorseful admission of “those carnal and worldly affections ... whether we would have Christ, or our delights” (Augustine, City of God, ch. 26). St. John of the Cross maintains that the souls in Purgatory “suffer great doubts about whether they will ever leave and whether their afflictions will end.” (Dark Night II,7) St. Thomas More talks about his sufferings in the Tower lessening the pains of Purgatory. But St. Catherine of Genoa approaches this from another angle: “The greatest suffering of the souls in purgatory, it seems to me, is their awareness that something in them displeases God, that they have deliberately gone against His great goodness” (The Spiritual Dialogue).

It is not therefore the fact of God inflicting punishment but rather the necessity of the removal of obstacles between us and God’s love. “The fire, when applied, would be powerless over them if they did not have imperfections from which to suffer. These imperfections are the fuel that catches on fire, and once they are gone there

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*“Who shall stand in his holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure  
heart, who desires not worthless  
things.”*

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is nothing left to burn,” says St John of the Cross (Dark Night II,10). In Purgatory there is that struggle between the burning desire for God and the biting shame of being unworthy, “To love and to be denied the object of one’s love,” says Tauler.

This conflict is resolved in the love which triumphs in martyrdom, for “in the evening of life we will be examined in love.” Divine love “is so awe-full that it does cause pain – one realises one’s own nothingness and the immensity of God’s goodness” to quote Agnes Holloway. In my own Concise Catechism for Catholics it is stated, “Those who die without perfect love of God will be purified in love in Purgatory” (Q. 242).

## The Night Where No One Can Work

In our lives there should be that longing to meet God in complete abandonment so that we can love him alone. St. Peter needed to atone for his three-fold betrayal, by a similar expression of his love. We surely believe that the sufferings undergone in this life, if accepted with a genuine love of God will gain for us remission of our sins and the reward of eternal life. When the time comes to leave this world, to be “a valiant soul without fear of death” (to quote St. Oliver Plunkett), we make our final sacrifice to God for the life that he has given to us. It should be as the prayer says,

"I take from your hands my illness and all I have to suffer; and when you call me at last, I will accept even my death from you to make up for my sins." (Roman Ritual). But undergoing Purgatory itself is essentially a passive process: "the night where no one can work" (John 9:4). It is a great act of charity to ask God in our prayers to hasten the purification of those souls we call holy, but who are not holy enough to enjoy the fullness of the light and joy of God's presence. It is true, as St. Paul says that Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself to make her holy, making her clean by baptism, but he is waiting to take those souls to himself so that they will be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25ff ).

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*"The greatest suffering of the souls in Purgatory is their awareness that something in them displeases God."*

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That is Purgatory as it ends in heaven.

We neglect to think about it at our own risk – one day we will need the prayers of those we leave behind, and now we should remember those who have died – the Curé of Ars calls them "the mendicants of another world." Judas Maccabeus considered offering sacrifice for those who had died was a "holy and pious thought" (2 Macc. 12:45). As early as AD 140, Aristides of Athens wrote, "If one of the faithful dies, obtain salvation for him by celebrating the Eucharist and by praying next to his remains."

## The Merciful Love of God

We bear in mind our faithful departed in the Masses we offer for them - in our deeds, our almsgiving and our prayers - especially if they are indulgenced. They are worth more than many flowers. After all, we should be keeping our hearts fixed even in this life on what God has prepared for those who love him, Jesus has told us, "Set your hearts on his kingdom first" (Matt. 6:33). "There we shall rest and we shall behold and we shall love and we shall praise. This is what shall be in the end without end" (City of God, ch. 22), sharing of God's blessedness, when Purgatory will be no more.

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*Fr. James Tolhurst was Spiritual Director of the English College, Valladolid. He was the first reviews editor of Faith and is the author of A Concise Catechism for Catholics and editor of Cardinal Newman's Tracts for the Times.*

# Truth, Joy and the Marriage Debate

TIMOTHY DANAHER OP

Since the legalising of same-sex marriage in the United States this summer, surprisingly few Catholics have voiced their dissent, either in pulpit or public square. Most have tended to murmur together in their own small groups, sharing worries for the future and disbelief at the present state of affairs. It's understandable in the face of an aggressive cultural movement which quite frankly doesn't "play fair" in allowing any opposition view.

But we all know in our hearts that we cannot stay silent. It's a matter, then, of finding the right words and methods to defend the truth of marriage, without producing just another shouting match or a public smear campaign. Perhaps we should take a closer look at some basic elements of the recent shift may offer us a few conclusions with which we can cut through the complexity of this debate. Then we might find practical ways to move forward.

## The Force of Law

The cultural shift isn't the fact that same-sex couples exist. They have done so since the beginning of written history in various forms, either socially acceptable or not. The shift is that people have accepted that such couples should be allowed to marry: "It's their own choice, not mine," goes the refrain, "It's not my place to decide their lifestyle for them, is it?"

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*"When something is enshrined in law,  
it becomes education."*

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But when something is enshrined in law, it becomes education. Law itself has an educative power. Whatever is on the books becomes a recognized "right" due to persons. Society then takes it to be the right thing. The concern from the Catholic

perspective is that such laws will then encourage acting on same-sex attraction. This conflicts with the Church's traditional approach – patiently and truthfully dealing with such an attraction on an individual basis.

We're still left with the question: how can a majority of citizens support something with which they don't identify? The general attitude today is essentially scepticism.

We have grown sceptical of calling any particular thing true. We are comfortable with allowing many truths, so long as no one claims to have the truth. We are sceptical that such a claim is even possible.

## The Claims of Love

Yet Christians cannot help but claim this! And not because we are against others, or merely because we are convinced of the intellectual and experiential integrity of our own tradition. We claim this because we are in love. Every love makes absolute claims: "My wife is the most beautiful woman in the world!" And for such a man, she is the most beautiful woman, surpassing even Helen of Troy. But when someone falls in love with God, who reveals himself in Jesus Christ, they do not make the absolute claim of having met the most beautiful person for me, but the most beautiful person period. Jesus Christ is the

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*"The only reason to become a Christian (and to remain a Christian) is to have faith in Christ."*

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most beautiful thing that has ever happened in the world, and he is still happening. The only reason to be a Christian (and to remain a Christian) is to have faith in Christ. Faith does not mean we generally trust that Christ loves us and guides us, but that he is Lord! He is the very One who thought of us in the first place, who made the heart of man, and who alone can direct it truly. We follow someone who said of himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). He is the first to make absolute claims on the truth of human life. Christians only do so because they are in love with him and trust in his every word.

## An Encounter With Truth

Speaking of God's word, St. Augustine makes some fascinating remarks in his work *On the Letter and Spirit*. He says that even the new law of the Gospel would kill us unless it was accompanied by inward grace, healing us and helping us from within. No wonder – from the outside looking in – people call Catholic teaching an impossible standard. Christ's instructions are impossible to live out without personal contact with Christ himself, with his grace, which his very words give to us so we might accept his word and keep it in our lives.

People too often talk about Jesus aside from his words, about his compassion towards all, while they fail to wrestle with some of his steepest moral teachings: "Whoever divorces his wife... and marries another, commits adultery; Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart; If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; I have come to

bring not peace but the sword; Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 19:9, 5:28, 5:30, 10:14, 10:37). To outsiders, these seem the cruel pronouncements of some mere law-maker. To those who believe, it is the voice of a lover, assuring us, "Whatever I ask of you, I am with you always..." (cf. Mt. 28,20).

There is, then, no place for a Catholic to wish for others to find their own truth. This is a false idea of love, against even the first instincts of love, which is for two people to try to see the world in the same way, so they might live in the same way. Catholics cannot be sceptics, even towards very sincere people with other views. Having met Christ the Truth, we believe in the integrity of truth, saying, "I wish Christ for you, and all that he teaches. What is true for me is also meant for you."

## High Standards

This has always been the underlying reason why the Church has always held (and continues to hold) a very high standard regarding sex. The Church directs us to an even higher standard: relationship with God. The long history of Christian living shows that intimacy with God is something possible, something concrete which affects our marriages, friendships, moods, careers, even our sex lives. Sexual union is sacred –

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*"The Church directs us to an even higher standard: relationship with God."*

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so much so, that God has bound to it the of co-creation of new human life. If we refuse to obey the designer and giver of so great a gift, one result is inevitable: it will begin to take the place of our relationship with him.

Of all the goods that God has given us, sex is one of the most powerful. The Church cannot sanction any act of sex outside of true (male/female) marriage, because it directly goes against the Church's primary vocation as the Bride of Christ, i.e. that Body of believers who spend their lives seeking "him whom my soul loves" (Song 3,3) and making him the first priority of their lives. She cannot approve or promote anything which would get in the way of that search, and sex outside of the sacrament of marriage always gets in the way of it. This includes a whole range of activities, from fornication and adultery to same-sex activity, and even including sins within marriage such as abuse, lust, or contraception.

## What We Can Do About It

Even if we re-examine some aspects of the current debate, what good does it do? The fact remains that the western world is changing its laws on these issues, and the Church is pressured to get on board. Catholic institutions have been targeted and penalized for resisting to comply with this new wave.

What do we do when we're being told to love and not to hate, while we ourselves are hated for even mentioning our own views out of love? There are experts who can help us navigate the legal issues involved with running Catholic institutions, and of course, certain people in the pulpit or the public square must continue to raise their voice in defence of the truth. But what can individual Christians really do about it?

Above all, we can and must preserve our joy. We have no reason for joy in the legislative setbacks of late. But we have reason to rejoice simply because God is still with us: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace" (Heb 14:9). It's an enormous privilege to live in this world as Christians. We must not let legitimate concerns overwhelm or define our faith. We are Christians first because we belong to Christ, not because of our public stances.

Now, of all times, we must get busy living Christian lives, living as Christian families: "Let marriage be held in honour among you all" (Heb 13:4). Our first job is just to pray, grow, teach the children, and enjoy Christian community, because God is still blessing us despite all that happens in the world.

## The Power of Joy

We must also bring joy into our conversation. Joy itself is evangelical, and people are more easily shocked by a happy, chaste Christian than they are by hearing about statistical studies of homosexuality or even philosophical arguments, such as sexual acts having intrinsic meaning and being open to new life.

Try asking people about their joy in God.

Too many conversations begin on the same wrong footing: "Why doesn't the Church let people...?" or even among certain Catholics, "Will I go to hell if I...?" This often leads to dead ends: the questioner claims he is the realist, while the struggling response attempts to define Church teaching. We need a new approach, not starting with the Church as a government, nor of Christ as merely some final judge, reserving for us a good or bad outcome. Rather he is Someone present right here, right now, inviting us to follow him.

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*"Joy itself is evangelical, and people are shocked by a happy, chaste Christian."*

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## Intelligent Witness

So we should begin with: "Do you have joy in God? What's that like for you? Because that's what we're about. That's where we're really coming from, where our laws are coming from, and where they are going." The results can be surprisingly personal and



sincere, opening the way for a deeper discussion. Gritty details of contentious issues are not unimportant. But what is most important is that Christianity is a relationship, and that all Church teachings are contained within that very personal, very intimate, and admittedly sometimes difficult context.

Christian witnesses must be intelligent and joyful. We must treat others in a human way (even when they may not return the favour) and in a divine way as well. And our joy is an invitation to them to find a new way forward.



*Timothy Danaher became a Dominican friar in 2011, entering the Province of St. Joseph in the eastern United States after obtaining a BA from Franciscan University of Steubenville in British and American Literature. He is currently studying for the priesthood at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C.*



FAITH Movement  
will have a stand at

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# A Necessary Victory:

## The Campaign Against the Marris Bill

PETER D. WILLIAMS

*The Executive Officer of Right to Life reviews a major recent Parliamentary debate about 'assisted suicide' and its wider significance.*

I had hoped for a quiet summer. From late July to early September, Parliament shuts down for Summer Recess and MPs return to their constituencies to enjoy a holiday. This usually means that political campaigners get something of a quieter period too, and in the case of those campaigning for the right to life this would have been particularly welcome.

The last six months before the General Election saw a good deal of political activity on 'life' issues. A Ten-Minute Rule Bill introduced by Fiona Bruce MP turned into an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, and there was much work to try to mobilise the support of right-to-lifers on that issue, as indeed on the Government regulations allowing embryo-exploitative and destructive 'mitochondrial donation' techniques. The votes for both of these, rather unhelpfully, happened within a day of each other. Then there was the long campaign to inform voters – at least as far as possible – about the beliefs of parliamentary candidates on life issues for the Election itself.

### A New Battle

After all that, the political campaigning wing of the right-to-life movement could have used a break, but this was not to be. Within a month of the first Queen's Speech of the new Parliament, an MP called Rob Marris came top of the ballot for Private Members' Bills (by which individual MPs are given time to introduce legislation of their own), and he chose to make his Bill one that would introduce assisted suicide. So began a new battle for the human right to life in 2015.

The lobby for assisted suicide has repeatedly attempted to pass their desired legislation over the last ten years. Up to now, this has focused on the House of Lords. First came Lord Joffe's two attempts to pass an assisted suicide Bill in the early-to-mid Noughties, then an attempted amendment to the Coroners and Justice Bill by former Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer of Thoroton in 2009. This also failed, but Lord

Falconer decided to introduce a new Bill in the last Parliament. This progressed all the way to Committee Stage until it ran out of time (when one Parliament ends, all Bills that have not been passed must be re-presented and start again in the next Parliament). The Bill as it currently stands is so far down the legislative list, that it has no chance of progressing in the current session.

## The Strategy

This is why Rob Marris decided to introduce his own assisted suicide Bill. I say ‘his own’, but while he took it through the House of Commons, the content of it was Falconer through-and-through. From the limitation of offering assisted suicide to terminally-ill patients whose prognosis is only six months of life, to the so-called ‘safeguard’ of having two doctors check the patient has a “clear, settled, and voluntary” wish to die (and, er, as we all know, a two doctor requirement was such a powerful safeguard in the Abortion Act!) – the Marris Bill was essentially Falconer redux.

The strategy of this proposal, in Marris as in Falconer, was to be so perceivably moderate and inoffensive that it got through the law-making process. If Parliamentarians could be convinced that assistance in suicide would only be available to a few very needy people who are suffering intolerably, and that sufficient ‘safeguards’ would be put in place to obviate abuses, then they might have comfortably passed such legislation into the statute books. Such an event would have made passing it through

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*“The strategy was to be so inoffensive that it got through the law-making process.”*

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the Lords much easier, especially since Peers had already seen these proposals and have a tendency to give favour to the elected House’s decisions.

## What About The Hardest Cases?

The danger of this strategy was precisely in its insidious pseudo-moderation. Once you grant the principle that a terminally-ill person has the ‘right to die’ – or more accurately, given that suicide was decriminalised in 1961, the positive right to be enabled to kill themselves – then there is no reason why this right should be restricted to the terminally-ill alone. If someone whose life is about to end has the right to an assisted suicide, then why not a severely disabled person, or someone who is clinically depressed?

Indeed, if the core of the right to die, rather than the choice to die, is actualised, then why should it not also apply to those whose conditions make their situations the hardest of hard cases – people who are ‘locked in’ to their own bodies like Tony Nicklinson or Paul Lamb? Yet such people cannot ever end their own lives, due to their debilitating condition. They would need euthanasia (for their doctor to kill them), and

this is precisely the ultimate goal of many advocates of the current law. Clearly then, 'Dignity in Dying' (formerly, the Voluntary Euthanasia Society), the lobby group at the centre of efforts to introduce assisted suicide, believed that the Falconer provisions contained the winning legislative formula that would have allowed them to get them this first crucial foothold in the law.

## How The Bill Was Defeated

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*"To get 212 (votes) was quite simply wonderfully astonishing."*

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Yet putting it through the Commons now was also a risk on their part. That House had not looked at this issue for almost twenty years, and if the Marris Bill were defeated, and especially if it were defeated heavily, this would not only render any efforts of theirs in the House of Lords essentially superfluous, but that their agenda would be defeated for potentially a whole generation. A new assisted suicide proposal could hardly be brought up too soon if the issue had been decided by the elected House comparatively recently.

Indeed, given that Rob Marris's winning of the Private Members' Ballot was sheer chance, this is certainly not something that the assisted suicide lobby had planned. They were being carried by circumstance, and given the potential price of failure, this had the possibility to be a providential development for the right-to-life cause.

In the end, that is exactly what it became. The Bill was defeated by 330 votes to 118. An emphatic rejection of the Marris/Falconer proposals, and of assisted suicide itself. It was a brilliant victory for the right-to-life movement. It was also surprising. Had you asked me about our chances, I would have forecast a small victory of maybe 30–50 votes. I had hoped, at best, for a 100-vote majority. To get 212 was quite simply wonderfully astonishing.

## Important Groups

The key to this brilliant victory was that Members of Parliament heard the voice of their constituents. Initially, MPs had noted to us that they had been getting many more communications from constituents in favour of assisted suicide than against. That changed over the Summer as more people began to hear about the issues involved, and the Church played an important role in this. In terms of public perception, the most important groups working against Marris were those who could be most profoundly harmed by the proposed legislation: the elderly, and the disabled. Towards the end of the Parliamentary session before the recess, a lobby was organised in Portcullis House (the office building many MPs use just across Bridge Street, overlooking the Thames) by Not Dead Yet UK, in which disabled activists invited their MPs to discuss assisted suicide with them.

It had a good turn-out, and emphasised to MPs the concerns that vulnerable people have towards a practice that would enable subtle pressure to be exerted on vulnerable people to die, even if only after being extended in the future. It was profoundly helpful that the leading disability groups, Scope and Disability Rights UK, are strong opponents of assisted suicide (as are Royal Colleges and the British Medical Association).

## Building on our Advantages

The speaker at this event was Liz Carr, the disabled star of 'Silent Witness', who as a stand-up comedienne gave a powerful speech against assisted suicide. She is

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*"These advantages notwithstanding, the campaign for assisted suicide cannot be underestimated."*

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one of many public figures who also has precisely the right credentials to be a credible public opponent of the 'right-to-die' lobby. Baroness Jane Campbell of Surbiton (disability rights activist, and former Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission), Baroness

Grey-Thompson (former Gold-medal paralympian), Lady Finlay of Llandaff (leading palliative care specialist and President of the British Medical Association), and Lord Carlisle of Berriew (one of the UK's top QCs and legal experts) are all either atheist or agnostic, and tend to be in favour of legalised abortion. Aside from their obvious professional achievements and expertise, the fact that they cannot be dismissed as being 'religious' or dogmatic right-to-lifers gives them credibility in our secular (and frequently secularist) political and media culture.

These advantages notwithstanding, the campaign for assisted suicide cannot be underestimated. They have money, celebrity backing, and great resources. Ultimately it was the efforts of the people who wrote to their MPs and urged them to turn up and oppose the Marris Bill, and the public witness of groups like Not Dead Yet UK, that led the House of Commons to recognise the need to safeguard the rights and dignity of vulnerable people. By the grace of God, our busy summer was not in vain.

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*Peter D. Williams is Executive Officer of Right to Life*

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# Christ The King

EDWARD HOLLOWAY

Universal King – because from His ‘Fiat’ the universe itself was spawned in the first microseconds of the explosive energies with which the creation itself began. King – because through Him, as Eternal Word, Intellect of the Divine, that dynamic movement of energies was ordered like an equation to its ascent of being. It was ordered says the Wisdom of Solomon, in “number, in measure, and in weight” (Wisdom 11,20). King and Son of Man, – because as the Angels were made in the sheer likeness of God’s immaterial being, so man’s kind was, from the beginning, made to the Image not of God in general, but of God to be Incarnate, in Christ. King he is as Teacher, Leader, Ruler of our lives: the Lord of History.

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. King again, because victor, as becomes a King in battle hard won over the power of evil and loss placed in the nature of Man by Original Sin, and the long catalogue of personal sin. King victorious, he is called Saviour, King as our Redeemer, the one who won back his own inheritance, and rescued us from our powerlessness to overcome the realities of sin, ignorance, and death. We could not break out upwards to God. We needed Him to break down the wall of the dungeon of our servitude.

## Lord of Life in The Eucharist

Call him the Lord of Life, because He is the Sunshine of our souls. He quickens life within us by his touch, as the sun quickens life upon the bare, winter tree. Call Him the Lord of Life, because as Divine he is the food and the life of the immortal human spirit. And, in his divine Person, linked now to the flesh and Son of Man, He knew a way to make this reality of his relationship to us, a real thing, a lasting thing, a sign of the New Covenant in his blood. Lord of Life he is in the Holy Eucharist he left with us and for us: it is Himself. King also He is in the Church. He led onwards through the Old Testament, in priest and in prophet, over long ages. He fulfilled that expectation of a Messiah, an expectation growing ever more fervent within Israel, in his own Person, when the Word was made Flesh on Christmas Night.

Call Him King again in the Church, the Assembly of his people. He is priest, prophet, and king, speaking through Council, Pope, prophet, and great saints, through the ages. His is the “But I say to You” never ceasing from the centre of Peter, where that power subsists, that spoke once upon the hillsides of Judah, and the lakeside

of Galilee. His is no hesitant or ambiguous voice. There is finality in his decisions. Therefore it must be said of his Church, as once it was said of Him, that welcome or unwelcome, "never did man speak as this man speaks". For Christ is the Living God, in the Person of "the Son", not simply the greatest and most perfect of the prophets and the Buddhas. Nobody is ever named God as a courtesy title!

### All Things Were Created By Him and For Him

Call Him, on this feastday, King in all things, and in all relationships to us, because He is the Firstborn of all creation. From Him life streamed out in the Beginning, and all was ordered by natural law unto His Coming, the season of Advent we next celebrate. In Him all creation, Angels, Mankind, the beautiful order of matter, finds its source, its meaning, and its fulfilment.

He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Of Him – we conclude with St. Paul – "In Him were all things created, visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. And in Him, all things do hold together in Communion, because in Him it has well pleased the Father that all Fullness should dwell" (Col. 1:15-20).

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*This meditation was originally published in Faith Magazine  
November/December 1991*

## **FAITH MOVEMENT**

### **Winter Conference**

**Tuesday 29th – Thursday 31st December**

Stonyhurst College, Hurst Green, Lancashire

Talks – prayer – social time

An opportunity to explore the riches of the Catholic Faith  
– and all in an atmosphere of friendship and in the spirit of Christmas

Full cost £120. Concession cost £100

**More information at [www.faith.org.uk](http://www.faith.org.uk)**

And mark this date in your diary for 2016:  
FAITH Summer Session Monday 1st – Friday 5th August 2016



# Faith Summer Session

RICHARD MARSDEN

*A 5<sup>th</sup> Year Seminarian at the Venerable English College, Rome, gives the flavour of a packed week at Faith Movement's annual event for young adults.*

Newly ordained priests giving first blessings, a popular forum with young people giving testimony to their faith, a ceilidh with dancing until late... all part of the 2015 Faith Movement Summer Session with some 200 young people, daily Mass, and a programme of talks focusing on the Sacraments. Some sound bites –

Fr Nick Walsh: *"The Holy Eucharist is the centre and focus of the Church's life. Christ, the Son of God, through whom was made the universe, makes himself available for us at every Mass. Why wouldn't we want to be there?"*

Jessica Robertson, history student at the University of Hull, giving her personal testimony about her devotion to the Eucharist: *"Adoration really gives you the strength to do anything, as does Mass. I urge you - if you can get to weekday Mass, then go."*

Fr Roger Nesbitt on St John Bosco's vision: *"He summed up the Catholic faith, our faith, with three important persons - first the Holy Eucharist, Jesus himself; second Mary, his Mother; third Peter and his successors. So if you want something and someone to guide your life and principles, follow those."*

Fr Stephen Brown on the Sacrament of Reconciliation: *"I think confession is a win-win situation for us because we are healed of the wounds that our sins cause us and we are therefore brought closer to God."*

Mass each day, some 20 priests hearing confessions during a Reconciliation Service with Adoration and Benediction, football, swimming, a talent show, and the unmissable ceilidh. Fathers Phil Cunnah, Matthew O'Gorman, and Mark Higgins were delighted give first blessings during the week as newly ordained priests.

Fr Higgins said: *"It's been a really amazing experience - seeing familiar faces but now relating to them in a different way, having people that I've looked up to over the years, other priests, now call me 'Father'. It was particularly moving to lead and preach at the Reconciliation Service. When I was 17, the Reconciliation Service really had a big impact on my life. It was then that I really was brought back to my faith. So it's an extraordinary honour to be involved in helping teenagers today to return to their faith or begin to take their faith more seriously."*

More about this and other Faith events can be found at [www.faith.org.uk](http://www.faith.org.uk)



### FAITH SUMMER SESSION 2015 - PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

*Mother of the Word, with great joy we call you blessed! God chose you before the creation of the world, and you were faithful even to the Cross when you became our Mother. We confidently entrust this Conference to you. Watch over the Faith Movement in the task it has been given. In our time of need be a Star to guide us to the Wisdom of Christ your Son, crowned Lord of the Cosmos, and our own Lord and Saviour. Mother of the Church and our most beloved Mother, pray for us. Amen.*



# A Compelling Coherence

Faith magazine *interviews Fr Roger Nesbitt and explores the origins of the Faith Movement.*

When Father Roger Nesbitt celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination in 2007, he was presented with a scroll signed by almost forty priests, each of whom owed his vocation, at least in part, to Fr Nesbitt's example. A schoolmaster, a parish priest, a youth leader, and a co-founder of the FAITH Movement, Fr Nesbitt is now (sort of) in retirement – but remains an active speaker and preacher at FAITH events, and the dynamic teacher he has always been.



"It's a long story" he says, when I ask him to talk about the origins of the FAITH Movement. We are enjoying the warm hospitality of Mgr and Mrs Keith Newton at the Rectory of the Ordinariate Church in central London, with a pot of tea in the large dining-room. In the church crypt – currently undergoing refurbishment – the popular Evenings of Faith attract good crowds, and Fr Roger has been among recent speakers.

## First Meeting

"I first met Fr Edward Holloway when I was at Imperial College. I was doing a degree in chemical engineering, and was secretary of the Catholic Society and he came to give a talk. He spoke about Teilhard de Chardin – with whom he disagreed – and I

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*"I knew he had something of importance to say and I wanted to learn more."*

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didn't really know what he was going on about. But I knew he had something of importance to say, and I wanted to know more. I went to work for the Atomic Energy Authority for a year, and was returning to Imperial College in London to do a doctorate. But I thought, 'What am I going

to do with my life?' And I had the thought to talk to Fr Holloway.

"When we met, he said after a short while 'I think you have a vocation to the priesthood'. We were talking about this idea of a synthesis between science and religion. I had been five or six years in the scientific world, and what he was saying about this synthesis really clicked with me and made sense. Within six months I was in the seminary."

## At The Seminary

Studying at St John's Seminary, Womersley, he read Holloway's early work *Matter and Mind* and visited him during the holidays. But meanwhile, dramatic things were happening in the Church and seminary life was powerfully affected. "When I arrived, it was 1961, just before Vatican II. There was a recognition of a need for change – the stuff we were being taught just didn't make sense and was unconvincing. There was a need for a new intellectual coherence".

"But then there was this implosion, the dramatic questioning of everything. The whole seminary and its message seemed to be disintegrating. It was as though nothing could hold it together. I wrote to the Bishop, worried sick about what was happening. By now I was a deacon. They didn't know what to do with me. They wanted me to leave the seminary. The John Fisher School at Purley was looking for a chemistry teacher, so after ordination I was sent there."

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*"(Christ) is the reason for the whole of creation. And we are made for union with him."*

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## A New Adventure

And that was how the adventure began. Holloway was rewriting his book – later to be published as *Catholicism, a New Synthesis* – and in the confusion of those immediate post-Vatican II years, the message of what was to become the FAITH Movement emerged with a compelling coherence: "Christ as the fulfilment of creation – the whole evolution of the universe, the law of control and direction. This explains the creation of man and the soul/body relationship."

The FAITH message centres on an understanding of Christ as the centre and meaning of all things. "The world was created for the sake of the Messiah: this is the Jewish understanding and is profoundly correct. We are made for God – man's environment is God. The psalmist sings of this: 'As the deer yearns for running streams, so my soul yearns for you O God'."

## The Need For A New Synthesis

"The Incarnation wasn't only because of human sin – Christ didn't come just because we sinned. He is the reason for the whole of creation. And we are made for union with him. Without this understanding, even our human biology doesn't make sense: the human brain is too large and ought not even to exist in its present form. It exists because of our souls and because we are designed to be in union with God."

The weakness of the philosophy as taught in the seminary at that time was revealed when it became clear that it wasn't providing answers to the questions students were

raising, and a dialogue wasn't even encouraged. The Church had become dissociated from the way people thought, and from the reality of things. There was no new synthesis and there was a desperate need for one."

"I remember writing an essay on de Chardin's *Phenomenon of Man*. He is clever and poetic but he confuses spirit and matter and God and creation, and he certainly doesn't believe in Original Sin, or have any real grasp of the difference between the soul and the body. What was needed was the truth: making sense of it all."

And so the FAITH Movement began: a magazine, initially called Kephaz, meetings, talks, and a group of priests joining together to affirm essential truths. At first, the theme was not so much an emphasis on a new synthesis as simply a gathering together of priests who sought to be orthodox in their beliefs and loyal to the Church and the Magisterium. Then as things developed, the emphasis on the new synthesis emerged as central.

## Youth Movement

The youth movement was founded in 1972, essentially an inspiration from Fr Holloway with support from Canon George Telford, who was Director of Education in the Southwark diocese. The name was originally going to be "72" not because of the date, but because of the seventy-two who are sent out, as described in the Scriptures. But then some one came up with the name FAITH, and it stuck. The first youth gathering was held at Herne Bay in Kent and attracted some 40 young people.

The growth has been huge, and steady. The annual summer gathering grew to huge numbers and has proved so popular that a Winter Session was added a few

years ago, plus a separate event – dubbed

"Baby Faith" – for younger teenagers.

Then there are Faith Family Days, retreats, local meetings, and a theology seminar

– plus booklets, DVDs, the magazine, and more. The movement has fostered

large numbers of vocations – and been

instrumental in the foundation of Scotland's first new religious order, the Sisters of the Gospel of Life.

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*"The movement has fostered large numbers of vocation."*

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## Turmoil and Renewal

Fr Roger spent fourteen years at the John Fisher School – where a FAITH group still flourishes, thanks to Mr Daniel Cooper, meeting weekly in an unbroken tradition now going back 40 years – and was then appointed parish priest at Folkestone in Kent. He retired some three years ago but the town is still his home.

The turmoil of the immediate post-Vatican II years gave way to the pontificate of Pope – now Saint – John Paul of whom Fr Roger says “He repaired and rebuilt the Church. I don’t think we fully realised the huge problems in the Church until we were able to look back on them, after he had begun to teach and teach, and to bring about changes and new hope.”

“And he had Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger with him – who will one day be declared a Doctor of the Church. He is a genius – there is no question. We all owe him a tremendous debt. These have been remarkable years. Things are very different from the 1970s.”

## Looking Back and Looking Forward

Highlights down the years have included a meeting with Cardinal Jean Danielou in the 1970s – “an extremely holy human being” – and support from America’s Cardinal John Wright, whose writings on the importance of angels became a popular Faith Pamphlet.

And an increasing sense of being involved with the formation of a new generation, at the heart of the Church in the early years of a new century: “Today the FAITH Movement is at a new stage – and perhaps its real work is only just beginning.”

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*Joanna Bogle*

## CATHOLIC HISTORY WALKS: Autumn 2015

Come and enjoy discovering the history of the Church in Britain, in good company and in a great city. All welcome and the walks are free.

Wear suitable clothing and shoes, we’ll be walking whatever the weather. Each walk last about an hour and a half, obviously you can leave at any time. We often finish at a pub.

**FRIDAY 6th NOVEMBER** – Meet 6.30pm (after the 5.30pm Mass) on the steps of Westminster Cathedral. Was there a Gunpowder Plot? What’s the story? We’ll walk down to the Houses of Parliament, discovering lots of intriguing history on the way.

Nearest Tube for Westminster Cathedral: Victoria or St James’ Park

**MONDAY 16th November** – Meet 1.30pm (after the 1.05pm Mass) at Precious Blood Church, London Bridge. We’ll explore The Borough and walk along the river to the Tower of London. Precious Blood Church is in O’Meara Street, just off Southwark Street.

Nearest tube: London Bridge or The Borough

**MONDAY 30th November** – Meet 1pm at St George’s Cathedral, Southwark. We’ll discover the history of this Cathedral and the surrounding area. St George’s Cathedral is opposite the Imperial War Museum.

Nearest tube: Lambeth North or Waterloo

**MONDAY 7th December** – Meet 2pm Westminster Cathedral. Come and learn about this great Cathedral and the City of Westminster.

Nearest Tube: Victoria or St James’ Park

*Organised by the Continuity Movement, 75 Lockgate Road, Sidlesham, Chichester West Sussex, PO20 7QQ Tel: 07816 422851*

# Going to Confession

CAROL ANN HARNETT

*A practical way to present the Sacrament of Reconciliation as we approach Advent.*

**T**he Sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation/Penance is a most wonderful Sacrament and we are fortunate to have this amazing gift from God. Confession looks to Christ the “physician” of our souls” (CCC 1421) to restore us to wholeness after our turning away from God in sin. Only God can forgive sins (Mk. 2:7). In this Sacrament, God, who created us to relate to Him, reaches out and draws us back into His fold. In order to present this most valuable Sacrament in a positive light to children we need to regularly receive the Sacrament ourselves.

After explaining why we need Confession we will look at the priest’s prayer of absolution, as the focus for the Children’s preparation for this Sacrament. A brief look at the Sacrament’s different names, will lead to a more detailed consideration of “forgiveness” and some ways in which children can come to experience being forgiven and learn to forgive. After looking at the effects of the Sacrament we will look at the general “mechanics” of the Sacrament and how children can be prepared for their first Confession.

## Why Do We Need To Go To Confession?

There are a number of “technical” words related to this Sacrament so it would be a good idea to create a vocabulary board and encourage the children to learn these words, making sure they are explained as well.

**Original Sin:** Before children can understand their own sin, they need to know about original sin. A retelling of the story of creation along with the disobedience of Adam and Eve is crucial. Most story book accounts refer to an apple, but you will look in vain for the apple in Genesis Chapter 3. It only mentions that “the tree was good for food and it was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6). In other words, we are tempted towards something which appears to be good. It is really important to emphasise that God’s love for Adam and Eve never wavered – that although they disobeyed Him and did not love Him as they ought, His love never ends (CCC 25).

Adam and Eve’s disobedience meant leaving the Garden of Eden and they no longer enjoyed an intimate relationship with God, for which they were created. The long-term effect is that all generations inherited this separation from God. Only in



Christ's death and Resurrection are we restored to union with God. However, we still suffer from the tendency to sin (concupiscence), even after Baptism.

**Actual Sin:** failing to love. The word "sin" is often avoided today in a misguided attempt to be "politically correct." However if children are to understand both original sin and actual sin, we need to use it in our catechesis (and not say "oh we all make mistakes"). Crucially, children must understand what is and what is not a sin. Unfortunately children are often chastised for things which are genuinely not their fault, e.g. accidentally tripping in a best outfit, for knocking over a drink or for just being exuberant. They need to have the difference between a "sin" and a "mistake" clearly explained. Put very simply sin is something I deliberately choose to do, knowing it is wrong, or something I deliberately choose not to do, which I should have done. In each case I have not loved God and/or other people.

#### **ACTIVITY 1** - *Aim: To know the difference between a sin and a mistake*

Make a set of cards with sentences on them such as "I did not help Mummy lay the table after she asked me to," "I took Fred's pencil because I liked it," "I dropped my dinner plate by accident" "I took Fred's coat, thinking it was mine," etc. Make two heading cards, one called "Mistakes and accidents" and the other, "Sinful acts; not loving." The children can sort the cards and discuss why some acts are sinful and lacking in love and others are not. This session can end with a short time of recollection with the children being invited to think quietly of times when they have not shown love to others. This is beginning to teach them to examine their conscience.

#### **Prayer of Absolution**

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The key words and phrases which need to be explained during the time of preparation for this Sacrament are underlined:

#### **ACTIVITY 2** - *Aim: To be introduced to the prayer of absolution*

Display the prayer with the underlined words clearly marked. Explain that during their preparation the children will come to understand what they all mean. Begin with the Holy Trinity. Say that everything done in the Church is in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Ask for the "technical term" for this (answer: the Holy Trinity). Remind the children they were baptised into the Holy Trinity and every time they make the Sign of the Cross they remind themselves of this.

## Names for this Sacrament and what they mean

This Sacrament has had different names and even today some people say Confession and others Reconciliation. The Catechism uses both Reconciliation and Penance and CCC 1423-24 lists five names which reflect different aspects of the Sacrament. As different words may be used, children need to be introduced to them.

### **ACTIVITY 3** - Aim: *To understand the vocabulary of the Sacrament*

“Technical” words are put up and definitions are read out. The children say which is being described.

- **Conversion:** Jesus calls us to turn back to God.
- **Confession:** We tell God, through the priest, our sins.
- **Penance:** We make up for our sins and lack of love by showing more love to others in our prayers and actions.
- **Forgiveness:** God forgives us our sins, that is, He wipes them away, through the absolution given by the priest. He gives us “pardon and peace.”
- **Reconciliation:** We are once again in a loving relationship with God, who asks us to be reconciled and loving to each other as well.

This can be extended to include terms such as absolution, concupiscence, mercy, pardon, forgive, grace, etc.

## What Is Forgiveness?

God’s forgiveness “wipes away” all sins. They no longer exist. The Catechism says that Reconciliation “brings about a true ‘spiritual resurrection’ restoration of ... [our] precious friendship with God” (CCC 1468).

The parable of the Prodigal Son (better called the parable of the Forgiving Father – Lk. 15:11-32) illustrates God’s unconditional love and mercy for us, (as stated in the prayer of absolution) and that when we are forgiven it is as if we were dead and have come back to life (Lk. 15:32). Some examples in the Gospels of Jesus’ forgiveness are:

- The paralytic (Mk. 2:12)
- Jesus’ death on the cross (Father, forgive them...) (Lk. 23:34)
- Jesus forgives the woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk. 7:36-50)
- The woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:3-11)

### **ACTIVITY 4** - Aim: *To become familiar with the Gospel accounts of Jesus forgiving*

Children in groups act these scenes from the Gospels. After each “play” questions can be asked, such as “Who forgave the sins?” “Why did Jesus forgive?” “When else does Jesus forgive?” “When does Jesus forgive us?” “What did the Prodigal Son plan to say to his father?” “Who does the father in that story represent?” It is important that the

questions direct the children both to the Gospel accounts and to their life of faith, and not to their feelings.

To conclude this activity, it is important to explain that in the Sacrament, although they see a priest and he will say “I forgive you” because he is there in the person of Christ, it is Jesus who does the forgiving as He did in the Gospels.

## Being Forgiving

Christ teaches that we must forgive one another and that God’s forgiveness is conditional on this. (See Mt. 6:14; 18:21-22; Lk. 17:4). Children learn by example and will learn to forgive when they know they are forgiven. We can help them to be aware of this by saying “I forgive you” to them.

This is a very humbling act and it can make us feel a bit vulnerable but I assure you, not only will it help the children to understand what forgiveness is, but when a child says in return, “Don’t worry, Mummy, (or Miss) I forgive you,” you know that they have grasped this important concept.

Incidentally, we do not have to “feel” forgiving in order to say “I forgive”. To forgive is a decision not a feeling; feelings come later. Saying “I forgive” when hurt serves to remove frustration and anger. This is also a way of teaching children about grace – only by God’s grace can we forgive others – we cannot forgive by our own strength.

## The Effect of The Sacrament

As well as restoring us to grace (CCC 1468), the main effects of this Sacrament are;

- Reconciliation with God (CCC 1468)
- Reconciliation with the Church (1469).

To understand this children must recognise that sin separates them from God and from one another. Reconciliation happens through the Church because the priest is a minister of the Church. He does not act alone.

**ACTIVITY 5 - Aim:** *To understand that sin damages themselves, others and causes them to be separated from God and one another*

Use the same cards as in Activity 1 (those which mention the sins). Invite the children to think about how the acts hurt other people and offend God. Remind them of Jesus’ saying that what we do to others we do to Him. (Mt. 25:45).

Finish with a time of reflection, but a more guided one this time, with questions such as “have I always done my best in school” etc. Hopefully this will lead them to feel contrition and they can be taught an Act of Contrition, a prayer to learn by heart. A simple one is: “O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.”

## The Mechanics

Unlike preparation for first reception of the Eucharist, children do not necessarily see people receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so a careful explanation of the process is necessary. This is addressed to the children.

### Preparation:

- a) Spend time thinking about how you have hurt other people and God (this is called an “examination of conscience”)
- b) Read or think about a time when Jesus forgave sins.
- c) Are you sorry for the sins you have been committed?
- d) Ask Jesus to help you to not to do these things again (this is called “firm purpose of amendment”).

### The Process:

1. You will meet a priest. Because he is there in the person of Christ, it is really Jesus you are talking to.
2. The priest will NEVER EVER tell anyone what you have told him, not your parents, teachers, the police or anyone, ever.
3. Begin with a Sign of the Cross.
4. Say, “Bless me Father, this is my first confession”
5. The priest may say a short prayer to which you answer “Amen.”
6. Then tell the priest your sins.
7. He may chat to you about your sins and how not to do them again.
8. He will ask you to make an Act of Contrition
9. The priest may either raise his right hand or stretch it out over your head and will say the prayer of absolution.
10. He will suggest something to do to show that you are sorry. Usually this is saying some prayers, or doing something kind for someone. This is called Penance.
11. He may end by saying, “Go in peace”.

Whilst it is not really possible to “practice” going to confession, a story board or diagram of the process can be helpful.

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# They Don't Celebrate Christmas

*Joanna Bogle opens a discussion about a group that has launched a new promotion campaign over the past year in Britain.*

You will find them at the entrance to a railway station, or at some street corner, standing politely, holding booklets that no one seems to take. They have dressed carefully to look smart, the men in jackets-and-ties and the ladies well groomed. And they have definite rules: smile pleasantly, don't accost anyone, hold the booklets but do not deliberately proffer them. Just be there as a witness.

And that is the name they have given themselves: Jehovah's Witnesses. They are decent folk, and in an ugly modern Britain, they are rather endearing. They smile, they have beliefs about God that matter to them, and they are trying to live by a moral code that is more than just "what feels right for me" and is certainly not particularly fashionable.

Some of them are ex-Catholics. At least, that is how they describe themselves, sometimes explaining why they abandoned a Faith they never really understood. They are glad to talk about it – or to talk about anything, really, because most passers-by don't want to talk to them. And it feels exciting when someone stops and they can do some real Witnessing.

## Standard Things

There are some standard things they say. One is "I got so confused when I was taught about the Trinity. How can there be three gods? And anyway, the word Trinity isn't mentioned in the Bible."

Is it worth opening up a dialogue? If so...we might start with a recognition that, well, the word "Bible" isn't in the Bible either, come to that. And the Trinity is vividly portrayed, with interesting detail, at the baptism of Christ, with God's voice calling from Heaven and the Holy Spirit hovering over Christ standing in the water. They may state that this is not an acceptable way of teaching anything: visual actions cannot reveal truth. But the Bible is full of visual imagery – and for centuries many illiterate people have come to know and love God through mentally picturing the great events it describes. Let's think about Genesis, the vivid picture of God bringing all things into being, all clearly set out: God the Creator, and his Word, and the Spirit hovering over the waters. Powerful stuff. And is there a match here with that baptismal event, the Spirit again hovering, the Voice speaking? Worth discussing?

Others, especially in December, may want to talk about Christmas and why it shouldn't be celebrated. Not in the Bible, you see. Is it worth a discussion? We might note that the day of Christ's birth was most definitely celebrated when it first occurred – angels singing, shepherds hurrying to see the baby...and Mary and Joseph fulfilled the law by taking the child to the Temple to give thanks, so should we not give thanks too?

And the Jewish people obeyed God in observing anniversaries with great care – the annual round of feasts, the Sabbath, the Passover... if we are never to mark any specific date or anniversary, the discussion needs to go deeper. Perhaps even giving names to days of the week is itself a bit pagan – especially as the names we have are in fact those of pagan gods. What does the Bible say about that? What about anniversaries of the founding of schools, churches, organisations...

### "I Am Who I Am"

Jehovah's Witnesses have been taught to ask people "Do you know God's name?" This is because most people will answer "Er...no. Um...isn't it just...er... 'God'? " Which gives the JW the chance to say "His name is Jehovah, and I want to tell you about him..." Of course the real answer is to refer back to the Scriptures, and to discover what God answered when Moses asked him his name. God said "I am who I am" and this is repeated by Christ when he repeatedly says "I am..." God's name is, in a crucial and important sense simply "I am". God is the one who is, without whom nothing else would or could exist. When Christ repeatedly uses the expression "I am..." he is making an enormous claim....a claim that was deemed blasphemous. He was claiming God's name. A Catholic armed with the Old Testament and the Gospel of St John could get into a deep and possibly fruitful discussion with a JW on all of this...

### Should We Get Involved?

So should one get involved in deep discussion with JWs who stand holding out literature? In general, perhaps probably not. Such a discussion may simply turn into an argument – not edifying, not helpful.

Many ex-Catholics do return to the Church eventually, and it usually isn't because some one has argued them into it. Often it starts with just a longing, a sort of homesickness, a childhood memory of affectionate grandparents, or of a kindly word from a priest or from some Catholic neighbour. People are influenced by the oddest things, too: one passionately anti-Catholic ex-Catholic started the journey back home when some one finally explained to him what the words of the Salve Regina meant: he had sung it regularly at his Catholic school in the 1980s but never had it translated and assumed it was just a weird and beautiful chant with no real meaning. Another

was drawn into a church simply because it was warm, and then was impressed by people coming in to light candles in front of a statue of St Anthony. And if the JW isn't an ex-Catholic, he or she may be coming from some other starting-point which itself needs first to be recognised...and this can take time and a false start may merely result in lengthy exchanges and forays into a variety of cul-de-sacs.

## Ideas

One possibility, however, is to offer a fair swap of literature. The Catholic Truth Society offers a wide range of leaflets and booklets, some directly useful for this. They are ideal for a friendly exchange: "Here – you take this, and I'll take one of your booklets". The latter can be dropped into the appropriate place on arrival home. Maybe that's what the JW will do with your leaflet too. But we can soak the whole exchange with some generous and genuine prayer, and leave the rest to God.

Other ideas? It does seem a pity not to engage in some way with these good people. A lot of energy, time and expense has gone into their bookstands and their carefully-planned campaign. They've been at meetings and training-sessions, and before all of those, there was evidently much debate and discussion which resulted in a decision to stop going from house to house knocking on doors and asking to chat. People disliked being interrupted, were sometimes rude, and rarely took any interest in the copies of the "Watchtower" with their images of people in 1950s outfits cuddling lions and eating berries as they live on earth with nothing to do for ever and ever. So the railway station campaign began. Perhaps it too will be abandoned in due course. But it still feels wrong, somehow, just to let the poor JWs get going on a further campaign. There's a call on our charity in this somewhere.

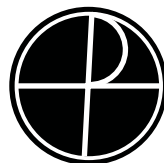
Truth matters. It is distressing to see good people trying hard to teach and promote something that simply isn't accurate: it's like a fad diet that doesn't work, a crossword puzzle with the clues printed wrongly, shoes that aren't matched pair, a knitting pattern with a page missing. One wants to help: these things can be sorted out.

If one in ten of the ex-Catholic JWs in Britain returned to the Church, there would not only be a substantial increase in the sum total of human peace and happiness among all those people, but there would also be a strengthening of the Church in Britain. Ideas welcomed.

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*Joanna Bogle is Editor of FAITH magazine.*

[www.faith.org.uk](http://www.faith.org.uk)

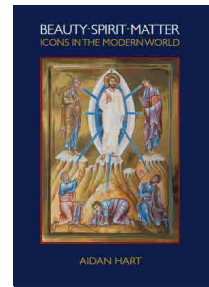




# Painters As Prophets

*Beauty, Spirit, Matter: Icons in the Modern World*  
by Aidan Hart, Gracewing, 214pp, £14.99

Aidan Hart's collection of essays in his book *Beauty, Spirit, Matter: Icons in the Modern World* covers a wide range of topics that are united in their interest in the material world seen through the prism of the Orthodox Church's theology of the icon. The author, a professional painter and iconographer, is well-versed in his subject and offers careful reflection on the renewal of Orthodox liturgical art, on the tension between tradition and innovation, and more broadly on modern art, on ecology, on the human person, on suffering, and indeed the state of human beings today.



To a certain extent, much of what Hart has to say is captured in his opinions on art. In a comment on some modern (or perhaps post-modern) art that seeks to shock and is graphic in its ugliness and violence, Hart says that "modern art's unwitting prophetic role has been to reveal to us man's loss of dignity". Modern art witnesses to the effects of the Fall and in particular to man's loss of God. Pre-dating post-modern art, the modern form of abstract art is, he says, trying to "unearth spiritual realities". For Hart, all art despite its differing expressions, shares a theme: to mediate between some higher realm and the artist's own world. All art is a search into the essence of things even though at times, instead of being a language to express things, it is mere play.

This understanding of art, now of the gallery and simply open to view rather than created with a purpose, seems to symbolise our modern era: at once a loss of God, purpose and meaning, yet at the same time a search for deeper and more lasting realities. As a remedy to modern malaise and the perennial search for meaning, Hart offers his reader a glimpse into the world of the icon where the artistic and the theological are inextricably entwined. Matter matters, and the material points beyond itself to hidden realities.

According to Hart, art joins together differences into a unity and the icon is perhaps one of the clearest expressions of this. Following Orthodox tradition, the icon exists because the archetype exists, be it Christ or Mary or one of the saints. The icon expresses not only the visible but also the invisible in a symbolic language that belongs to a dynamic tradition. The icon takes its place within God's created and

purposeful cosmos as one of the ways in which creation and the material is raised up to God. Chaos and cacophony can be replaced by harmony, order and theophany. As Hart puts it, “sacred iconography is a [grace-filled] fruit of Eden rediscovered”.

Hart asks his readers to look with “the eye of the heart” at the icon. With its disregard of photorealism, with its strange and imperfect form, the icon invites us into the unknown where suffering, struggle and compassion can all be found. Its artistic abstraction hints at apophatic theology, and the saint’s holiness yet also humanity unites joy and sadness. Moreover, the icon’s imperfection draws the viewer in to complete the work.

The book hits the ground running with what begins as a deceptively easy theology of the icon. Hart successfully makes the clear and important link between historical theology and iconography and he contextualises the whole into Christology. However, the book rapidly enters into the early Christological disputes, and for those readers new to the difficulties surrounding significant theological and philosophical terms, such as ‘person’, ‘nature’, ‘hypostasis’, ‘hypostatic union’, and later the “original Nicene Creed” (a nod to the filioque controversy), the content may seem intimidating. This is especially since Hart does not always define his terms. The tone changes between chapters and it encompasses the historical, philosophical, theological, catechetical, ethical, analytical, liturgical, contemplative, and even slightly whimsical and anecdotal.

This perhaps reflects the fact that the book is a collection of essays and this may also account for the sense that the chapters are addressing different audiences. At times the language is technical and precise, at times it is broad and generalised. At times the reader may have the impression that there is an ‘elephant in the room’ or that he or she has missed something of the argument, especially when it comes to the thorny yet rather insider issues of copy over a freer style of icon painting, or the merits or otherwise of eighteenth and nineteenth century Russian iconography, or the suggestion that there is some “point scoring” going on in the debate in question.

The rather generalised nature of some of the chapters perhaps inevitably leads to some caricature. In his comparison of icons to Western sacred art, Hart points to the “spiritual realism” of icons, rather than “carnal realism”, in that they “depict people who are radiant with the uncreated light of God”. While the spiritual aspect does have precedence over the material, Hart does sometimes appear to be dismissive of what he calls the “naturalism” of the Western tradition that, he claims, is the result of a focus on man rather than God.

For someone who celebrates the material world and rejoices in a proper ecology, this seems to require more nuance. Moreover, it sweeps all Western religious art into the same category. The Western theological approach to salvation is described simply as legalistic, and, according to Hart, apparently “a Roman Catholic church may hold a multitude of Masses at the same time”. Another but minor misapprehension

is the confusion of El Greco, Domenikos Theotokopoulos, with his son Manuel. Some readers may be alienated by the author's constant use of "man" when referring to human beings. Nevertheless, Hart's book is thought-provoking and written from 'the heart'. It carries stories and sayings from the desert fathers and the patristics. It resonates with a sense of the spiritual in its discussion of liturgy, ritual, spiritual stages, repentance and deification combined with a love of icons and art including mosaic, architecture and sculpture. With his careful choice of very beautiful line drawings and colour plates of icons, Hart demonstrates that the spiritual life of the person who paints icons is of great significance. Perhaps the last word goes to Hart: painters are like prophets, delivering the word of God with zeal. And icons are ways of bringing God's word to the world, even to the gallery world.

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## A 'Faith'-Style Father

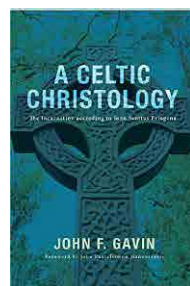
*A Celtic Christology: The Incarnation According to John Scottus Eriugena*  
by John F. Gavin, S.J., Cascade Books, 160 pp, £13.00

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A work of theology with the word "Celtic" in its title might raise suspicion. That the same book is about John Scottus Eriugena, who, for most of us, is a relatively unknown figure, might make you even more hesitant to pick up this volume. You would, however, be wrong to hesitate. And this for two reasons: the presentation and the content of the book.

John Scottus Eriugena was an Irish theologian born somewhere around 800 AD. He moved to France about the middle of the ninth century and was one of the leading scholars of the Carolingian Renaissance. In his lifetime he was renowned for his knowledge of Greek. Generally regarded as a Neoplatonist, today he is remembered above all for his translations of and commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

The author of this study, however, sees Eriugena as the inheritor of a spiritual tradition that, while acknowledging the influence of Augustine of Hippo, also embraces Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius Ponticus and Maximus the Confessor. There are colourful – though probably apocryphal – stories that Eriugena was stabbed to death with a pen by one of his own students. A cautionary tale for pedantic professors! However,



all that is known for certain is that he died sometime after 877. Fr. John Gavin, S.J., will be known to quite a few of the readers of this magazine, and those who do know him will know that he is gifted teacher, possessed of a remarkable talent for straightening out the convoluted and explaining the complex.

A Celtic Christology is Gavin at his lucid best. The presentation is excellent. It is a short book, just over 150 pages. It eschews unnecessarily intimidating jargon – the non-specialist reader might have to look up the odd term, but that could be easily done on Wikipedia, and both Eriugena's thought and Gavin's arguments are developed in an easy to follow, logical sequence. The content is fascinating, even if Eriugena is not one of the great Fathers of the Church. Nonetheless, the themes that Gavin explores in Eriugena are of perennial interest.

Gavin's study is broken down into five chapters which trace Eriugena's thought from Creation, through anthropology, to the Incarnation, and to Christ's "historical presence in the Church and her actions" (p. 140). Chapter 1 deals with the state of fallen humanity and the reasons for its creation. Chapter 2 deals with issue of Christ's two natures. Chapter 3 explores the motives for the Incarnation. Chapters 4 and 5 deal respectively with how the individual comes to share in the Incarnation, and how believers appropriate the historical particularities of the life of Christ in their own lives. Eriugena's presentation of the content of the Catholic faith bears certain similarities to the Faith Movement's own catechetical approach.

There are, nonetheless, problems with Eriugena's theology; and Gavin, whilst balanced in his assessment, does not shy away from these. He concludes his study asking what can be learnt from Eriugena's theology and what is lacking in his theology. Amongst other issues, Eriugena's attitude towards matter is questionable, and his understanding of the division of the sexes does not stand up to scrutiny. Both the materiality of the body and the division of the sexes are seen as a results of the Fall. For those familiar with the theology of the Faith Movement, given the similarities between its and Eriugena's manner of presenting the Catholic faith, it is striking that on the very points where Eriugena theology is wanting Faith has something original to contribute.

This book is clearly written and with a little effort could be followed by a non-specialist. Although Eriugena himself is a marginal figure, he is the inheritor of an interesting and far from marginal tradition in the Church's theology, which is of particular interest to those involved in the Faith Movement. Eriugena's themes are still relevant, and even if he himself does not always arrive at the best conclusions, his speculations, as explained by Gavin, are, nonetheless, stimulating and worth reading.

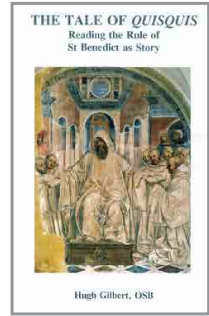
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*Kevin Douglas obtained his Licenciato in theology at the Patristics Institute in Rome and is a priest of St Andrews and Edinburgh archdiocese.*

# St. Benedict For Anyone

*The Tale of Quisquis - Reading the Rule of St Benedict as Story by Hugh Gilbert OSB*  
Gracewing, 209pp, £12.99

In the 64<sup>th</sup> chapter of his Rule Saint Benedict wrote: “It beseemeth the abbot to be ever doing some good for his brethren”, and one feels that the Father of western monasticism must be well pleased with the efforts of Hugh Gilbert as one of his sons, firstly as Abbot of Pluscarden for the best part of two decades and now as Bishop of Aberdeen since 2011. Here, as in his two previous books, the author brings together a distillation of his own long monastic experience and makes it accessible to a wider audience. The material has its origins in conferences given at Pluscarden and other religious houses and is primarily a commentary on Saint Benedict’s writings for those who have placed themselves under his Rule, but the heading “quisquis” (literally “anyone”) implies that here is wisdom for everyone who sincerely seeks to “prefer nothing to the love of Christ”, a goal that ought to be shared by all the baptised.



Benedict is writing to offer a structure to “establish a school of the Lord’s service” and as an encouragement to Quisquis to hearken “to the precepts of the master and incline the ear of thy heart: freely accept and faithfully fulfil the instruction of a loving father”. Just as the original text is imbued with Scripture, so Bishop Gilbert’s approach in these conferences is full of insights from his own personal experience of *lectio divina*. He can write, “as a Christian homily (the Rule) is impregnated with Scripture. It is almost nothing more than an echo of the Bible. Saint Benedict subordinates himself to Scripture. It is Scripture, the Word of God itself, which addresses us”; but the ex-Abbot’s own frame of reference reveals, alongside a profound regard for Scripture, a broad culture with homage paid in these pages to the likes of Rilke, Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn.

While monasticism in modern times has been deeply influenced by Dom Paul Delatte’s rather rigorous interpretation of the Holy Rule (he was Abbot of Solesmes from 1890 to 1921) we find in Hugh Gilbert’s firm but gentle hands a rather more humane understanding of the contemporary mind, particularly in his substantial treatment of the concept of obedience (a minefield for any Christian apologist) which stands at the centre of this present work. Faithfulness to what has been received combined with openness to what the Holy Spirit might be saying to us today would seem to characterise this Benedictine’s *modus vivendi*: “to live obedience in greater

truth and freedom, in greater depth, with greater maturity ... If we are called to penetrate the mystery of prayer, not just for ourselves, but for everyone in the world, can't it be true that we are called in some way to penetrate the mystery of obedience?"

As one would expect from such a contemplative source, there are helpful chapters on prayer and some very pertinent comments on intercession which can be applied to the situation of those outside as well as within the cloister. Drawn from his own long experience within monastic walls (and also his more recent experience of episcopal ministry) one suspects that Hugh Gilbert's section on "Restraint in Speech" comes from deep within the heart when he writes: "death and life are in the power of the tongue. It is possible for the human tongue to carry the word of life". In other words, gossip can be a killer!

The words from Psalm 118 "*Suscipe me, Domine*" (receive me, Lord) are sung by those making profession as a monk or nun, and the teaching offered here on the nature of vows speaks to anyone who sees their human journey in terms of vocation. G K Chesterton's take on them is worth committing to memory: "the vow is to the man what the song is to the bird, or the bark to the dog: his voice whereby he is known".

In a beautiful final chapter, Quisquis, the disciple, the searcher after the monastic way, reaches his goal: "at the beginning of the Rule, he is asked to open the ear of his heart to the teaching of the master, Saint Benedict. At the end of it, he is asked to open his whole life to the Word of God in all its revealed fullness". Having spent some time in company with Quisquis, one feels that the Catholic people of Aberdeen are fortunate in their present shepherd who would seem through his written words to combine the teaching and pastoral offices to which Pope Benedict (surely no coincidence in the name) called him. I do not know Bishop Gilbert personally, but I imagine the same might be said of him as was said of an early Cistercian, Blessed David of Himmerod, who was always smiling: "he had, like the saint, a face shining with joy. He had the face of one going towards Jerusalem"!

Who might benefit from this latest compilation of monastic themes? Certainly its publication is intended for a much wider audience than those for whom the chapters were originally written, and as well as anyone wanting to gain a better understanding of Saint Benedict's Rule (which remains, as it has been for a millennium and a half, a foundation text within the Christian tradition) it could well be used as a study source for a parish group. There is much meat here to be digested and provide ongoing nourishment.

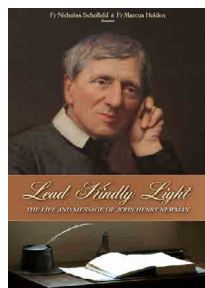
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*Fr Christopher Colven was a parish priest in Hackney for ten years and is now Rector of Saint James, Spanish Place in London's West End.*

# Lead Kindly Light

*The Life and Message of John Henry Newman presented by Fr Nicholas Schofield and Fr Marcus Holden, St Anthony Communications, £12.95*

This 68-minute DVD offers an attractive overview of Newman's life. The presenters are two youngish priests, Fr Marcus Holden and Fr Nicholas Schofield, close friends with a shared enthusiasm for the history and culture of the 19th-century English Catholic Church. They are filmed walking around all the major English Newman-related sites (Ealing, Oxford, Littlemore, the Birmingham Oratory, Maryvale, the Oratory School Reading) while discussing some leading themes in Newman's life.



Occasionally another contributor is interviewed, and the short presentations by Fr Jerome Bertram, Fr Daniel Seward and Dr Andrew Nash are so good one could wish to hear from other experts, of whom there is no shortage in England. The production values are generally high – the topographical backgrounds provide a visual feast, the speakers are always articulate and rarely repetitive, and the chronological narrative provides a clear structure. For parish audiences unfamiliar with Newman this DVD provides a useful, accurate, uplifting and uncontroversial introduction.

Precisely because it is introductory, however, the DVD might be found rather too long and unexciting by viewers with a prior knowledge of Newman's life. Perhaps another, supplementary, DVD could be made, with a stronger intellectual focus, moving from controversy to controversy rather than place to place. Some discussion of the bitter hostility Newman provoked in some quarters, Catholic as well as Anglican, combined perhaps with a few interviews with some of Newman's living critics, might make for a more gripping, even dramatic narrative. Such a DVD, which the two priests would be well qualified to produce, might have greater appeal particularly to students and sixth-formers, or simply to audiences accustomed to a more abrasive TV documentary approach.

*Christopher Zealley is the Managing Director of St Philip's Books in Oxford.*





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