

# faith

Promoting A New Synthesis Of Faith And Reason

Don't Be Intimidated  
*Editorial*

Priests of the Faith Movement  
*Fr Dylan James*

A Year of St Dominic  
*Jennifer Moorcroft*

Engaging with Muslims  
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Book Reviews

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Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art  
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# Memo: please stop being intimidated

“**T**hey don’t let you do Nativity plays any more, do they?” There is a conviction – or at any rate a sort of half-formed belief morphing into a conviction – that “they” have banned Nativity plays from Britain’s primary schools. It is rubbish, but because it represents a well-founded fear that Christianity is being marginalised from community life, it is fast becoming part of popular mythology.

Facts first. There is no law preventing an ordinary primary school in Britain from putting on a Nativity play this Christmas. Naturally, if the school is 90 per cent Moslem, it would be a fairly stupid or – to use the currently fashionable word – an *inappropriate* thing to do. But where most of the children come from religiously ignorant, incoherent or indifferent households, it could be a most useful exercise, introducing pupils to one of the great narratives (that’s another very ‘now’ word) of our civilisation, and giving them a chance to sing the carols that are a standard part of our annual collective noise. A Nativity play gathers echoes from folk memories – and not just from Britain – and taps into a need to mark the seasons of the year, our sense of community and a recognition that we are not spiritual and cultural orphans.

For a Catholic school, there is no question about it at all. Catholic primary and secondary schools can, do and should, as a matter of course, mark Christmas on a great scale. (In fact, the problem is, at a liturgical level, precisely that: in a laudable desire to encourage a joyful celebration, they inevitably sideline Advent, and pre-empt Christmas as term ends with plays and carols and mince pies galore. But that’s a separate issue...)

Nevertheless – and this is the important point – there is this sense of worry. An air of “Are we allowed to do this?” pervades discussions about Nativity plays, sometimes accompanied by a sort of coy laugh, an assumption that, officially, we’re all meant to be either atheists or adherents of some non-Christian religion now. And sometimes fervent Christians are among the worst at this. It’s somehow satisfying to be the bearer of bad tidings: “They’ll be banning Christmas outright next”, “Mark my words, Catholic schools are doomed”, “They’ll make it a hate-crime to say prayers in school”.

Such chat is enjoyable but misses the point. The issues at stake are deeper, and of real importance. “They” are indeed intruding into areas where religious freedom is at stake, and this needs addressing.

No one is stopping Catholic schools from being Catholic in the sense of having Mass and the sacraments, celebrating the feasts and seasons of the Church’s year,

crowning a statue of Mary in May, praying for the dead in November, celebrating Christmas. Religious Education with a Catholic syllabus is encouraged – if material in a Catholic school is useless or worse, it is the fault of the Church authorities and not that of the State.

But look at what is being urged, through the tax-funded bureaucracy of the education authorities, seeking to impose new ideologies such as “gender diversity” and “anti-homophobia”. In Cornwall a document ([www.interconmtrust.org.uk?resources/cornwall\\_schools\\_transgender\\_guidance](http://www.interconmtrust.org.uk?resources/cornwall_schools_transgender_guidance)) concocted by the education authority and various groups including, worryingly, the police, announces that a child who thinks that he or she would like to be a member of the opposite sex, should be urged to succumb to the fantasy and begin the process that will lead to the use of physical mutilation accompanied by hormonal drugs.

No Catholic school need go along with this cruel nonsense. It carries no legal force. The current fashion for announcing that a child is “trans” instead of male or female is just that, a fashion. A troubled child needs help, not an ideology imposed by campaigners paid by public funds.

No Catholic school need invite in any lobby group promoting a lesbian or homosexual lifestyle. No Catholic school need distribute contraceptive materials or drugs or devices to pupils. Catholic schools can and must teach the Catholic faith in ways appropriate to pupils’ ages and needs, and use relevant literature including the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its associated materials especially those aimed at the young.

Our Catholic schools are hugely popular and over-subscribed. The faith and values that these schools represent must be allowed to flourish without bullying from officialdom. Education authorities, national and local, must be, if necessary, told that they have no right to intimidate schools by trying to force the use of materials which the school is within its rights to reject as unsuitable and unhelpful.

Things are going to be difficult for Christians in Britain over the next years as an increasingly angry and confused society struggles to make sense of itself. Our model in working within this must be that of saints and heroes of the recent past, who have much to teach us. As Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wotyla never sought unnecessary confrontation with the authorities, but insisted, again and again, on the rights that the Church had negotiated. And the faithful built up the Church: packed Masses, processions, public pilgrimages, open-air gatherings at the great shrines. It must all have looked at one stage as though the whole ghastly Communist regime might last indefinitely, and the Church would have to struggle on in survival-mode for decades. But things turned out differently.

Poland’s story has a message for Christians in the post-Communist Europe that is now succumbing to the ghastly crudity of angry secularism. We need Bishops of

courage. We need Catholics who are prepared to give public affirmation of their faith. We need to make it clear that the Christian faith will outlast any and every political slogan and system, and that as Christians we can and will work within whatever nonsense history imposes upon us and will do so with hope and with trust in what is true.

There are many troubled and hurt people in Britain today. Living in a post-Christian country can be fairly wounding: the emphasis on a narcissist “look at me! I’m wonderful” consumerist approach to life, an endless nagging sense of a need to be happy, a leering attitude towards sex. And many children have grown up confused about their identity, unclear about which of the various groupings of adults in their lives they should really regard as being their parents. Who is really in charge? Mum and new boyfriend? Mum’s former boyfriend, who was a sort of Dad figure for many years but has now been superseded? Dad, much-loved but now living far away and with a new wife?

Hurt people carry their wounds with them: into politics and lobby groups, into industry and commerce, into professional life in law and medicine and academia. The Church is wounded too, in this culture. But she has access to the cure: Christ can make all things new.

Catholics should not be intimidated. Let us celebrate Christmas with vigour and hope: organise Nativity plays in school and parish, get groups of carol-singers going from house to house. And more: arrange carol-singing at a local railway station (oh yes you can – you need official permission so that different choirs don’t all arrive on the same day, and you need to make sure that any funds raised are for a registered charity. That’s all). Ditto outside supermarkets. Leaflets through doors with details of Christmas Masses and other services? An outdoor Nativity scene by the church, facing on to the street? Put a Christmas poster in your window. Put up a crib scene in your home, ask a priest in to bless it and invite the neighbours. Buy Christmas cards with a proper Nativity scene on them. Ask for proper Christmas stamps with Mary and Joseph and the Christ-child on them. Wish people a Merry Christmas. And please: stop saying “Oooh...are we allowed to celebrate joyfully the birth of our Saviour?”



# Priests of the Faith Movement

*Fr Dylan James gives a personal testimony as a priest with the Faith Movement*

Every year I attend four national events organised by the Faith Movement (three events for youth and one for my own formation). This is a massive commitment in time, energy and money. It takes me away from my parish for the inside of a week four times a year. Yet, the reason I am absent from the parish for these events is in order that these very events might be harnessed to serve what happens in my parish. Over the years I have learnt various parts of what can be called the 'Faith' apostolic strategy, a strategy that we feel serves the needs of the contemporary Church. Let me outline six key elements of that strategy.



## Prioritising youth work

Anyone who attends a Faith conference cannot help but notice the high ratio of priests-to-youth. This is not just a feature of our conferences but a reflection of the fact that our priests are particularly devoted themselves to youth. We live at a moment in the history of the Western Church when the institutional Church is in decline in every imaginable statistic. Yet, we also live at a moment when numerous 'New Movements' and new apostolates have arisen, and the Faith Movement is one of these. In Faith, we believe we need to prioritise the formation of youth in order to preserve the Church's future, and in order to remedy the injustice that has been done to them by years of catechetical and pastoral neglect.

In prioritising 'youth' we need to note, more specifically, that Faith focuses on teenagers and young adults. In contrast, many parishes today devote great energy to young children but offer practically nothing for them once they reach an age when they can begin to think for themselves. This, however, is exactly the stage when a more mature engagement becomes possible, and this is the 'youth' we target.

## Parish youth groups ('forums')

Prioritising youth work isn't just about taking youth from our parishes to national conferences. An integral part of our strategy, practised now over some decades, is the establishment of youth groups in our parishes. These groups serve a threefold function:



we catechise them, we teach youth how to pray, and we enable young Catholics to meet and socialise with other young Catholics. For example, in the Shaftesbury Faith Forum a typical meeting has 45 minutes of catechesis, 15 minutes of prayer in church and 30 minutes of snacks and socialising. Of course, these three pillars are not unique to Faith, they are found in many new 'youth discipleship' programs, but they have long been part of our vision.

Another feature of our priests and our youth work is that a great many of our priests are themselves *products* of the Faith Movement: we attended the conferences ourselves when we were young, and we benefited from advice and formation from Faith priests in our own youth. This is a huge part of why priests like me feel a need to give the same to those who are young today.

It is important to note that our youth groups, typically called 'forums', are very different from the 'youth clubs' that characterised Catholic youth activity from the 1950s to the 1970s. Such clubs were primarily social gatherings, and presumed other formation elements were happening elsewhere: prayer in the home and catechesis in the schools. In practice, however, such spiritual and catechetical formation often didn't happen, and so our youth forums aim to offer it in a more systematic fashion.

### UK-wide youth conferences

Local parish youth groups need something beyond the local parish. Young Catholics (and the families from which they often come) frequently feel isolated, as if they are the only young Catholics in the world. Regularly attending a larger Faith conference that draws young people from all over the UK gives a young person an experience of the world outside his or her parish, gives encouragement, and offers speakers of a quality that a local parish might not be able to provide. It was the hope of our founder (Fr Edward Holloway) that these events would also enable young Catholics to meet and marry other suitable young Catholics, and this, and the formation of many friendships, has been one of the many happy outcomes that we've been able to observe in Faith.

These national youth conferences and the parish youth forums feed each other in a cyclical way: the national events provide an experience that cannot be achieved in an isolated parish, and the parish groups provide year-round formation that a periodic national event cannot achieve alone.

### Appealing to the mind

The Faith Movement has a reputation, not undeserved, of having some towering intellects among its members. Outsiders are probably less aware that we have many 'ordinary' folk too (!), but it is nonetheless an essential part of our strategy to target the mind.

Young Catholics today grow up in a world where they are assaulted by numerous

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conflicting opinions, with the general presumption being that religion is for ignorant or stupid people and that the Church has nothing intellectually credible to offer society. In Faith we seek to face this head on. Apologetics, serious catechesis and an explicit appeal to the mind are what we offer. We see ourselves as an antidote to the content-lite programs that passed for 'catechesis' in recent decades.

As a priest in a parish, however, this appeal to the mind involves a mental effort on my part too. To translate our intellectual vision into parish talk series, adult formation and youth catechesis is hard work. It is much easier to pass such things by and stick to the simplicity of Holy Communion rounds for the sick. While the everyday pastoral work must continue, the Faith apostolic vision pushes us to do more, to appeal to the mind in both youth and other work.

### **A Christ-centred apologetic rooted in science**

At the heart of our appeal to the mind is the rooting of our apologetic in modern science. Admittedly, in the 21st century people are more impressed by technology than by science, but the scientific mindset remains the dominant undercurrent that is typically considered more credible than the Church.

Our vision is rooted in the science of evolution, a vision that shows the interconnectedness of all things, the need of all things to find their proper environment and the manner in which all things interrelate under the control and direction of a Mind. God alone, who created all things through His Word, who planned to enter and fulfil His creation through the Incarnation of His Word, is both the Mind that directs and the spiritual environment where Man finds his home. A rabbit needs the carrots and warren that constitute its natural physical environment; man needs grace as the sunshine of his soul, as his spiritual environment. While many of our conference attendees are arts students (and not scientists), they come because they recognise the appeal of a scientific apologetic in our contemporary world. As a priest I offer it because I believe it meets the needs of our time.

The need to give young people this apologetic, to give them a reason for believing in Christ, His infallible Church, His seven sacraments and His Blessed Mother, is so important that we repeat at least some outline of the apologetic at every one of our

*What was the purpose of Creation? The coming of Christ. What is the purpose of my priestly mission? That Christ might come into the hearts and lives of our people.*

conferences. Young people today need a reason to believe, otherwise they will never be able to know and commit to Christ. The imparting of this apologetic



has the same goal as my whole ministry. What was the purpose of Creation? The coming of Christ. What is the purpose of my priestly mission? That Christ might come into the hearts and lives of our people.

### My own need for formation and support

One of the dangers for a priest today is to react to the difficulties of our pastoral situation by retreating into a minimal, yet frantically busy, parish life. One of the reasons I am committed to the Faith Movement is that I recognise that I need the support of a group. My attendance at the different Faith events is admittedly a huge drain on my time, but the support and vision it offers me in return more than outweighs the cost. Crucially, my parish benefits by having a parish priest who is inspired and enlivened by all that Faith offers. In addition to the various youth events that have already been referred to, Faith offers ongoing formation for priests in its annual Symposium and regional study days.


As a priest, Faith offers me a strategy for how to function and prioritise pastorally. It offers me national events to support my parish youth work. It provides me with an apologetic to appeal to the minds of my parishioners. It unites me to a body of like-minded apostolic priests, men I can phone and turn to for advice in the daily grind of parish life. That's why I am glad to be a priest of the Faith Movement.

*One of the dangers for a priest today is to react to the difficulties of our pastoral situation by retreating into a minimal, yet frantically busy, parish life.*



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# A Year of St Dominic

*2016 marked the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Dominicans. Jennifer Moorcroft explores the life of the founder of the Order of Preachers.*

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In April 1215, Fr Dominic Guzmán, with six companions, crossed the threshold of a small house in Toulouse given them by two wealthy citizens. It was the birth of one of the great Orders of the Catholic Church, the Dominicans, or to give them their proper title, the Order of Preachers. Dominic was about forty-five years old by then, and had only six more years to live, but all his life and experience up until then had been preparing him for this moment, and the six years before his death saw the Order increase at a phenomenal rate, a testimony to the divine inspiration behind it.

Dominic was born in the little village of Caleruega, Spain, about the year 1170 and from a very early age had been drawn to the priesthood. After his ordination, his bishop, Don Diego d'Acebes, who recognised exceptional qualities in him, persuaded him to join the Cathedral chapter, where he was able to live a life of intense prayer within his duties in the Cathedral. It was part of the bishop's plan to rejuvenate the spiritual life of his diocese. In 1203, Dominic accompanied his bishop on a diplomatic mission to Denmark, which opened his eyes to the vast missionary lands that had never heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## New evangelisation

Nearer home, he was also aware of the acute need that the Church had for a new evangelisation of their people, a need that was recognised by his bishop, and also by the Pope himself. It was a time of upheaval, when people were moving out of the countryside

*Dominic recognised that the Church needed an Order that could be where the people were, with members well trained in the Scriptures and in the Church's Tradition, who could speak directly to them.*

into the towns and cities in search of work. The older Orders of the Church were situated in remote parts of the countryside and no longer served the needs of the people as they had in the past. Dominic recognised that the Church needed an Order that

could be where the people were, with members well trained in the Scriptures and in the Church's Tradition, who could speak directly to them.

The Order of Preachers was revolutionary in that previously, priests received their faculties to preach from their bishop, but this was an Order independent of the bishops, but under papal authority to preach.

This was badly needed, because the Cathars were making great inroads, appealing to Catholics who saw in them men and women who were living a simple life, many of them in great austerity, and with a spirituality that met an evident thirst among the faithful. This was in contrast to the Church, which now seemed remote, many of whose priests were woefully untrained to preach the Gospel and who left their flock spiritually unfed. The Pope had taken steps to remedy this by sending out a mission of Cistercians on a preaching mission, to which Dominic was attached. Dominic had a great admiration and respect for the Cistercians, even being given the habit, without joining the Order, but he was horrified with the sumptuous train they had adopted as fitting a Papal mission. It left them wide open to ridicule when contrasted with the austerity of the Cathar preachers. Dominic persuaded them to abandon their entourage, to walk on foot, to adhere to their customary Cistercian austerity, and had some success.

### Learning and preaching

After that came ten years labouring as a parish priest of Prouille, a period of little success in gaining converts from Catharism, although he founded a small community of nuns who wanted to remain Catholic while living a life of comparable simplicity as they would have had as Cathars. This would be the foundation of the Dominican Sisters.

All this was preparation for his Order that was born in 1215. From the very beginning he wanted his brothers to adopt a poverty of life that would match or even surpass that of the Cathars. He wanted them to be situated especially in the great University cities, not only of Toulouse but also of Paris, Bologna, Oxford and Cambridge, to make them well trained, not only in Scripture and theology, but in the secular learning of the time, which in university training always preceded Scripture and theology, the Queen of Sciences. The friars' first obligation was to preach, but they could not teach what they had not first learnt. His friars must be steeped in the Scriptures and in the great spiritual patrimony of the Church. In the custom of the day, in the university they would be trained to understand thoroughly the teachings of those they opposed, in order to put a reasoned Catholic response. The cells in the first houses of the Order had no doors, because what they learnt in their cells, and the prayer that was its vital accompaniment, had to be open to the world.

This was the beginnings of the Dominican Order, and their mission to evangelise continues today. In many ways the challenges that Dominic faced in his days, eight hundred years ago, are very similar to those that the Church faces today, and therefore Dominic has a message for us now as to how we can meet those challenges.

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## Prayer

First of all, Dominic was a man of prayer, and the fruitfulness of his mission lay in those years of preparation 'in the wilderness', in his intense prayer as his Order spread and took root. To the extent that every one of us is alive with God's love, showing to the world the joy and the peace of God, will our witness be fruitful, too.

The motto of the Dominican Order is 'Veritas', which throws down the gauntlet to our age in which the accepted wisdom is a relativism that asserts, 'Something may be true for you, but that doesn't make it true for anyone else.' (This being the only infallible truth!) Not so, says St Thomas Aquinas, the great Dominican. There is ultimate truth, and if our lives are not ordered to that truth then our lives, and ultimately society, will be disordered because it is not grounded in truth: 'Truth must consequently be the ultimate end of the whole universe... for the first author and mover of the universe is an intellect ...and the ultimate end of the universe must, therefore, be the ground of the intellect. This good is truth.' The Church must continue to affirm that Truth is a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ, and that there is ultimate truth.

In his day Dominic confronted Catharism, of which the New Age movement in its various forms is a descendant, and even the neo-atheism of today. They bear a great resemblance to what Pope John Paul II called 'the culture of death', with its downgrading of marriage, its advocating of euthanasia, abortion and contraception. By opposing these things the Church is a 'sign of contradiction' to the beliefs of the secular world, and other faiths, while acknowledging whatever is good, true and beautiful in other faith systems.

## Truth in love

Dominic reminds us that we need to be truly grounded in our faith so that we can respond when challenged, but always 'speaking the truth in love' as he did. He countered the Cathar heresy by pondering deeply on the Scriptures and by living in close union with Life Itself in the person of Jesus Christ. He showed by his own way of life the winsomeness, the joy and the attraction of life lived to the full because lived in God; in other words, living

*To the extent that every one of us is alive with God's love, showing to the world the joy and the peace of God, will our witness be fruitful, too.*

out the Gospel of Life. By his grounding in the Scriptures, aligned with the medieval disciplines of the secular sciences of his day, he was able to give a reasoned and persuasive alternative to Cathar teachings.

## Faith and Reason

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, as well as Pope St John Paul II, was very concerned with what the secular world sees as the opposition between faith and reason, but which the Church sees as its two wings. As Pope John Paul said, 'God has placed in the human heart a desire

to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves' (*Faith and Reason*: Introduction). God has given us reason to search out the mysteries of the natural world, but that same reason is a tool to search out the mysteries of God, too. At the same time God has given the gift of faith to understand truths that transcend the natural world. Pope John Paul II also points to why Dominic was so successful in integrating his prayer and study in his discussion of Saint Anselm. (*Faith and Reason*, 11)

“Saint Anselm underscores the fact that the intellect must seek that which it loves; the more it loves, the more it desires to know. Whoever lives for the truth is reaching for a form of knowledge which is fired more and more with love of what it knows, while having to admit that it has not yet attained what it desires.”

The people of Dominic's day had a thirst for God which lay dormant, or sought its fulfilment outside the Church; the same is true today. When Dominic preached the Gospel and demonstrated it in the way he lived, when people saw it in the love of God which flamed from him, they flocked back to the Church as well as into his Order. His example encourages us to follow in his footsteps, to be filled with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ; to seek to know him in ever greater depth. We can be confident in the knowledge that all true searching into the depths of the deposit of our Faith and in the world around us, which are never in opposition, can only bring us closer to God. He is ever beyond our natural understanding, but knowledge of him is open to all through the gifts of faith, hope and love.

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*Jennifer Moorcroft is a Carmelite tertiary, now retired and living in Wales. She is the author of The Hidden Light, a biography of St Dominic*



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*The Church and Life: The dignity of the human embryo.* Pia Matthews

## Tuesday 15th November

*The Church and the Poor: A vision of love and hope.* Fr. Thomas Lynch

## Tuesday 29th November

*The Church and Evangelisation: A vision.* Fr. Christopher Findlay-Wilson

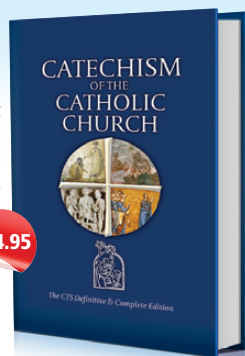
## Tuesday 13th December

*The Church and Politics: What is her role?* Peter D. Williams

## Got Questions?

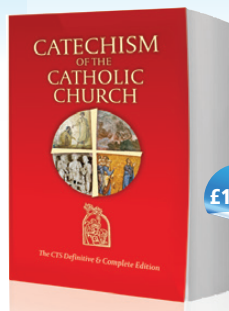


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# Engaging with Muslims

EDOUARD HARMOUCHE

For the majority of people living in Western Europe until thirty or forty years ago Islam was still seen as an exotic and largely foreign religion. Few would have had clear knowledge of the tenets of Islam or much social interaction with its adherents. But across the whole of Europe followers of various forms of Islam are now a significant and growing minority, many as second and third generation citizens. So questions about how Western culture should relate to Islam have inevitably become much more sharply focused.

This is not just due to high profile terrorist attacks by those branded as 'Islamist'. Fears and concerns over the threat of attacks from such extremists tend to overshadow the wider and deeper questions about how Christians, and Catholics in particular, should relate to Islam as a religion and to Muslim neighbours and acquaintances on a personal and practical level.

## Areas of overlap?

Religious commentators often observe that there are large areas of overlap between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is not surprising since Islam began within a Jewish and Christian milieu in the Middle East of the seventh century AD, consciously adopting beliefs and practices from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The Quran contains frequent references to Old Testament prophets and also to John the Baptist, Jesus and Mary. However, the biblical material is heavily reworked to suit the Islamic message. More than that, Islam is founded on the explicit rejection of all the central Christian mysteries: the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation and the Redemption. The Quran contains repeated and categorical denials of these doctrines.

For this reason theologians have often regarded Islam as a kind of heresy. Although Mohammed was never a baptised Christian, he probably knew and was influenced by many Jewish and Christian groups, especially heretical movements like the Nestorians and others who effectively denied the divinity of Christ. Muslims will point out that Jesus is mentioned more often than Mohammed in the

*While there are some values and convictions Christians and Muslims will find in common, Islam does not simply stand within the lineage of 'Abrahamic' faiths. It is more of a pagan re-interpretation and deviation from that tradition.*

Quran – Mary is honoured too (even the virgin birth is accepted) – but he is only a human prophet.

Islam claims to be a new and final revelation that modifies (they would say it corrects) the Jewish and Christian religions and demands recognition of Mohammed as the last and most perfect of the prophets and the greatest human being. Islamic claims therefore directly challenge the identity and authority of the Church. So while there are some values and convictions Christians and Muslims will find in common, Islam does not simply stand within the lineage of 'Abrahamic' faiths. It is more of a pagan re-interpretation and deviation from that tradition. It also retains strong elements of pre-Islamic Arabic paganism, such as worship at the Ka'ba or holy house of Allah at Mecca and many superstitious, even magical practices.

## God

It is true that Islam believes in a single and eternal creator God who has revealed his will and his law to men through prophets, but the understanding of God and of his revelation is markedly different from Christianity. Allah does not disclose his own nature, nor grant grace that engenders eternal life within us. He is not our Father. We are his slaves, not his children made to his own image and likeness. He does not invite us into communion with himself, nor is there any possibility of seeing him as he really is in the Beatific Vision.

In Allah there is no Divine Logos who is infinite Wisdom and Reason. In fact there is no 'reason' or possible rationality when it comes to Allah and his edicts. Muslim theology is really a matter of jurisprudence, debating what is allowed and what is forbidden. And he rewards those who obey with a paradise of frankly sensual pleasures and punishes those who do not with sadistic tortures that are graphically described on page after page of the Quran. Allah is an absolute and arbitrary law-giver, 'merciful' only in the sense that he has reiterated his commandments through one last prophet. But there is no redemption, no cross, no atonement, no saving grace. Islamic propaganda contains a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about Christianity. So Muslims are often surprised when these spiritually superior dimensions of Catholicism are patiently explained.

## Objections and scholars

A common objection is that the Bible is unreliable because it has been altered from (a now unavailable) original which would have been identical in teaching to the Quran, and this is evidenced by variant readings in the biblical text. The Quran, on the other hand, is often held to be an unchanging copy of what was dictated to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.

In fact this is not even claimed by their own scholars at the time of Mohammed's death. There were at least seven traditions of recitation and various written versions in circulation when the Caliph Uthman (576 – 656 AD) issued a definitive text and had all others destroyed. One problem for the earliest texts was that written Arabic had no vowel markings, making many letter combinations ambiguous in their meaning. Also there has been considerable revision over time with whole passages being abrogated or excised. There are currently two received versions (the *Hafs* and *Warsh*) in circulation among Muslims worldwide, although Muslim scholars insist that there is no difference of inner meaning with regard to what is permitted and what is forbidden.

A key problem for Muslim thinking about their own scripture is that the text is full of references to itself as “The Quran” even while it was purportedly being revealed. This may well be because it was actually written and promulgated (and Islam created as a pan-Arabic religion) in its present form some time after the man Mohammed lived and died, but Muslims get round the issue by saying that the real Quran is eternal. The earthly book is a physical translation and embodiment of the heavenly original.

Yet one of the strictest teachings of Islam is that nothing eternal can exist beside Allah. To suggest otherwise is the sin of “*shirk*” or polygamy; the very accusation they throw at belief in the Trinity. So the question arises whether the “Word of God” (i.e. the eternal Quran) is Divine or not? The historical answer given by Muslim scholars, who recognised the contradiction and the potential Trinitarian trap, is that it is and it isn't!

## Eternal Word

It was finding the perfect answer to this conundrum in the prologue of St. John's Gospel that brought Mario Joseph (born Suleiman ibn Ahmed) to accept Jesus as Lord and God. Understanding then that the Eternal Word is not a book but a Person, and that all things are made in Christ and for Christ, and that it is through him that we are reconciled to the Father, being granted “grace upon grace” through membership of his Body, the true ‘*umma*’ (divinely constituted community) of salvation, he soon became a convinced and courageous Catholic. (cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ5fuaThORQ>).

Another Catholic convert from Islam offers more very useful insights and advice about relationships with Muslims in an EWTN video also available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty4hP8rthOY>). Among other things, he makes the point *the Eternal Word is not a book but a Person... all things are made in Christ and for Christ*

that we need to be aware of what sort of Muslim we are dealing with. Many people know that Muslims are broadly divided into Sunni and Shia adherents. The principal dispute is about who should exercise authority over the Muslim community: the Sunni believe that a leader or *caliph* should be selected by the community, while the Shia hold that caliphs can only come from the descendents of the Mohammed's chosen successor, his cousin Ali. Other legal and moral issues divide them too.

## Complex

There are many complex subdivisions within these main branches, but it would be a mistake to think of these as analogous to Christian denominations. Some, like the highly puritanical Sunni 'Salafist' movement and its Saudi Arabian theocratic expression 'Wahabbism', which claim to be revivals of an original and pure application of the religion, reject all other forms of Islam as inauthentic and heretical. However, most groups, while accepting that there are differing schools of interpretation of Shariah law, see all Muslims as closely bound together in a single *umma*, united in basic belief and practice. They have a common aim too, to convert the West and the whole world ultimately to Islam.

In a recent BBC documentary, the political commentator Trevor Philips said he used to think Muslims would quietly integrate into UK culture, but he is now sadly disappointed by a recent survey of Muslim opinions. Clearly he had judged Islam through eyes of liberal Christianity – a common mistake.

His secular liberal peers are even more blind. They have cynically used the cloak of 'multiculturalism' to hasten the de-Christianisation of society, but it is slowly dawning on them that Islam will gladly sweep aside their liberal secularism and implement Shariah law when the time is right.

*Their image of Christianity is largely taken from our decidedly post-Christian and deeply corrupt culture.*

This does not mean that all Muslims are violent extremists. Muslims traditionally distinguish between the 'House of Islam', where Muslims form the majority and Shariah law is in force, and 'The House of War' where Islam is not accepted. Sometimes that is literally a theatre of war, but some also speak of more nuanced divisions: such as 'The House of Truce', 'House of Calm' – non-Muslim territories where Muslims are free to practice – and 'The House of Invitation' where Islam is not yet fully accepted but is in the process of being introduced – ie. Western Europe in some estimations.

## Christianity

While there can be as many variations of views and levels of practice among Muslims as there are among Christians, many young Muslims are actually well instructed in

the apologetics of their own religion. Their image of Christianity is largely taken from our decidedly post-Christian and deeply corrupt culture. They see Christianity as a weak and spent force, and they have little clear understanding of its real teachings. Most Muslims in the West are not used to meeting truly convinced and well-formed Catholics. It is often enlightening for them to realise that we Catholics also reject secularism and its hedonistic values.

They can often have a pride and enthusiasm for their own religion and degree of faithfulness to its personal demands that puts many Catholics to shame. How many lay Catholics stop whatever they're doing and pray five times a day no matter what? Of course, that is a habit that Islam originally copied from the recitation of the Divine Office by priests and monks. They can be surprised to learn that we fast too. Only we don't do it to demonstrate our strength of will but as a humble remedy for sin and as a sacrifice of love in union with Christ. These are things we should remind them about and reclaim by example as well as word. *Fas est ab hoste doceri* (You are allowed to learn even from your opponent).

## Distinction

We should remember the traditional Catholic distinction between a formal heretic – someone who initiates a heresy and consciously rejects Catholic teaching – and a material heretic – someone brought up in a culture and tradition separated from or outside the Church. So we should distinguish between Islam as a religion and individual Muslims. Those who have been brought up in a religion may indeed be implicitly seeking to know and love God in so far as they know him. It may be our job to lead them to that true divine faith for which they implicitly yearn, and which Our Lord desires them to reach.

For that to happen we need all our young Catholics to be at least as well instructed in their faith as their typical Muslim counterparts. We need to be living our faith to the full, with a personal life of prayer, a committed love for Christ and a deep devotion to Our Lady. We need to be ready to bear cheerful, charitable and robust witness to the Truth in words and in deeds. We may not be asked just now to bear the ultimate witness and how the true meaning of martyrdom, but if that day does come, we must be ready for that too!

*We need to be living our faith to the full, with a personal life of prayer, a committed love for Christ and a deep devotion to Our Lady.*

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*Edouard Harmouche, who is of French/Lebanese family background, has recently retired from working for the United Nations.*

# A Neglected Virtue?

DONATO TALLO

*Donato Tallo explores the value of humility for modern disciples.*

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has given us a wonderful living example of what true humility is, and humility is indeed a central theme of his Pontificate as well as being a central theme of the Year of Mercy. However, humility is not always easy to put into practice.

As pointed out by St Benedict, the Father of Western Monasticism, “it is hard to be humble”. Humility is a concept that comes from within one’s soul, a concept that can help to bring us closer to God and closer to those around us, making us more stable and well-formed individuals.

It has never been more important for Christians and indeed all people to seek to be truly humble. St Benedict and his Rule can help to inspire us; following his ideas within our lives can help us all to put our faith into action in ways that are genuine and much needed in today’s society.

The virtue of humility must not be misunderstood or misinterpreted; we must avoid being falsely ‘umble’ like David Copperfield’s Uriah Heap. We must seek to be humble by opening our hearts to the true meaning of humility and, as St Benedict says, “keeping the fear of God before our eyes in all that we do”.

St Benedict dedicated the entire seventh chapter of his Rule to the concept of humility and it has a great deal to teach us when considering the idea of mission and living the faith of the church. Humility is most certainly the basis for an effective faith lived out in daily life.

While each of St Benedict’s twelve steps of humility (which are listed below) have a strong message of their own, the second step in particular is quite a striking one, being of great importance in today’s society which is so full of consumerism, family breakdowns, celebrity culture, social media, vanity and many other problems and challenges.



*Humility is a concept that comes from within one’s soul, a concept that can help to bring us closer to God and closer to those around us, making us more stable and well-formed individuals.*



The second step of humility is based on the Lord's saying "I have not come to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (Jn 6:38) and suggests that we should not love our own desires or take pleasure in them but we should model ourselves around the above saying of Our Lord, which is not an easy thing to do.

I am not suggesting that we must all seek to live monastic lives, but the virtue of humility as explored by St Benedict has so much to teach us, especially if we are called to be Christ in our lives on earth and to see Christ in others. It was Mother Teresa who in 1987 said "you get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other on earth". Perhaps by demonstrating greater love and care to those around us, particularly those within our own family and especially those who are unwell or marginalised within society; by reaching out to those who are struggling in life, in need of comfort or support – and by valuing them all as human beings – then we can all indeed be true disciples of Christ on earth.

The Eucharist must always be the central point of our faith but, as Scripture tells us, we are called to be disciples and witness to Christ in our world today, not simply at the Eucharistic Table but by being Christ in our world and seeing Christ in others. This we do through our daily thoughts, actions and deeds.

We are reminded in Psalm 7 that "God knows our hearts and our minds". Perhaps as this Year of Mercy draws to its end, St Benedict's rule can inspire us and help us to deepen our faith and fellowship towards others on earth. I would greatly encourage people of all faiths and none to explore the Rule of St Benedict. You might be surprised by what you find and, like me, find it a useful tool to help bring you closer to God.

These are St Benedict's twelve steps of humility within his Holy Rule which members of monastic orders must follow:

1. Always be aware of the presence of God
2. Love not doing his own will but the will of God
3. Submit to the Abbot in obedience
4. Obey superiors even in hardship
5. Confess his sins to a spiritual father
6. Be content with his circumstances
7. Believe in his heart that he is least of the brothers
8. Follow the rule and tradition of the monastery
9. Refrain from excessive speech
10. Refrain from raucous laughter
11. Speak as is appropriate in a monastery
12. Keep a humble bearing in his body

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*Donato Tallo is a registered nurse working in the acute hospital sector*

## Interview

# Drama and Life

### TEN TEN THEATRE GROUP

*FAITH editor Joanna Bogle meets actor/playwright Martin O'Brien.*

The TenTen theatre group offers challenging, thought-provoking productions, with the accent strongly on contemporary issues. This is drama that draws the audience in and creates an environment in which it is impossible to remain indifferent – no small achievement when the target audience is adolescents in a school hall or gym.

Schools across Britain are now becoming familiar with Ten Ten. FAITH magazine met co-founder Martin O'Brien in London to learn more.



### Actor

Himself an actor – West End musical, National Theatre – he is also a writer producing material for TV and radio. He established TenTen with a specific message: it's St John's Gospel, 10:10 "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full". The first play was *Babies*, tackling the theme of abortion and unwanted pregnancy. It was followed by plays tackling gang warfare, human trafficking, family relationships and more.

TenTen employs professional actors and, in addition to presenting plays in theatres, it takes the drama to schools, using whatever facilities are on offer there. The team works hard: there is a three-week rehearsal period and then a stint of travelling, doing one play a week. A success story this year has been *This is my Body*, a drama centred on love and relationships. There is also *The Gift*, for primary schools. TenTen offers follow-up material for use in discussion groups and project work.

"The work is expanding all the time. We created a sketch on the Prodigal Son to link with the Year of Mercy, and presented it for a whole-school assembly, after which the day was spent meeting with one year group after another for follow-up work. That has gone really well."

The core team is a family one – Martin, plus his sister Clare and mother Anna "Definitely a family thing – that has its challenges, of course, but it's also the strength of it."

"Next year there will be a tour for *This is my Body*. A lot of our actors are people who have been with us for some while – they enjoy the work and keep coming back. We keep commissioning new work, and we also have projects that have gone well and are worth repeating."

"We work hard – it doesn't all come easily. There's also a lot of organising to do. When we are mapping out the plans, we contact schools to say we are in their area and ask if they are interested. Year on year we fit in all that we can: we max out on the dates."

## St John Paul

The work began with plays in local theatres and for community groups. An adaption of *The Jeweler's Shop* by Karol Wojtyla (Pope St John Paul) has been repeatedly popular. It played a major part in the creation of TenTen.

"John Paul has been a big influence. When I read *The Jeweler's Shop* in my twenties I was really taken by it – still am. That was definitely a big part of creating TenTen."

Another play that has stirred audiences is *Kolbe's Gift*, telling the story of St Maximillian Kolbe's sacrifice to save another man's life in Auschwitz: it proved a success at London's Leicester Square theatre.

## New development

A new development has been their teaming up with Catholic charities, including Missio, the Apostleship of the Sea and London's Cardinal Hume Centre to present a message. "We become, in effect, an educational arm of the charity, working with teachers, often at a school assembly, and then following up in the classroom." TenTen has also started producing on-line resources for schools, as part of the follow-up work after a drama performance.

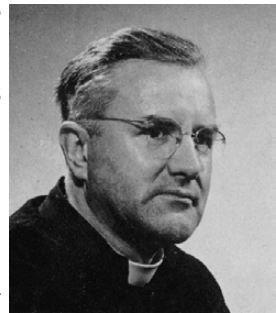
TenTen has been involved with a number of Catholic organisations and events over recent years, including diocesan gatherings and the big *Celebrate* gathering for families, run by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement.

Schools pay for performances, and the group also has a mailing-list of supporters. Because the plays work well, there has been a continuing and steady development, with new avenues opening up. Looking ahead, there is a film being planned, and the expansion of a project for primary schools based on the Sunday Mass readings. From a small beginning – "to be honest, the whole thing sort of evolved from that first play" – TenTen is now a major part of the Catholic and the theatre scene in Britain. There are many ways to convey the life-giving message of the Gospel. TenTen harnesses the extraordinary power of human creativity and modern culture, and lays them at the service of Jesus Christ. It is powerful indeed to witness. More information: [office@tententheatre.co.uk](mailto:office@tententheatre.co.uk)

# Holloway on: Relating to Jesus Christ

EDWARD HOLLOWAY

What sort of Jesus do we want, and respond to in the Catholic Christian faith? Is it a 'brother', so one with us that he is Man only, albeit Superman? Quite surely this is the Christ of *The Myth of God Incarnate* [SCM Press, 1977] but it is also the Christ of Hans Kung and, for that matter, the Christ presented: today, the depiction of a Christ through gospels which are not reliably historic nor literally true, in a personality subject to ignorance of his divine being, a Man-God, not the God-Man, who did not know who he was, came only gradually to the knowledge of his 'divinity' ("it all depends what you mean by 'divinity' etc"), shouted aloud in despair on the cross and failed to rise physically on the third day. To this Jesus one cannot pray with the allegiance of one's whole mind and heart, nor give a total assent of faith and of moral law to fulfilment which is absolute through every age of man. This Jesus leaves more than a doubt concerning his status, and so He cannot be loved and followed psychologically in the state of perfection and to the mortification of concupiscence. The priest cannot accept celibacy for such a Jesus, nor the layman refuse divorce, nor the teenager sexual intercourse. One may be missing too much, and there may be nothing else on the other side of life. Maybe we do live on only in our children's consciousness ...



## Jesus is God

We do not want Our Lord to be 'just like us' in order that 'He can understand our sins, sorrows, and temptations'. Such a Jesus is only a saint, even if a very great saint. We have always adored, loved and followed as disciples a Jesus Christ *who is as much transcendent as the Father* just as we profess Him: *God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God*: this confession could not be clearer, nor more intractable to historic relativism. Unless Jesus is God transcendent in very being, his unique mission is neither unique nor of any use to us. First, we are not redeemed in Him in any deep sense, nor is He Saviour and Bread of Life. Christian faith teaches that

by union and communion with the Divine Being we grow and are nourished in the life of organic grace to the fulness of the measure of the Manhood of Christ and the likeness of God. Unless Jesus Christ can be the food and life of the inner man, there is nothing at all unique He can do for us. A saint can lead you towards God, but no guru, no saint, can be at once the Way, Truth and Life. This is why it makes a blinding sense for Christ to say: "for my flesh is real food, my blood is real drink: he that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I within him. As the Living Father has sent Me, and I live through the Father, so he that eats of Me, the same one shall live through Me" (Jn 6 *passim*). This makes most perfect sense, not only in relationship to the Living and Transcendent God. It is not the sort of thing men make up when they desire to aggrandize saints or heroes. It is not the sort of thing the mind thinks of.

### The witness of St. John, St. Peter and St. Paul

Rightly the humanist theologian detests St. John and his gospel, for it is full of this type of blinding coherence but true and coherent only of a divine relationship of Jesus Christ to every man. Yet, as the rationalist theologian tries to discredit the validity and historicity of what is said in John, he has to answer, and never does answer, the question how a man, working out a *mythos* of Jesus Christ from his own lyrical and history-limited mind, can so clearly and succinctly express things which are utterly true and valid, but only and uniquely of the Living God Incarnate. If Jesus Christ never said such things, never claimed such things, was never a 'Christian' for that matter, who or what so formed in succinct coherence the mind of John the evangelist? It is psychologically inexplicable unless the transcendent Divine, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, have seen with our eyes, have watched, touched with our own hands: the Word, who is Life' (1 John, Prol.), formed the mind of John to understand and speak what no sincere, balanced Jew had ever thought or dared to say of 'man' before.

### Transfiguration

No less is it just as true of Peter, who speaking of his experience upon the mount of the transfiguration, saw us as being in Christ made "*co-sharers of the divine nature*", an expression appalling at any time but unthinkable from the psychology of a rugged Galilean fisherman for whom God was as much One Only Allah as for any Muslim tribesman; a Peter whose conservative double-dealing over the incidentals of the Mosaic law, earned him the sarcastic reproof of St. Paul. Ah yes, St. Paul — that sophisticated Paul aware that God alone is the Environer of mankind, in whom men live and move and

*A saint can lead you towards God,  
but no guru, no saint, can be at  
once the Way, Truth and Life.*

have their being: he also teaches a Christ through whom *all reality*, angel, man and matter is created, and through whom all things, like one vast equation, do hold together (Col. 1:17). He teaches a Jesus who, being in the form of God, *thought it not robbery* to be equal to God, an expression meaningless unless He is of one being with God. The expression is a nonsense otherwise, especially in the mouth of the most orthodox of the Pharisees, a man who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel at Jerusalem. Moreover, in the so-called *primitive* witness of Matthew and Mark, what do we make of a sending of missionaries in *the name* of 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'? This title, in its very Jewishness *makes no sense at all* unless it is a claim upon one being, power and divinity. Of that *One Name* the devout Jew adored so much the unity and power that when he met it in the scrolls of the scriptures he did not speak it, but out of very awe substituted the title 'Lord' instead. One could go on indefinitely, and so unnecessarily. It has all been better said by the Fathers of the Church, fighting the very same heresy in Nestorius and in Arius long ages ago. The testimony of the infant Church, of the Fathers, of the Councils and the Creeds is wholly to the objective, the literal, the Transcendent Divinity of the One Person true God, and truly man, of Jesus the Christ.

### Concerning test and temptation

It is a mistake to interpret, indeed to translate, the words in the Letter to the Hebrews to mean literally *tempted* like us in all things except sin. The word which would correspond in Hebrew (in what is an extremely Jewish epistle) has no such sharp specific overtone. Just as well it means to 'try' or 'test'. Every temptation is an assault, and a trial and a test. Who would say that the martyr under torture endured less than the youth sweating under passionate desire? Who can say that the temptation to *get out of* a work, a way of life, a gift to God upon which many will depend, but which is no matter of sin, but of free vow or free offering, cannot be just as great an agony when the temptation of pain, anguish, revulsion of nature, sheer reason it would seem, presses hard upon a dedicated soul? When you add many-sided pain and human hopelessness to a work which is not a matter of commandment, there can obviously

*The testimony of the infant Church, of the Fathers, of the Councils and the Creeds is wholly to the objective, the literal, the Transcendent Divinity of the One Person true God, and truly man, of Jesus the Christ.*

be moments of great crisis of stress and testing "temptation", only a many-sided stress. In the garden of Gethsemane, is it not obvious that the tortured body and soul of Christ endured such a stress? He did not have to die for us. In his image it has been true that the saint, man or woman, has also persevered, often under great stress, with a work and a gift to God which was no



matter of intrinsic obligation. You may say that the saint is under obligation to do the will of God known in love as the perfection of friendship even if it is not an obligation of mandate.

## Redeem

So be it, it is the greatness of the love which makes the obligation absolute, and increases the stress and the pain beyond measure. But it is a different source of stress from that induced by lust for money, power or bodily delight. Christ also did not have to redeem us by going the whole way according to 'the law of nature and the course of things' in a fallen world. That surely is the meaning of his injunction to Peter: "Put back again the sword into the sheath. Do you not realise that I can ask my Father, and He will give me even now more than twelve legions of angels? ... The chalice my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" (Matt. 26:53 and Jn 18:11). The Christ of God made man was well able to know fellowship with us in our ignorances, sins and temptations without our wishing upon Him impossible conditions of a flawed humanity. The Letter to the Hebrews makes the context of Christ's human compassion fully clear: "who in the days of his flesh on earth, with a great cry and burst of tears offered prayer and supplication to Him who was able to save Him from out of death, and was heard for his enduring dutifulness (*eulabeia*). And though He was indeed the Son of God, through the things he suffered He learned obedience" (Heb. 5:7-8). Whether stress and test be from physical addiction or be the lonely heartbreak of sufferings endured through the gift to God of a self-giving under free vow, it is all one and the same pain: obedience under such pain to the truth of God and the will of God is the one acid test of real love.

## In Him the fulness of the Godhead bodily

We are made in the image and likeness of God to be fulfilled only through God. We go to God, not anything lesser, for the only truth that can be absolute, the only good that can be all beatific, the only commandment that can carry a total sanction of necessary obedience. This has always been our relationship to the Father, and it is the same with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit. We go to the Son, and Him Incarnate for fulness of Way, Truth, Life and Bread. Becoming Son of Man for us, He reveals that we are willed and made, with Him as the root and stock of our kind, *through His Flesh* upon which the bases of the universe are aligned, but because of His Divinity. It is of God our nature is born, and the very flesh of Christ is given only that in Him, the totality of the supernatural order, including our Redemption since sin, might be given to us as Sons of God. The adoption is into the divine nature and into the divine inheritance and not into anything created.

## Letter to Colossians

St. Paul said it all for us in that startling letter to the Colossians, in which he reacts *against a Gnosticism which was already beginning* and apparently not merely among converts from Greek philosophies and eastern mystery rites, but from a Gnosticism among the early Christian Pharisees, the type of which is evident among the Pseudo-Epigrapha of the last century BC and the lifetime of Christ. *"As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fulness of the Godhead does bodily dwell, and you have come to fulness of life in Him who is the head of all rule and authority"* (Col 2:6-10). No orthodox Pharisee, and such Paul was, could possibly conceive from the rabbinical schools of that day, or from any natural cultural development of Pharisaism, of such a phrase as 'fulness of the Godhead in bodily form', nor of its consequence claimed for Christ 'the fulness of life in him who is the head of all rule and authority'. This is clearly an affirmation of a new revelation claimed for Christ and learned of Christ. It ascribes beyond doubt a Divine Person to Christ, in spite of his being 'in the flesh'.

### *My Lord and my God*

The simple priest, the unacademic church student, the worried sister should be sure of one thing to the rejection of all else. Their basic Catholic way of 'going to God' directly in prayer and adoration is correct, is natural and is also supernatural. After that, the same simple souls can be sure from the whole historic testimony of the Church that they are also *utterly right* in going to Jesus Christ in uniquely and univocally the same way, as to God, directly in adoration and acceptance. We go to Him as *My Lord and My God*, and the Christian discipleship is more than one of the acceptance of an absolute light and truth. It is also the acceptance of a moulding of life, morals and personal fulfilment from being configured upon the Person of Jesus Christ, as the norm of human perfection, and of man's approximation to the life of the Godhead. We live in Him and through Him: the counsels of perfection of the

*The sanctity of Christ is the holiness by which all Christian people are saved, and the norm of the injunction to be perfect even as the heavenly Father is perfect.*

historic Catholic Church are the perfection lived by Christ Himself and to which He invites the more intimate disciple. The sanctity of Christ is the holiness by which all Christian people are saved, and the norm of the injunction to be perfect even as the heavenly Father is perfect.

### Jesus is one divine personality

One must stress also that 'fulness of the Godhead in bodily form' implies just *One Personality*, in the common man's acceptance of the word, in Christ: there is only one focus

*We go to God as principle of our joy and fulfilment; we seek union with his divine joy and being*

that says "I" in him, whether that personality says of Godhead, "before Abraham was made, I AM," or in his human being (nature as existential) "my soul is sorrowful even unto death". When we go to God, we go to *the Father as one him*, we go to *the Son as one him*, we go to *the Holy Spirit as one him*. At all times the one him of Jesus is the divine Him. In the matter of suffering, if somebody pulls savagely at the hairs on your arms it can be quite sadistic torture. The pain is evoked not in the personality, but in the nature. The pain proceeds within one's vegetative and animal life, but it is still my pain and it is focused through one's spiritual personality and attributed to one final point which is 'me'. Since our created soul is created, and subject to loss and pain, there is evoked a concomitant spiritual distress as well, by sympathy, so to speak. Yet the pain was evoked through the lower being of one's nature and not through the summit of personality. In the living human being of Jesus Christ (nature as existential) there is evoked a pain above all other human pain, a pain of body and of soul which was freely endured and could always have been sinlessly refused. Our Redemption by Christ is given to the Father under vow, not under intrinsic obligation.

The pain of Christ in his living human being is also increased beyond our comprehension both by the perfection of his living communion in the Father,

*Go to Him then in prayer naturally and easily as both God and Man, and let no empty deceit of human traditions and elemental philosophies of this world rob you of your inheritance.*

and by the focussing of the pain of nature through the Divine "I" in which His Person stands to Father and to Holy Spirit. It is through this relationship that his work for men is defined, undertaken and carried through.

### Intrinsic relationship

This intrinsic relationship of the Son to the Father explains the attribution to the Father of the raising of the Son from the dead. This same relationship to the Father, in the Love which is the Holy Spirit, also explains the shock, horror and bloody sweat

of Gethsemane. There is more to be worked out in this subject-matter than can be even hinted at now. If one hint may be given, let it be an acknowledgement that there is a difference in Christ between his joys and his sorrows. Every human joy must become concomitant with the Joy which defines the divine being in itself, and belongs to his divine person. Not so with the suffering: there is not in Christ an accompanying pain and sorrow in the divine nature, for loss or lesion is impossible to God's nature. This does not make Christ any less 'human' for us. We go to God as principle of our joy and fulfilment; we seek union with his *divine* joy and being. We don't expect the Father, in order to be Father, to experience the pains and weaknesses of our finite and fallen nature, in the divine nature. So too with our Lord Jesus Christ: the pain and the suffering are truly human, much increased by the beatific possession of the Father and the Holy Spirit in his human soul, through His divine personality. It is as *human* that the divine Lord experiences a compassion, a fellow suffering, with ourselves. But it is as divine person in his own single ME that he knows, understands, loves and fulfils us. He gives us all that we do want, could want, or dare ask even from God. *He is more, not less God for us, as the fulness of the Godhead in bodily form.* Go to Him then in prayer naturally and easily as both God and Man, and let no empty deceit of human traditions and elemental philosophies of this world rob you of your inheritance.

*Abridged from a 'Theological Comment' article by Fr Holloway in the September/October 1977 issue of Faith magazine.*

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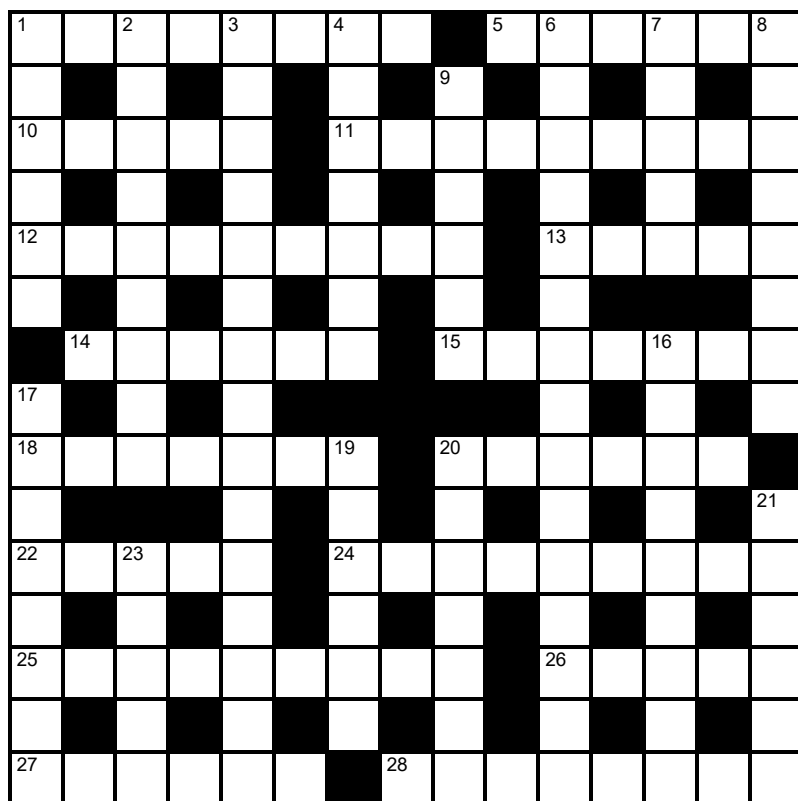
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We invite you to complete this crossword: the clues in bold involve general religious knowledge;



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A special Christmas prize of a bottle of wine sent by post will be awarded to the sender of the first correct solution opened from all those received by 1st December 2016. Entries may be this original page or a photocopy and should be sent to Faith Crossword 2, 45 East St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxon., OX14 5EE. PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR FULL NAME AND POSTAL ADDRESS.

## Across

1. Confused, sane, tripped on island peak (8)
2. Cold shoulder confused Beatle before start of evening (6)
10. **Days of fasting at the beginning of a season (5)**
11. Drawn to pamphlet involved in evening out, facing back (9)
12. **The House of Bread (9)**
13. Meal without starter is more important (5)
14. **Not spirit (6)**
15. Cut up, heard vegetable goes in to be combined (7)
18. Maiden sits on topless chair - to be greedy? (7)
20. I dive into French river - in sea water! (6)
22. **City in Spain - home of Teresa (5)**
24. Edge east to divide pontiff and make the distance round (9)
25. Re-arrange a lot in bus to produce a runner (5,4)
26. No Parisian by outskirts of Newcastle - hoping for affirmative reply (5)

27. Witness to a good man swallowing tee-total ethic to begin with (6)
28. Send back dog to fog over Europe - most soothing (8)

## Down

1. **Sister of St Oswald (2,4)**
2. Rarebit cooked with a small piece of toast? Settle the matter! (9)
3. **Hymn for November 1st (3,3,3,6)**
4. Hide from the French topless swimmer (7)
6. **Roman rite liturgical book (8,7)**
7. Working before dancing makes it freely available (2,3)
8. A field or a door will reveal sought-after city (2,6)
9. Drawn at the end of the day (6)
16. **Council which resolved the Western Schism (9)**
17. **Polish town - site of church built despite Communism (4,4)**
19. Upper canine of superior type (3,3)
20. Question dramatically asked of vicar (4,3)
21. **One like Melchizedek of old (6)**
23. Paint in a mess - not at all the thing. (5)

## Book Reviews

# An Exciting Re-Reading of Cosmology

*The Sense of the Universe: Philosophical Explication of Theological Commitment in Modern Cosmology*

by Alexei V. Nesteruk, Fortress Press, 545pp, £38.99.

*Reviewed by Brendan Purcell*

What are physicists and astronomers doing when they're doing cosmology? Alexei Nesteruk thoroughly explores how this question moves way beyond the purely physical measurement of the cosmos to its philosophical and theological dimensions. He draws on phenomenology, Kantian theory of knowledge, the Greek fathers of the first millennium of Christianity and a range of 20th century Russian and French thinkers, to fashion a unique critical examination of how and what we know in contemporary cosmology.



### Approach

Nesteruk summarises the objective of this book as “the unfolding of theological motives in humanity’s perception of existence in the universe” (p.22). But ‘we do not analyse cosmology from the perspective of an explicitly theistic stance based on some dogmatic propositions of God’s existence; rather we proceed cautiously from what we call theological commitment as an existential, experiential mode of communion with God’ (p.24). His justification of this approach is that the natural sciences normally don’t question their own existence and cognitive operations, nor does knowledge of the universe occur anywhere except within the persons who know it: ‘science is not capable of dealing with the question of its own facticity ... In this sense the universe as articulated reality has existence and sense only in a mode of personhood, which is a divine gift’ (p.25).

### Cosmology and human subjectivity

He argues that both the knowing subject and the cosmos as known object must be articulated at far deeper levels than is normally the case even in philosophical



discussion. He notes that cosmology is developed by a 'human subjectivity [which] affirms itself through its non-egocentric attitude toward the external world' (p.113). Thus neither the cosmos nor its human knower can be explained in terms of the natural sciences:

as human personhood escapes complete definitions by manifesting itself through "presence in absence", the universe, being a mirror of the human reason through which humanity constitutes itself also escapes complete definitions, thus acquiring a mode of "presence in absence", that is, a mode of personal "opposite" of dynamic ecstatic reference... The universe can then be understood as a kind of otherness of personhood that is present in the event of a person's self-affirmation (p.158).

He explains this otherness of the universe:

Cosmology, in contradistinction to astronomy and astrophysics, is rather a "universology" that deals with a single, unique totality of all, which not only cannot be treated as an object and hence subjected to experimentation, but also cannot be made devoid of the delimiters of human insight (p.182).

## Aquinas

Nesteruk could perhaps have made things easier for himself if he had drawn on Aquinas' philosophical understanding of being, especially as his chapter 'Constituting the Universe: Transcendental Delimiters and Apophaticism in Cosmology' may run the danger of conflating the notion of created being with the uncreated Being of God. I'm not denying the richness of his rethinking of our relation with the universe as analogous to a relation with a person. Still, the notion of created being of course includes both personal and non-personal existence. A fine expression of that richness can be seen in this characteristic reference to St Athanasius:

[The] intrinsic rationality in the world, according to Athanasius of Alexandria, is maintained by the creative Logos of God, which is not an immanent principle of the world, but the transcendent artificer of order and harmony in created existence, which is thus contingent upon the transcendent rationality of God (p.219).

## The standard cosmological model

In his discussion of the rationality of our notion of the universe, he writes that 'the existential belief in the unity of reality corresponding to the unity of conscious experience permeates the whole standard cosmological model, including all its constructs' (p.280) and asks why the standard cosmological model is so convincing. He refers to philosopher of science Ernan McMullin who notes that its coherence is

due 'not just to the particular historical reconstruction of a long-past geological or biological episode but in the ways in which one reconstruction supports another, and the scope of the concepts and explanatory concepts on which the reconstruction is based gradually widens' (p.280).

Nesteruk continues on this topic, contrasting the testable standard cosmological model with the untestable multiverse hypothesis:

Unlike peninsular constructs such as multiverse, which by themselves cannot have any direct relation to the life-world, the construct of the visible universe possesses a heuristic quality of predicting some new properties of the universe that are subject to empirical testing (p.289).

There follows a finely weighted discussion of the kind of truth involved in cosmological theory, including the Kuhnian requirement of acceptance by the scientific community on the basis of its verifiability. He speaks of 'a weak objectivity that includes the transcendental conditions of establishing truth' (p.299), which is very close to Bernard Lonergan's discussion in *Insight* of the contingency of judgments about the material world. Such judgments, in Lonergan's terminology, are 'virtually unconditioned', that is contingent with regard to their object, not contingent in terms of the cognitive operations grounding the judgment.

### Cosmology and the explication of the human condition

He argues that the universe's origin is just as inexplicable as the origin of each unique human being: 'In other words, how to interpret the Big Bang idea in the perspective of the interior life of a human person' (p.306). He has been dealing throughout with what Heidegger called the forgetfulness of being—that cosmology can never explain the facticity of the universe, its existence, its suitability for life, life itself, and of course, the unique existence of each person. He's aware of how some cosmologists like Stephen Hawking try to dispose of this question 'by suggesting sophisticated theories of how to avoid temporal origin in cosmology at all' (p.316). Cosmology itself is rooted in that even greater mystery of the human person: 'the purpose of explanation in cosmology is related to the explication of the human condition. Correspondingly, the purposiveness of cosmological research acts as a certain delimiter in the explicability of the universe related to the human condition' (p.350). His questioning of the physicists' acceptance of the sheer givenness of the underlying laws of astrophysics reminded me of Hawkings' dogmatic statement that 'Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing...' (*The Grand Design*, p. 180).

## Strongly theological dimension

One of the threads in the complex weave of this book is its strongly theological dimension. For example Nesteruk writes that 'It is implied here that a glance at nature and the universe as created by God is accessible to humanity only through the Holy Spirit' (p.433, n.36). However, I think Nesteruk is merely trying to get beyond the forgetfulness of the mystery of existence that he catches so frequently with remarks like *'The origin of the universe shows to humanity precisely that its origin cannot be shown'* (p.453, his emphasis). He sees the universe not just as contingent existence but in the richer sense of being pure gift, a cosmic giftedness that requires a response from us.

## Theology and cosmology are correlative

Nesteruk sums up: theology and cosmology are correlative, since theology needs human persons embodied in the physical universe, whose nature is explored by cosmology. This anthropological basis for cosmology 'cannot be explained through reductions to the physical, and forms the foundational mystery whose elucidation and interpretation can only be provided by theology of the Divine image' (p.475). The book concludes within a specifically Christian vision:

... cosmology can be treated as a theological work, as a spiritual and para-eucharistic activity, bringing the universe back to its creator through exploration and articulation. By so doing, human cosmologists endeavor a task of the moral mediation between the universe and God, contributing to the stages of deification through which the universe will be transfigured and seen through the eyes of the Logos-creator himself (p.479).

## Orthodox Christian

So, while being utterly faithful to his own vocation as an Orthodox Christian, Nesteruk has offered one of the most exciting re-readings of cosmology that has ever been carried out, all the more useful to the Western Christian reader since it includes a great many Russian and Patristic sources more or less unknown to the West. The book is immense and will richly reward whoever explores its various natural scientific, cosmological, anthropological and indeed theological summits.

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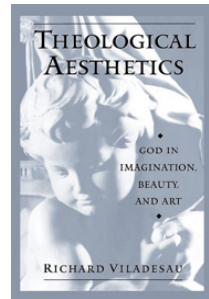
*Fr. Brendan Purcell is Adjunct Professor, University of Notre Dame, Australia, and the author of From Big Bang to Big Mystery: Human Origins in the Light of Creation and Evolution.*

# To God Through Beauty

*Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art*, by Richard Viladesau, OUP, 312pp, £25.00.

*Reviewed by Guy Nicholls*

Art attempts to 'represent the unimaginable' in images which speak to us and move us. But in the making of images there is the danger of fomenting idolatry, and inviting the confusion of the reality with the image, when the original is, like God, unimaginable. Richard Viladesau tries to break away from this philosophical impasse by proposing a fundamental theology of the human imagination based on the *Logos*, the Son of God as Creator. This draws on the teaching that man is by nature 'capax Dei', and that the Creator never ceases to draw us to Himself. The ability to know Him, the unimaginable and uncreated One, therefore, even through the medium of created images, is inbuilt and cannot be satisfied except by coming to know Him. Therefore we should expect that this desire for God is made to be fulfilled in Him alone. Human cognition is capable of reaching the truth, even through images of various kinds, which can therefore lead us towards an authentic theology of art and aesthetics, enabling us truly, albeit partially, to 'image' the godhead.



## Not by the intellect alone

Viladesau therefore asks how beauty can indeed be understood as a way to know God. Undoubtedly, one of the major problems that has beset theological aesthetics is, on the one hand, the modern and post-modern loss of faith in the image and likeness of God in created human nature; and on the other, the loss of conviction that truth is objectively real and attainable by the human person, intellectually and by feeling (aesthesis). Of course, where knowledge of God is concerned, the nature of what we can claim to know of Him has always been difficult to encompass in human language. But that is precisely where the intellectual conception of God alone, unaided or unbalanced by aesthesis, shows its limits. Pascal famously commented that 'the heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of', suggesting that feelings are an indispensable part of the human heuristic process. The 'heart' stands for the apprehension of that which is instinctively and powerfully perceived as desirable. This is characteristic of beauty as it is experienced by the human heart, not as a force

opposed to that of reason, but as admitting more than the intellect alone can grasp. As the anonymous mediaeval English author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* expressed this truth so neatly: 'by love may [God] be gotten and holden, but by thought never.' Viladesau adapts to aesthetics an argument from Kant and concludes that 'God is ... self-subsistent joy in God's own being and in all that participates in it, and the supreme goal and mover of human desire.'

## The foundation of art and beauty

This 'categorical' revelation of God in the joyful apprehension of Himself is what Viladesau seeks to establish as constituting the foundation of art and beauty. The experience of beauty is a delight, a joy in the experience of 'form', the organising principle that gives 'shape' to things and to our knowledge of them. The recognition of form is itself a sign of intelligibility and is accompanied by a sense of joy and satisfaction in the discovery of meaning and purpose. Yet how is it that we often experience beauty as something sad or tragic? Or that we can even sometimes experience what is tragic as beautiful, as desirable, especially when we encounter it in art and music? Viladesau accounts for this puzzling fact by placing God himself at the 'horizon' of every experience of beauty. Finite beauty powerfully points towards the infinite but unreachable beauty of God, arousing in us who experience it both joy in possession, and pain in the perceived absence, of the one to whom we may be drawn and directed by a particular aesthetic event.

## Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant attitudes

Viladesau does not shirk the important differences between various schools of Christian theology in understanding of the place and function of art and beauty in relation to God. The sacramental principle, in which created matter and form can be apprehended in some authentic way as images of God, and as ways towards union with Him, is fundamental to the Catholic and Orthodox attitude to art, whereas the Protestant theological system relies on the priority of the word over the image as the medium through which God communicates Himself to us, and by means of which we apprehend Him. It is significant, for instance, that the Protestant theologian Bonhoeffer described 'art, culture and religion' as 'the three great powers by which humanity contradicts the grace of God.' Nevertheless, it would be wrong, as Viladesau recognizes, to make this dichotomy too absolute. After all, on the Catholic side, St Bernard strongly disputed the place of sensible (especially visual) beauty. On the Protestant side, Luther himself had a profound appreciation of the power of music especially to convey God's truth and presence, as is particularly exemplified in the religious works of his great follower, Bach. Viladesau quotes Karl Rahner's pertinent

observation that 'when listening to a Bach Oratorio ... we have the impression that, not only through its text, but also through its music, we are in a special way brought into a relationship with divine revelation about humanity.'

### The cross – divine love made incarnate

The hermeneutical key to the proper understanding of beauty in art, Viladesau states, is the cross of Christ. From an aesthetic point of view, the cross is not itself a beautiful thing, but it is the symbol of a beautiful act, that of the self-giving of the Son of God incarnate out of love for the Father and for fallen creation, in order to restore the beauty of what He had made but sin had marred. So 'if the image and presence of God are found in the poverty, ugliness and suffering of the world, it is precisely as the hope and promise of transcending these conditions.'

Viladesau therefore asks whether Christian spirituality has been too exclusively preoccupied with renunciation and has taken too little account of 'the fact that Jesus, in contrast to the ascetical John the Baptist, came in a spirit of celebrating the arrival of God's kingdom.' Theological aesthetics must eschew any hint of dualism, and fully accept that 'body and soul were both equally created by God, equally attacked by corruption, and equally saved by Christ.' Hence we may therefore speak of an 'aesthetic conversion' that takes place when we recognise beauty not merely as that which produces feelings of pleasure, but as 'form', understood as 'perceivable order, intelligibility and value'. Yet this conversion must take place in the light of the cross, understood specifically as the historical sign and fulfilment of divine love made incarnate.

### The problem of idolatry

The resolution of the problem of idolatry, in both its intellectual and its ascetical dimensions, is to be found in intellectual, moral, aesthetic and religious conversion, rather than in the renunciation of any intrinsic dimension of human being. Viladesau warns us that 'a lack of experience of the beauty of what is truly good, a lack of taste for the holy – turns people ... towards the pursuit of material pleasure.' The human thirst for aesthetic fulfilment is insatiable. The question is whether what fulfils that thirst is good and true, and convincing. The conclusion of this book is that the only authentic beauty capable of bringing us to the end for which we have been created and redeemed is the splendour of truth and goodness in the everlasting glorious vision of God, mediated to us by the Crucified incarnate Logos.

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*Fr Guy Nicholls of the Birmingham Oratory has just completed a doctoral study of Newman's aesthetics.*

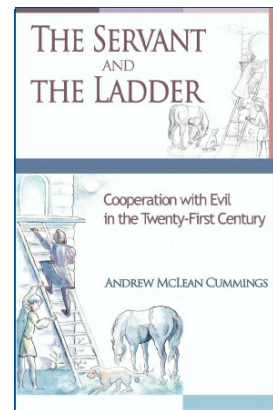
# Complicity and How To Avoid It

*The Servant and the Ladder: Cooperation with Evil in the Twenty-First Century* by Andrew McLean Cummings, Gracewing, 443 pp, £20.

*Reviewed by Helen Watt*

This is a lively and thought-provoking book on the topic of cooperation and complicity in others' wrongdoing. The 'Servant' of the title is an imaginary character attracting centuries of debate and even a papal condemnation: the employee of a would-be rapist who is asked to hold a ladder while his master climbs in a window. May he hold the ladder, many have asked, and if so, in what circumstances?

Those who regard the Servant example as perhaps a little strained and antiquarian may prefer to think about other cases mentioned in the book: the shipping clerk who dispatches land mines, or the nurse who hands instruments to a doctor who plans to use them for an abortion. How should we make sense of these cases, and what if the Servant, the nurse or the clerk were 'going through the motions' at the point of a gun, rather than merely (as in the condemned Servant view) in fear of their jobs or an 'angry look'?



## Formal and material cooperation

Twenty-first century readers benefit from the distinction now drawn between 'formal' and 'material' cooperation – where material cooperation in others' wrongful choices is unintentional, while formal cooperation is intentional. Formal cooperation with the main wrongdoer's act, however reluctant and however disapproving, is always itself morally wrong. Material cooperation, in contrast, may or may not be morally wrong – and despite clarificatory remarks in *Veritatis Splendor* – the identification of formal and material, and permissible and impermissible material cooperation, is still a matter of much dispute.

Cummings leads us through the history of discussion of this and allied areas, taking in some entertaining if horrifying views requiring censure: proof, if proof were needed, that laxism did not begin with our current age. He also sets out his own views on cooperation, which are not only quite restrictive but not entirely convincing to this reviewer in the particular shape they take. While rightly willing to assert the duty



to refuse illicit choices 'even if it hurts', Cummings is perhaps too quick to identify some choices as 'formal' that might be better seen as 'material' cooperation, however unjustified these choices may remain.

### The role of intention

Cummings not unnaturally fears that "if negative consequences are held to be in no way intended, they will be permitted for a sufficient reason; if there is some intentionality, they may fall under absolute norms and be forbidden in all cases" (p.94). So willing is Cummings, at least sometimes, to impute intention from foreknowledge that he even says at one point (p.244) that someone who draws the curtains to keep out the sun intends that they fade! However, intention, as we normally use the term, is about our actual goals – our choice of ends and means – rather than about states of the external world, however important these are in providing choiceworthy options. Rather than sometimes stretch the definition of intention to breaking point, it might be better simply to admit that intention should not be 'made to do all the work' when identifying what is absolutely morally excluded. For example, to condemn lethal organ harvesting, or pre-viability removal of an unborn child from its mother, it is not necessary to claim that the surgeon 'must' have intended the foreseen death for the unborn child or the organ donor – as a result of what he did intend for the object of his assault.

As I see it, Cummings, like many others who support morally restrictive conclusions on these issues, overstates the role of intention as required to reach such conclusions. That said, there are also welcome signs in the book that Cumming recognises that certain wrong intentions cannot be so readily imputed in some cases where the moral verdict is, however, clear. For example, as Cummings rightly notes (pp.134-5) you do not have to intend to give scandal to give it, and Cummings refers at one point (p.336) to "an exaggeration of the role of the intention of the acting subject in determining the moral value of the act".

### Much-needed distinctions

In his entirely reasonable desire to argue that certain cases of collaboration are justified material cooperation, Cummings can be unconvincing: for example, he presents as a mere omission to remove from his mailbag the delivery of morally offensive mail by a postman – which merely raises further questions about mail for that address consisting solely of offensive material, not to mention the blameless actions of colleagues in filling the mailbag in the first place. Again, though rightly showing some desire at least to exculpate the bank clerk who *in effect* helps the bank robbers steal, and certainly intentionally helps them *move* the money, Cummings

is on shaky ground given the general points he makes. The clerk's collaboration is necessary to the theft, something much stressed by Cummings, and is not something the clerk was 'doing anyway' or necessarily part of his duties (or recognised duties) as a bank clerk – two other factors stressed by Cummings.

Elsewhere, however, Cummings makes some much-needed distinctions – for example, correctly pointing out in a discussion of an example of Germain Grisez that a temporary contractor who wrongly cooperates in arranging escort services as required by another firm may not be intending that any such services actually take place once the contract has been signed (p.237). It would have been good here to focus more on the co-operator's illicit intending of the business partner's *plans to offer* such services to clients, as such plans are of course morally wrong at every stage. The business partner is intending at least that his clients be attracted to the business by the availability of such services, and the co-operator is intending at least the immediate pursuit on the business partner's part of that immoral intention, as a condition of the contract being signed.

Concentration on deliberately assisting wrongful plans can help us negotiate many complicity problems: for example, whether or not a morally conflicted nurse intends that a doctor *succeed* in performing an abortion, she may be wrongly intending that he *try* when she passes him an instrument, on his orders, that will help him do so. (Of course, it goes without saying that she should not be passing the instrument anyway, even without this formal intention, especially if no-one is training a gun on her, even if her job is on the line.)

## Heroism and self-sacrifice

While good at showing us problems, *The Servant and the Ladder* is perhaps less good at finding solutions; it remains, however, a valuable exploration of a very perplexing area of ethics. It is engagingly written, attractively produced (barring mysterious asterisks at some points where page numbers should be) and generally well worth exploring. There is much to inform and indeed inspire in the book, not least the spirit in which it is written. One can only admire the author's willingness to accept the sometimes radical demands of conscience: to acknowledge these demands is ever more important in a world where pressures on people of conscience multiply by the day. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists, soldiers and business people, are all too often asked to do what either they should never do (in the case of some choices) or only under unjust pressure (in the case of other choices).

Looking back to the last century, the author quotes the words of Franz Jägerstätter, martyred for his refusal to serve in the Nazi army, on its being too late to save the world, but never too late to save your own soul, and bring some other souls to Christ

as well. We may not all be called to be Jägerstätters and it can feel uncomfortable making moral judgements on such cases from the safety of our armchairs. We must distinguish between genuine duties, however demanding, on the one hand, and on the other, 'supererogation' i.e. 'going above and beyond the call of duty'. That said, as Cummings notes (p.386), in words that should resonate with all of us, "There are many degrees of heroism and self-sacrifice, and many if not most Christians are called to some degree of it."

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*Dr Helen Watt is Senior Research Fellow of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre; her books include The Ethics of Pregnancy, Abortion and Childbirth and the edited collection Cooperation, Complicity and Conscience.*

## Contemplating Where The Magi Bought Their Gifts

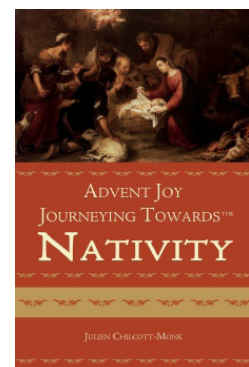
*Advent Joy - Journeying Towards the Nativity* by Julien Chilcott-Monk, Gracewing, 104pp, £6.99.

*Reviewed by Ella Preece*

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**A**dvent Joy - Journeying Towards the Nativity is a book designed to help the reader to contemplate the Stations of the Cross. It has 24 stations beginning on the 1st December rather than the first Sunday of Advent, which varies. The stations themselves cover salvation history from creation to the adoration of the Magi. They each begin with a quote from Scripture which sets the theme of the station, the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, a contemplation, a short prayer taken, for example, from the Divine Office or a sequence from the Mass, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

Each contemplation is only about a page long, allowing the length of each station to be very comfortable. The language used is easy-going which makes it suitable for use with young children. There are, however, a few points that should be noted. Each contemplation has been inserted into the middle of the Our Father, which is a bit clunky, to give an example... "Our Father who are in heaven, hallowed be thy name.



Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. When you told that group of questioners..."; and similarly at the end the contemplation concludes, for example, "Help me heavenly Father to do my part. Give us this day our daily bread...". Because the contemplation is a completely different writing style the sudden entry back into the formal prayer does break the flow of the meditation.

### Random things, not deeper mysteries

The writing style itself can be hard to follow at times as the author uses many double negatives, "Did not you..., was it not..., were they not...". The contemplations of the author can be a bit rambling at times and sometimes seem to focus on random things like what Mary thought of Joseph's home and workshop, and what the house was like, did the workshop look out onto a busy road, was Joseph well known for his carpentry skills etc. There is less focus on the deeper mysteries of God's actions and messages in relation to our lives, which might be of more interest to readers of this magazine.

There were also a few statements which made me personally feel a little uncomfortable. For example, "It is likely that Abraham did not apprehend you as the only one and only God but caught glimpses of you in a great morass of distractions [...] doubtless he believed that you shared the heavenly stage with strange and terrifying divinities." This is hard to believe when Abraham (the father of the monotheistic faiths) says "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth." Elsewhere we hear that shepherds lived apart from the rest of the community "almost leper like". Again, this comment fails to put forth any of the relevance and importance of the shepherd but places a somewhat negative label on them in the contemplation.

This only happens occasionally in the book but prevents the reader sharing in the deeper revelation and love of God that is occurring at that point in salvation history, especially in light of the New Testament, and raises the question that if the person in Scripture who is experiencing this unique relationship with God didn't really understand God, then how can we?

### Undermining the traditional reading

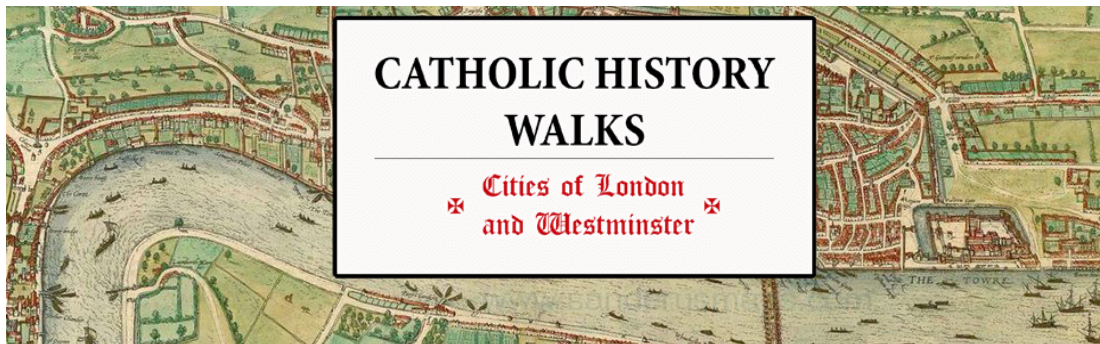
The book is designed to spend the Advent period focusing our thoughts on the mystery of the Incarnation, deepening our understanding through the revelations of salvation history, and our relationship with God. However, when reading it, on several of the days it seems that instead of "reading them in light of the Resurrection of our Lord" the author is undermining a traditional reading of Scripture. He takes faithful characters who humbly place their trust in God and portrays them in a negative light of ignorance and doubt, often with his personal opinions which tend to be mundane and superficial in nature.

There seems to be little to gain by speculating what Joseph thought about why he had to travel to Bethlehem for the census or if the Magi picked up their gifts in the market on the way over to the stable, in comparison to the great mystery of the Creator of the cosmos taking on human form in order to save us from the fires of Hell and restore us to how we were created to be, let alone “considering afresh the Holy Incarnation”. In short, it does not leave you feeling like you have done a mini-retreat.

To conclude I would say that the book is not terrible, but I am not sure it would appeal to the readers of this magazine. The idea and layout are great, but sadly the spiritual and meditative content leave something to be desired.

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*Ella Preece is a home-educating mother whose hobbies include archery, juggling and general adventuring.*



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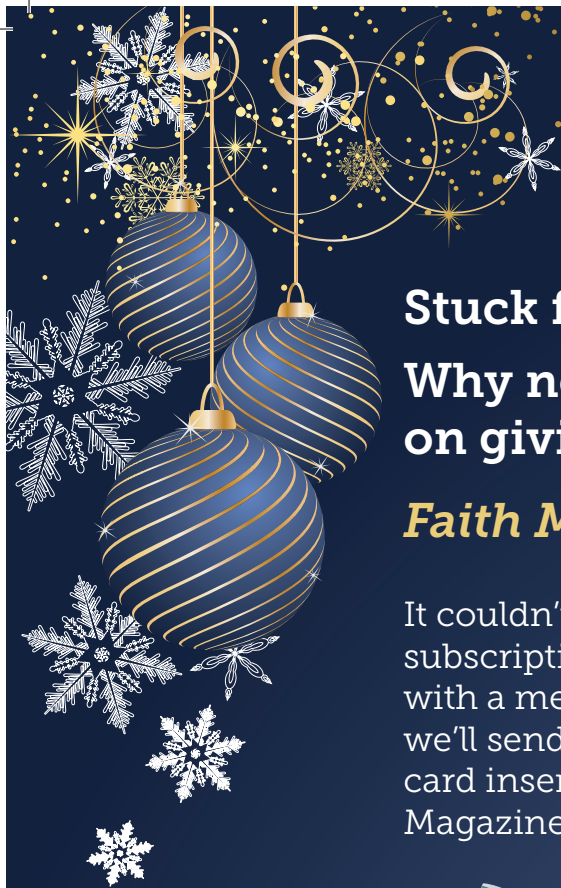
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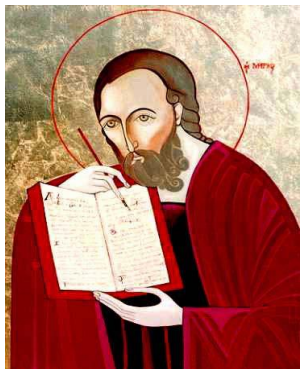
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