

faith

January and February 2014
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A priest of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg

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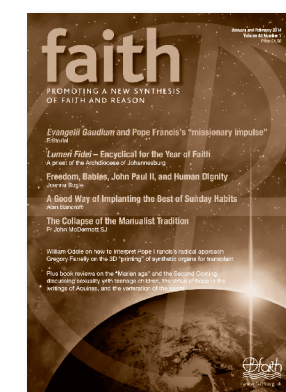
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Evangelii Gaudium and Pope Francis's “missionary impulse” *Editorial*

“What a joy it is for me to announce this message: Christ is risen! I would like it to go out to every house and every family, especially where the suffering is greatest, in hospitals, in prisons ...” (Urbi et Orbi message, Easter 2013)

It is characteristic of Pope Francis to want to reach out to the margins of society. And this great missionary zeal is evident in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*: “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world.”

In the same paragraph he quotes his predecessor John Paul II with effusive approval: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG 27). The question that faces us is how best to foster this missionary spirit, and of course the tactics to be adopted will vary according to the circumstances that obtain in our corner of the Lord’s vineyard.

Of course Pope Francis is right: the Church must be renewed in missionary zeal and she must reach out anew to the whole of humanity. However, in the United Kingdom at least the necessary prerequisite for this “missionary option” is a thoroughgoing renewal of catechesis. If we as Catholics are to go out and evangelise those on the fringes of our society, then we must first be well acquainted with and certain of the full content of our own faith.

For readers of this magazine and those involved in the Faith movement, this call for a renewal of catechesis is a familiar theme. It is undeniable that for the past 40 years many of our catechetical programmes simply have not borne fruit. And this being the case, it would be all too easy to carp and moan from the sidelines. However, that would be unworthy and unhelpful. We need to offer a positive alternative. We need to say what this catechesis would look like and what its content would be. It is part of the charism of the Faith movement to do just that.

At many times in the Church’s history – often because of external factors such as the influence of political circumstances or of the surrounding culture – particular issues have come into sharp relief. These issues are not the whole content of the Catholic faith but, to use a military analogy, they take on a strategic value. If we surrender on such an issue then it would be corrosive of the whole of

the Catholic faith. But if we can hold this issue and resolve it correctly, and with the necessary clarity, then it safeguards the whole content of the Catholic faith.

An example would be the debate over the term “consubstantial” in the Nicene creed. Every Sunday we profess our faith that Christ is “consubstantial with the Father”. The debate, which focused on this single word, convulsed the entire Church in the fourth century. It was not just an arcane point of Christology at stake. This one term had important ramifications for the whole content of our faith.

Similarly today, there are key strategic issues that we must get right to strengthen the whole edifice of our Catholic faith. Almost 40 years ago, in the September 1976 edition of this magazine, the then editor Fr Edward Holloway gave a checklist of the key issues: “the transcendence of God, the real spirituality of the soul, and the reconciliation of an evolutionary universe with one fixed nature of man, a true fall in that nature and a true leading on of human salvation by God, which climaxes in His literally divine and transcendent self”.

Get these issues right and not only will we have defended the whole content of the Catholic faith, but the way in which these issues dovetail and cohere will result in a compelling apologetic for the Catholic faith. Conversely, any catechesis that ignores or fudges these issues is building on shaky foundations.

A missionary impulse, no matter how generous or noble-hearted it may be, will not be able to sustain itself in the long term if it is not based in sound doctrine. In the end it will amount to little more than a passing enthusiasm. If, however, we get these key issues right then we will be able to discern the full contours of the figure of Christ. We will find in him our saviour and a sure, unambiguous foundation upon which we can build our lives. The joy of knowing Christ will be infectious, and by our lives we will communicate this spontaneously and naturally to those around us.

Only in this way will Pope Francis’s dream of a “missionary option” find its lasting fulfilment. ☪

Lumen Fidei: Encyclical for the Year of Faith *By a priest of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg*

This extended article, originally given as a conference to the members of the spiritual family of The Work, explores the major themes of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Lumen Fidei*.

Preliminary Observations

Certain aspects concerning *Lumen Fidei* assert themselves even before one consults the text of the encyclical itself. First, the timing. It seems apparent that *Lumen Fidei* is intended as the guiding magisterial document for the “Year of Faith”, a celebration which outlasted the reign of the pope who convoked it in commemoration of the opening session of the Second Ecumenical Council in the Vatican 50 years before. This in turn raises the question of authorship: Benedict or Francis (or both)? To the believer, this is only of incidental importance. As with sacred Scripture, so with the exercise of the Petrine ministry: the truth or otherwise of a teaching is based on the authority invested in it – in both cases, by God himself, guaranteed by his Holy Spirit – rather than on the identity, oftentimes unknown, of this or that composer (or composers) of a particular text.

Having said that, anyone familiar with the style and substance of Joseph Ratzinger’s scholarship will readily recognise in *Lumen Fidei* what is freely admitted, in fact, by the one who signs the encyclical simply “Francis”; namely, that Benedict XVI left a substantially completed encyclical unpublished at the time of his abdication. As an aside, the publication of *Lumen Fidei* speaks volumes for the humility of both pontiffs: that one should risk much by vacating office before its publication while the other considered he risked nothing by publishing it tellingly soon after his own accession to office.

It seems reasonable, then, also to consider *Lumen Fidei* as the final instalment in Benedict’s trilogy on the theological virtues – his encyclical on faith, whereas *Deus Caritas Est* and *Spe Salvi* had treated love and hope, respectively. One might surmise that by commencing his pontificate with the publication of *Deus Caritas Est* Benedict concurs with the Apostle Paul that “the greatest of these is love”; or again, that he wished to leave the best till last (*Lumen Fidei* as a sort of last will and testament). Having had an evident hand in the drafting of *Fides et Ratio* (Blessed John Paul’s encyclical on faith), however, Ratzinger hardly needed to await the final hour of his pontificate to issue his own encyclical on this theme. The peculiar significance of its timing, therefore, attracts legitimate curiosity.

All speculation aside, the dramatic circumstances surrounding its publication scarcely permit one to evade a third noteworthy consideration confronting the reader prior to engaging the text itself, namely the context. As one of the Second Vatican Council’s more enthusiastic experts – as well as one of its first critical interlocutors during the years of its sometimes questionable presentation in the popular imagination – Ratzinger can scarcely be accused of having a less than astute sense of the context within which the Church has to evangelise. Considering the vast array of geopolitical issues with which a Supreme Pontiff is burdened in his solicitude for

the whole of the universal Church, that Benedict should choose to close his pontificate (or Francis to open his own) with an encyclical on the theological virtue of faith indicates a very pointed discernment of the signs of the times made by the papacy in our age; namely, that what is most lacking in the century in which we live – what is most crucial to today’s society and what this era of history most requires, therefore, from the Church – appears to be faith.

The Structure of the Encyclical

Delving into the text of the encyclical itself one finds that it addresses, appropriately, the utter incomprehension the dominant culture manifests towards something quite taken for granted in generations past: the very notion of faith. In 60 paragraphs arranged across four succinct chapters, the Pope treats what he evidently considers the fundamental question of our times: how the believer can render an account for faith in a world that considers it little more than mere sentiment, and which rejects out of hand the very notion of universals. As the encyclical well notes, rejection of absolutes excludes philosophically the possibility of God – risking a nihilistic society in a state of wholesale amnesia in which nothing is regarded as prior to self; nothing transcends us: nothing, therefore, can ultimately unite the multitude in the face of the tyrannous caprice of the petty individual whim.

Moreover, the prevailing notion of truth disregards the truism that love never coerces – which is why the encyclical reiterates St Paul’s admonition that believing be done by the heart. Truth needs love, since only love moves the individual outside of self in a relational quest for union with the beloved. Even non-believers (such as Ludwig Wittgenstein) grasp the notion of belief being akin to falling in love – save where love itself has been degraded to the purely subjective; and *Lumen Fidei* begins well by insisting that only faith unites all human dimensions – the intellect, affectivity and the will: opening the heart to the love that needs truth because only “true” love can transcend what is fleeting and establish what is lasting. In consequence, reason and the sciences benefit immensely from the attitude of faith, since it opens them up continually to the full complexity of reality, preventing research from becoming satisfied that it has grasped the fullness of it all.

Fundamental theology does not shy away from the empirical. “What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands,” begins the First Letter of St John: “this we declare to you.” *Lumen Fidei* makes immediate appeal to the senses in exploration of the act of faith. Fundamentally, this is so because the principle of the Incarnation has made it possible to touch the Lord with hearts that believe (St Augustine). The first sense treated by the encyclical is sight. “Seeing is believing” is the chorus of doubting Thomases everywhere; even the Gospel remarks of Mary Magdalen in the garden of the resurrection that she “saw and believed”.

Starting with its very title (The Light of Faith), this encyclical contemplates the cry of the man born blind (“Lord, that I may see!”) as emblematic of humanity’s universal longing no longer to dwell in darkness. “Let there be light” is the first utterance of God’s creating Word issuing forth at the dawn of creation. Early Christian iconography depicts this primordial victory as a stand-off between the cockerel (dawn’s herald) and the turtle (the Latin for which suggests what is dark and hidden). *Lumen Fidei* likens faith-that-sees to the experience by which one’s eyes become accustomed to gazing into the darkness (as wonderful a definition of prayer as can be imagined). By their innate desire for light in the darkness many unbelievers act as if God exists, perceiving life’s grandeur and its beauty. Even the pagans saw in the dawn of each day the portent of victory in a cosmic battle in which each of us is invested. Yet, as the early Church Father St Justin points out, not even the fervent devotees, or worshippers, of *Sol invictus* (“unconquered sun”) were prepared to lay down their lives for the sun – unlike the decisive witness of martyrdom of Christians.

“The Incarnation has made it possible to touch the Lord with hearts that believe”

The blind faith of sentimentalism and the purely personal faith of those prepared unreasonably to leap into the dark, on the other hand, utterly fail to convince unbelievers – who ask whether these be not illusory lights, rather, that shine without illuminating (in Aquinas’s expression). Such lights, after all, tend only to blind the believer – and have brought them no closer to the transformed vision promised. Faced with weak witness, unbelieving minds even invert the association; thus, the Age of Faith is renamed the Dark Ages, while its casting off is styled the Enlightenment. *Lumen Fidei* does not deny the “leap” of faith; on the contrary it insists on it – only with equal insistence it refutes that it be reckless or unreasonable because made in self-referential darkness.

The encyclical also insists much on the “hinge” of the Incarnation of God’s Word in Jesus, which alone makes it possible that one might journey where another has gone before. In this regard, is it unbelievers who show themselves fundamentally unreasonable when, while trusting lawyers to represent them in court or architects to construct their buildings or pharmacists to prescribe their medicines, they cannot also acknowledge another (the Word) as trustworthy where God is concerned. If unbelievers have failed to see, however, it is believers who have failed to show them. The Pope makes urgent appeal in this encyclical to all who profess faith to allow that faith’s guiding light to transform them wholly, so that they may receive the eyes of faith which establish in the believer a new way of seeing the journey which lies ahead.

Chapter 1

The encyclical would have us consider first the journey already charted by the faith of Abraham and Moses: how the believer has been called out of prehistoric notions of a god of

this or that place or season into the truly personal response (“I”-“Thou”) to a Word whose divine utterance both precedes us and calls us forth to journey towards a horizon which the Word himself illuminates and for which the Word himself acts as guarantor. Even the remembrance of this journey’s great milestones has the power of illuminating the present, as is vividly demonstrated by Gothic catechetical windows through whose Old Testament scenes light streams into the cavernous interior of cathedrals, infusing them with brilliant light.

Thus, faith sees to the extent that it journeys, and is guided throughout by a Word that liberates. In this regard, *Lumen Fidei* will offer the Magi as emblematic of *homo religiosus*, the wayfarer: they that seek God find the path towards him illuminated also by him. Fuelled by the desire to see his face, our fathers in the faith became progressively purified of the perennial threats to faith of heresy and idolatry. Rather than regarding his son as the *sine qua non* of the promise that he will become the father of a multitude of believers, Abraham must place his faith in God’s Word alone as guarantor of its promises. Citing the pithy expression Martin Buber attributes to the Rabbi of Kock, idolatry occurs when a face addresses a face that is not a face. Authentic faith requires, therefore, that humanity relinquish excessive confidence in the work of its hands – including technology and possessions. Faith’s negation ultimately results not in atheism but in polytheism, since the continuum of life’s journey breaks down, then, into a plethora of diversions through which the idolatry of desire leads necessarily into a labyrinth from which there is no true liberation.

The Mosaic experience demonstrates, further, that a mediator is no obstacle to faith but serves rather to facilitate the knowledge proper to love: shared knowledge – in which Abraham’s “I believe” becomes the resolute “we believe” of the multitude of his descendants. Finally, the witness of the Patriarchs deepens appreciation for a faith secured in the reliability of the future fulfilment of God’s promises – in the expected arrival of a Messiah who must become, in time, the guarantor of the Word into which they entrusted their destinies.

We can entrust our very selves, however, only to a Word that will certainly uphold us; one who is revealed to be the wellspring of our being – and certainly not a mere product of chance or in any way alien to our being. Despite what the prince in Dostoevsky’s *Idiot* says about the crucified Christ constituting a sight that could cause one to lose faith, it is precisely upon the Pierced One that the believer must gaze – for in contemplating the length and breadth and depth of a God whose love recoils not from his enemies (nor even from death), even the least faithful believer is offered the greatest proof of the reliability of the Word into which they entrusted their destiny. The fact that this really happened in history not only means that it can be encountered – but that it must be reckoned with. Were it otherwise, asks the encyclical, what difference would it make whether one believed the tale or not?

It is in grappling with the incarnate Word of God that believers undertake the quantum leap which constitutes the very heart of their act of faith: convinced by Christ, the believer no longer “believes” Jesus (nor even “in” Jesus) – Jesus, himself, becomes our faith. His way of seeing things becomes our own – possible only because he first made our way his own, seeking the Father in time and space. Not for nothing did the first Christians call their faith “the Way”. The leap of faith is a “quantum” leap, however, precisely because in taking it the believer is remade, enabled in the one through whom (uniquely, for he is the only Son) he or she becomes adopted into the paternity of God. The believer, thus refashioned, becomes conformed to this Word in whose indwelling presence he or she grows in knowledge; and begins to see as he sees, to hear as he hears, to share his mind and to partake of his own filial disposition to the Father. Any focus on one’s own efforts here is entirely misplaced, for it fails to situate this “leap” purely in Christ (quite outside the potential of the self) – which is why the Church never hesitated to confer infant baptism. None of our individuality is lost when we commence our life in Christ, since grace builds on nature. Rather, we find ourselves expanded by the gaze of the other within, in whose reflection (as in a mirror) we see all others also with the same eyes in whose loving gaze the many are being drawn into the one: the mystical body of Christ that is the Church. With Romano Guardini’s memorable description of the Church as “the bearer within history of the plenary gaze of Christ on the world”, the chapter concludes with the assertion that faith is necessarily ecclesial.

Chapter 2

Lumen Fidei proceeds to examine the crisis of truth in which our relativist age founders. Wounded as it has been by the absolutist claims of 20th-century totalitarianism, contemporary consensus demotes truth – on the one hand to something purely subjective (signifying fidelity solely to one’s own sentiments and often offending against the principle of non-contradiction), on the other to the merely convenient (namely, to “what works”). The act of faith might be a leap, but the encyclical insists it must be a reasonable one if it is also to be credible. The one we take at his word must be equal of it (he must serve as its guarantor). A necessary philosophical nexus exists between truth and faith, which is a truth on which one may rely in order to stand fast. No king would stake the security of his kingdom on lofty sentiments or cheery consolations alone: the Prophet Isaiah, therefore, must persuade King Ahab that the word in which he would place his trust is one which will establish him.

Having explored belief as sight, the encyclical now turns to explore “*fides ex auditu*” (faith through hearing). Faith is the relationship of a word spoken to each soul – requiring from it a response which the Apostle Paul calls the “obedience of faith”. This must include recognition of the speaker and also the acknowledgement that his reward to those who seek him is to allow himself to be found (as good a definition of prayer as can be conceived). Professors of theology admonish their students that theirs is a science best studied on their knees: requiring of

“What is most crucial to today’s society – and what this era of history most requires, therefore, from the Church – appears to be faith”

them the humility that allows them to be imprinted by the Word they regard and readily acknowledges that we do not possess the truth but rather it is the truth that possesses us. God’s Word is not an object, but a subject who makes himself known through relationship. This is not to say, however, that belief can be purely personal, either: the Word heard is not one’s own. Faith is not done alone, nor does anyone baptise himself. *Lumen Fidei* affirms that theology is impossible without faith and concludes its second chapter with the affirmation of the specifically ecclesial dimension of the faith.

Chapter 3

In its third chapter, *Lumen Fidei* locates this dimension in the dynamic of confession: the appropriate response to the Word received. Faith’s transmission through confession is likened to the conflagration of Easter light from the paschal candle to the torches of all gathered in the church’s nave such that faith reflects from the face of one believer to another (in the Pauline expression). Mother Julia Verhaeghe exhorted her spiritual sons and daughters in *Familia Spiritualis Opus*: “Our faith must be so radiant, that the people are attracted by it.”

That which the Church transmits is no mere series of formulaic expressions of the faith faithfully repeated over and again through the centuries, but rather the transmission of a Word who is “alive and active” and cuts to the quick of our existence, touching our workaday concerns, discerning deeply all our dimensions. The encyclical refers, in this regard, to the sacraments, *par excellence*, as those incarnate faith-encounters most intimately acquainted with the milestone moments in the faith journey through time and space of each believer. Our incarnate faith is no esoteric one, no stranger to our actual condition: belief is also an empirical experience that disdains not even sensory experiences. Each sacrament is, accordingly, possessed not only of form but also of matter (oil, water, bread, wine, etc).

Baptism is the first and essential of these: by it, the believer is made a new creation. With it he or she receives a deposit of faith – requiring from them a confession which comprises specific elements. The classic elaboration of these (in catechesis) rests on four pillars: the profession of faith (the Creed), the celebration of faith (the sacraments), the living of faith’s consequences (the moral law, particularly the Decalogue), and the spirituality of faith (in particular, the seven filial petitions of the Lord’s Prayer).

Characteristic of Ratzinger’s thought is that the communion of believing must include not solely all those now making up the pilgrim Church on earth (synchronic communion) but all those who have come before us marked with the sign of faith (diachronic communion). Each of us comes from someone, and in turn, belongs to others: the Church also possesses, therefore, a maternal memory animated by the Holy Spirit, whose love will remind us of all that Jesus said and did. This same Spirit renders each of us a contemporary, as it were, of this Jesus – astonishing as it is to comprehend – in a faith

encounter in which God's Spirit effects living contact for each believer with the foundational experience of belief: the encounter with the Lord.

“Convinced by Christ, the believer no longer ‘believes’ Jesus ... Jesus, himself, becomes our faith”

Our faith, then – while deeply personal – is not merely personal: it is a person, the unique Word of the Father of all creation. An obvious consequence of monotheism is this: if faith is not one it is not faith. Accordingly, faith's veracity becomes externally verifiable in the consistency (synchronically as well as diachronically) of its profession of this deposit. This is a consistency guaranteed by the Lord himself: both in the unity of his Person and in the unity of his gift of inerrancy to the Church through the apostolic succession. Her faith must certainly be inerrant if it is to be that word that you can rely on. Being essentially a seamless garment, faith's confession must needs be whole and entire: the articles of the faith are intimately interconnected and cannot be individually accepted or rejected on the rupturing principle of the caprice of whim, the consequences of which are the wounds of heresy. This explains the apostles' insistence that the Church guard the deposit in its entirety. There is no incompatibility here with individual freedom since it is into freedom that the Word leads us through love's empowering ability to expand each believer's capacity to see things through the eyes of another.

Chapter 4

Whereas the faith journey fixes its eyes firmly on the celestial horizon, it does not remain indifferent to the urgency of fashioning here and now, even, a dwelling in which all God's creatures might encounter his justice and peace. This is verified throughout faith's journey from Noah's ark to Abraham's tent of meeting, to Solomon's temple. Since faith – to be true – must be good for everybody, the encyclical turns in this chapter to the manner in which the believer translates the interior experience of faith into a tangible expression befitting the common good. The light of faith cannot illuminate only the interior of the Church, after all: unless society itself is founded on the same reliability of mutual respect, it will remain a cohabitation based solely on mutual convenience or mutual fear.

Since it is, in fact, the basic unit of communion best reflecting the dynamic of faith itself, the family has been privileged from the beginning of salvation history as the cornerstone of all human society: a stable sign, born of love, acknowledging the complementarity of human differentiation, in which the spouses' promises of mutual reliability in the engagement of the whole of their lives beget fruitfulness and endurance for the good of all. Only persons capable of acknowledging something greater than their own projects can undertake a task of such courageous faith. For this reason, the family also constitutes the best school of faith, where future generations learn to place

their trust in the word of those who have generated their being. The experience of recent World Youth Days abundantly demonstrates the hunger today's youth manifests for expanding the horizons of the faith family and the concrete experiences of the faith.

Societies which devalue faith find themselves inevitably destabilised, their principle of bonding reduced to fear or convenience alone. Utopian substitutes for fraternity, such as communism – fatally flawed as they are by the obvious absence of a common Father – are destined to fail. This experience has amply demonstrated how humanity, without faith, possesses no criterion for its own unique worth. This, in turn, leads invariably to one of two extremes: the renouncement of all responsibility; or the assumption of total control in the manipulation even of truth, in a vainglorious and idolatrous projection of self on to the very canvas of creation. Contemporary models of development become, thus, based purely on profit or mere utility. Faith's love for the Creator, on the other hand, engenders respect and reverence for the work of his hands, and protects creation with forms of government cognisant that all authority stems from God and is at the service of the common good.

As the enduring mystery of iniquity attests, even though faith is a lamp illuminating our journey, it does not extinguish the darkness altogether. Since suffering cannot be eliminated entirely, it must be given meaning in the experience of the God who does not abandon us to nothingness. This is not to say that faith is a crutch; on the contrary, it is the courage of believers like Blessed Teresa of Calcutta which impels them to reach up out of the self into the condition of others, sharing with them in their existential angst the meaning that only faith can give; namely, that even in the face of suffering and death, life is worth living. It is precisely when greatly afflicted by suffering and weakness that faith readies one to experience God's power to triumph.

Faith expands the capacity of the believer to embrace the concerns of all along life's journey towards a horizon quite different from the illusive enticements the idols of this world appear to offer. Forgiveness, too, is only possible with a faith that affirms goodness to be prior to (and more powerful than) its denial. The word that sustains our life proves stronger, again and again, than every denial of it. In closing this chapter, the Pope admonishes believers to minister Christ to a suffering world desperately longing for the consoling presence of the God who is with us. This is precisely the service of faith: extending the hope which, grounded in the resurrection of one of us from the dead, does not disappoint.

The closing lines of *Lumen Fidei* are aptly dedicated to “[her] who believed” and who so treasured in her heart all that she had seen and heard of God that she veritably conceived the Word. Mary is presented as the icon of faith. Her disposition is alike to the good soil of the parable which receives the seed of faith and bears fruit with patient endurance all the way to the

cross, and beyond. From the foot of the cross her maternity is extended to all believers, who gather around her in Pentecost's upper room, which stands at the wellspring of the Church. In closing the Year of Faith, Francis and Benedict reunited in the presence of the statue of the Blessed Virgin of Fatima to dedicate to her immaculate heart the entire world.

Concluding Remarks

Although in issuing *Lumen Fidei* as the first encyclical of his papacy, Pope Francis might not have offered the world a programmatic outline of his pontificate, shortly afterwards he gave a clear hermeneutical key for interpreting *Lumen Fidei* also as a “Franciscan” encyclical – in a letter to the editor of an Italian newspaper whose editorial had questioned the relevance of the encyclical (as well as the notion of faith itself).

Pope Francis writes that *Lumen Fidei* serves not solely to confirm the faith of those who already believe but to dialogue with those who do not believe. This dialogue is indispensable for the believer, not because he or she is presumptuous, but because the security of the faith alone makes it possible for the Church to speak to everyone (the meaning of the word “catholic”). Our new Pope discloses that faith arises from a personal encounter with God's Word that infuses a person's existence with new meaning – but that this encounter is possible only within the faith community, in which are rendered accessible the sacred Scriptures, sacramental grace, fraternity and service to the Lord in others. Thus, Francis reaffirms that it is not possible to encounter Christ outside the Church.

Passing on what Jesus's words and deeds mean to the Church renders irrelevant contemporary endeavours to excavate a “historical Jesus” in some archaeological space outside of the Church, divorced from the contributions of the Pauline epistles or the Johannine corpus. Reckoning with Jesus, even in the concreteness of the most ancient Gospel account (Mark's) reveals that the scandal he provoked stemmed precisely from the authority with which he claimed to speak – his relationship of equality with God. This authority runs no competition with the world, nor does it signify a usurpation of human freedom, for its goal is service of life and freedom. Jesus demonstrated this to the point of laying down his life in the experience of being misunderstood, betrayed, rejected, condemned, and abandoned on the cross.

That God has come into our flesh to share our joy and pain makes of the Incarnation the cardinal pivot of our faith. Only the Incarnation permits each of us to participate in the unique relationship God has with his Word – the distinguishing feature of Christianity among transcendental religions. As the centurion discovers in the love that proves stronger than death, in the forgiveness stronger than sin, in the life that is worthwhile to the end, it is Christ's fidelity which reveals him to be God's Word among us. This is the faith of the Church, which is not for exclusion but for communication – so that all who are called to be children of the one Father are brought to the way of his love, which alone renders us brothers and sisters to one another.

“It is Christ's fidelity which reveals him to be God's Word among us”

Returning in conclusion, then, to the observations made in the introduction, it seems most pertinent that it is to virtue that Christ's Vicar would have us harness our hopes for the sake of a world increasingly awash with vice. The Latin word for virtue (*virtus*), in which the meaning of man (*vir*) finds its root, conveys the idea of virtue as strength. Beyond the brute sort of strength of which a caricature of a man (like a gladiator) is capable, however, there is the kind of strength one perceives in a father, in a soldier, in a king – that inner, virtuous strength of a man for which one might consider him a gentleman. It is not to say he is gentle, precisely, for that is only the appearance of it; rather, it is to say that he is dependable – in short, a man of his word.

Philosophically speaking, the virtuous life is regarded as the life worth living (the life lived well, or rightly); and so it seems fitting to conclude this summary of *Lumen Fidei* on the note struck at the outset; namely, that in this encyclical one finds the sort of word on which one can rely – a word one might expect, in fact, from a conscientious father such as we have had in both popes with which the Lord has graced our times. ☪

“At a time when some scientists are reviving the old idea that science and faith are incompatible – and some Christians seem to be playing into their hands – this programme is a sign of hope and new possibilities. We need to bring these vital areas of life into a creative and constructive dialogue, and here we have resources to do just that. I commend this whole programme with enthusiasm.”
Bishop Tom Wright, DD, Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity, University of St Andrews

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Freedom, Babies, John Paul II and Human Dignity

By Joanna Bogle

“The dignity and value of the human person ... is echoed both in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council ... and in subsequent teachings of the Magisterium”

Joanna Bogle is author of several historical biographies. Her latest is *Courage and Conviction* about Brigettine nuns who hid Jewish refugees in Rome during the Second World War. She is active in the Association of Catholic Women, is chairman of an ecumenical Christian group running the nationwide Schools Bible Project, and was appointed a Dame of St Gregory by Pope Benedict XVI. In this fascinating article she explores the Church’s teaching in relation to new developments in reproductive technology.

“You created my inmost self; knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139)

The advertisement on the Tube showed an enchanting baby, glowing with health, tugging on his sun-hat, wide blue eyes bright with hope. And the words alongside invited us to buy such a baby for ourselves: donor sperm was on offer, just contact this website. Nothing shady, nothing backstreet about this: I’m sitting on the Jubilee Line, staring at it, all jostling with advertisements for holidays, or meeting your true love, or getting the best insurance deal. All offering whatever you think you want or need.

Medicine has always raised ethical issues. The Church has remained consistent in her defence of human life – from the very earliest days of Christianity two millennia ago when abortion, contraception and infanticide were condemned in the *Didache*.¹

Buying someone’s sperm with which to inseminate yourself is not a new thing: advertising it on the London Underground probably is – but there’ll probably be more, and worse, things fairly soon.

We got legalised abortion and widespread contraception in the 1960s and ’70s. By the 1980s and ’90s, it had become possible to fertilise a woman’s ovum in a test tube, using sperm from any man, and thus to have human embryos which were not created in a maternal womb, and were not the result of sexual communion. These embryos could also be created in larger numbers than would have been the norm had conception taken place in the usual way. And of course they could be the result of the union of material from two people who were not married and who did not even know each other’s names. The embryos could be stored or destroyed, they could be used for experiments, they could be bought and sold, they could be put on display, they could – at least in theory if not yet in practical possibility – be inserted into any woman’s womb, with or without her full knowledge or consent. The moral issues raised by all of this were grave, and the risks to the common good of the human community enormous.

Donum Vitae* and *Dignitas Personae

The Church speaks on this, both with the authoritative voice of Peter, and with the work and worth of Catholics uniting with all men and women of goodwill who seek to defend human values. But it is uphill work.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the Instruction *Donum Vitae* (DV) in 1987 and this was followed by *Dignitas Personae* (DP) in 2008. Essentially, the second of these adds detail, force, and further analysis and instruction to the first. The two documents flow together and create a united message. The first was issued under Pope John Paul and was signed by Joseph Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation, and the second was issued when Joseph Ratzinger had become Pope and was signed by William Levada as Prefect.

The more detailed and analytical approach of *DP* reflects the further developments in medical technology which had taken place since the publication of *DV* in 1987.

John Paul II: “A World of Values”

DV opens with an overview of developments in the technology which now make it possible “to intervene not only in order to assist but also to dominate the processes of procreation” (*DV* 1). It emphasises that science and technology must be “at the service of the human person” (*DV* 2) and the language is quite strong: “Science without conscience can only lead to man’s ruin” (*DV* 2); and “No biologist or doctor can reasonably claim, by virtue of his scientific competence, to be able to decide on people’s rights and destiny” (*DV* 3).

The document devotes its first main section to the importance of respect for human embryos, and makes it clear that any deliberate destruction of an embryo is abortion, firmly condemned by the Church in the *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, which it quotes.² It then tackles, in detail, the question of prenatal diagnosis, therapeutic procedures, experimentation, in-vitro fertilisation, and other issues.

The message is clear and is spelled out: the human embryo must be treated as having full human rights. Thus prenatal diagnosis is never acceptable if the intention is to abort the pregnancy; therapeutic procedures are acceptable only if there is a direct benefit to the embryo, such as the healing of an illness stemming from a chromosomal defect; and all experimentation is wrong that is not directly related to the good of the particular embryo and carried out with the parents’ knowledge and consent.

DV affirms categorically that “the human being must be respected – as a person – from the very first instant of his existence” (*DV* I.1). It goes on to analyse this, discussing the whole question of a “personal presence” and asking : “how could a human individual not be a human person?” It states:

The Magisterium has not expressly committed itself to an affirmation of a philosophical nature, but it constantly reaffirms the moral condemnation of any kind of procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and is unchangeable. (DV I.1)

The clear message here – especially as it denounces in detail the various possible ways in which an embryo’s dignity as a human being could be violated – is that not only the death of an embryo, but also any tampering with the well-being of this individual that might harm his integrity or well-being, is condemned. Even after death, there must be respect and the corpse may not be subject to autopsy without the consent of the parents, nor must any commercial trafficking be allowed.

DV goes on to insist that civil legislation must give legal protection to human embryos: “The inalienable rights of the person must be recognised and respected by civil society and the political authority,” and these include “every human being’s right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until natural death”.

We can see here an emphasis on the dignity and value of the human person that was at the heart of Pope John Paul’s philosophical studies and is echoed both in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council – to which he made noted contributions as a bishop – and in subsequent teachings of the Magisterium. Inevitably, opponents of the Church’s message sought, after the publication of *DV*, to attempt to denigrate it, by seizing on the question of whether or not an embryo is a full human person in every sense of that term. This would in due course be further addressed in *DP*; but in any ordinary reading of *DV* it is clear already.

John Paul’s biographer notes that “in insisting that the state not declare entire classes of human beings outside the protection of laws, the Church was appealing to moral truths that could be known by any thinking person willing to work through an argument – moral truths that were part of the cultural foundations of democracy.”³ John Paul himself put it bluntly when speaking to young people at Denver, Colorado, in 1993: “The slaughter of the innocents is no less sinful or devastating simply because it is done in a legal and scientific way. In the modern metropolis, life – God’s first gift and the fundamental right of every individual on which all other rights are based – is often treated as just one more commodity to be organised, commercialised, and manipulated according to convenience.”⁴

A colleague of Karol Wojtyła who worked with him in the 1940s and ’50s recalls him studying the philosophy of Max Scheler on the centrality of the value of the human person. The young Fr Wojtyła found it hard going at first, and decided to translate the whole book into Polish from German, to get closer to the subject and tackle it with the depth required. “It opens up a new world, a world of values, and a fresh view of mankind,” he told his friend.⁵

A New Century

As a new century opened, the Church could rely on the clear teachings about human life established in the encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), both of which emphasised the centrality of respecting human life. The increasing use of in-vitro-fertilisation techniques, and the emergence of new possibilities involving human cloning, mixing of human and animal genetic elements, and the use of embryonic stem cells for research, among other things, brought the need for further teaching.

The essential message of *DP* is the same as that of *DV*. In some parts, the words used are stronger: “gravely immoral” (30) “morally and ethically unacceptable” (33) “co-operation in evil” (34) “gravely unjust legal situation” (35), “grave moral disorder” (55).

DP emphasises the fundamental human rights of the human embryo: “If *Donum Vitae*, in order to avoid a statement of an explicitly philosophical nature, did not define the embryo as a person, it nonetheless did indicate that there is an intrinsic connection between the ontological dimension and the specific value of every human life” (*DP* 5). One detects here a slight tone of irritation with those who sought to find a tiny “escape clause” in *DV* through which destruction of embryos or their use in experiments might be permitted. *DP* asserts that no such escape hatch exists – note the “if” in the sentence above – and in any case seals and padlocks the door which *DV* has already effectively closed: “Indeed, the reality of the human being for the entire span of life, both before and after birth, does not allow us to posit either a change in nature or a gradation in moral value, since it possesses *full anthropological and ethical status* [original italics]. The human embryo has, therefore, from the very beginning, the dignity proper to a person” (*DP* 5).

Are Human Beings “Things”, or are They People?

As Fr George Woodall notes, this is essentially about whether human beings can be treated as things, or whether they must be treated as people, with a spiritual value:

This has major implications over the whole area of morality, since someone’s body shares in the dignity of his or her person, and is not a sub-personal reality or “thing” at the disposal of the person.... Put more simply, the body is part of who the person is, not some-thing which the person has. This way of understanding the human person, which stems from the unique dignity of the person created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27) and called to eternal redemption in Christ, is rooted in revelation, but it can be appreciated or grasped as true even by those who do not share our faith, on the basis of natural moral law.⁶

The rejection of the idea that a human being is a “thing” also extends to the idea that anyone has a “right” to have a child: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes emphatically: “A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift...a child may not be considered a piece of property” (CCC 2378).

Freedom, Babies, John Paul II, and Human Dignity continued

DP spells out what is absolutely wrong with regard to experiments on embryos, and it tackles at length the question of how those involved in medicine and scientific research should act. Either direct or indirect involvement with the killing of unborn life is gravely wrong: enabling others to do the killing is not an acceptable way of dealing with this. Foetal material obtained illicitly – ie from unborn life deliberately destroyed – cannot licitly be used for research. People have a duty to refuse to use such material: it may be necessary “to remove oneself, within the area of one’s own research, from a gravely unjust legal situation and to affirm with clarity the value of human life” (*DP* 35).

“A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift . . . a child may not be considered a piece of property”

This is an issue which conscientious Christian healthcare workers in many related fields now face. Germain Grisez notes: “Some fields of activity are closed to them, and others will be. They are being pressurised to help manufacture babies, prevent them, and kill them Some committed people will not be able to keep their jobs, maintain their practices, continue to operate their facilities unless they betray their commitment by doing wicked things.” It will be necessary to stand firm and hold to what is right: arranging for a third party to do something wicked, while still intending that it should be done, is not acceptable either.⁷

In *DP*, as in *DV*, the central issue is that human beings have an intrinsic value which gives them a status beyond and above everything else in the created order. Human rights are centred on this reality. It is a reality which has a spiritual root, but which can be grasped by all men of goodwill, whether religious believers or not.

Christopher West writes: “. . .our incarnate humanity as male and female reveals the divine mystery more than anything else in the created order. For we are made ‘male and female’ in the divine image. Indeed, to say ‘theology of the body’ is just another way of saying we’re ‘made in the image of God.’”⁸

New Challenges

DP examines the plight of embryos frozen in a state of cryopreservation: most are orphans whose parents have abandoned them, and in many cases the records of their parentage have been lost. In what must surely be a first for a Church document discussing grave moral issues, *DP* states that the unjust situation of these embryos “cannot be resolved”. It is not ethical to place them in the wombs of women who are not their mothers,⁹ and it is not ethical to destroy them. There are, according to *DP*, “thousands and upon thousands” of them. The Church pleads that the production of embryos be halted, especially as there is “no morally licit solution”¹⁰ regarding their destiny.

Another major issue involves the use of vaccines which may have their origins in material produced from embryos. The position of parents who use such vaccines is not the same as that of the manufacturers: there are differing areas of responsibility. But “everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask the healthcare system to make other types of vaccines available” (*DP* 35).

The future may hold hope for good things, if the right courses of action are pursued. Stem cells can be obtained licitly, without loss of human life – for example, from an adult organism or from the blood of the umbilical cord at the time of birth. Both *DV* and *DP* are confident that good things can be achieved in medical research if immoral practices are abandoned. Prohibitions on slavery, and on the unjust discrimination or marginalisation of women are “a sign of genuine progress in human history” (*DP* 36). Prohibitions can certainly contribute to human progress and the common good.

Human Rights and Human Dignity

Pope John Paul once mused that his pontificate was unlikely to be remembered, but that if it was he hoped to be remembered as “the pope of the family”.¹¹

In addition to grappling with the status of the human embryos, both *DV* and *DP* deal at length with questions relating to aspects of in-vitro fertilisation and the integrity of marriage. It is a measure of how far things have moved since the 1980s that in *DV*, published in that decade, it was not necessary to spell out, after the word “marriage”, the fact that by this word is meant the union of a man and a woman, and not two people of the same sex. Similarly, the status of the human embryo, and the value placed upon it, have come under increasing scrutiny over the past decades, and even since *DP* in 2008 it has become increasingly normal to assume that it is morally acceptable to destroy embryos or to experiment upon them.¹²

The increasing sense of a loss of respect for human life in its earliest stages is linked to the abandonment of male-female lifelong marriage as the normal structure in which human life begins and is cherished.¹³ *DP* emphasises that “human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution” (*DP* 16). In 1979 Pope John Paul followed the request made by Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* a decade earlier to take up “the truly great work of education, of development and of charity”¹⁴ in teaching the truth about human love and conjugal life. He did so in a series of 129 catechetical lectures which drew together in a new way the Church’s message on the integrity of the human person and the virtue of chastity. The vision they presented came to be called “the theology of the body”.


Dealing with the grave issues of human life that are raised in *DV* and *DP*, it is necessary to see the Church’s teaching not as a set of “club rules” for Catholics, to be read with a mentality that says “How far can I go?”, but as searching for God’s loving desires for the whole human race. John Paul’s encyclical

Veritatis Splendor (1993) takes precisely this approach. In its message, we can recognise the teaching in both *DV* and *DP*; an immense value is placed on the human person, his value and worth. Civilisation cannot survive if we believe that we are simply adrift in a supermarket of various ideas and personal whims. As George Weigel notes: “To those who object that the essence of the modern human condition is its plurality, John Paul says – you are right, and that is precisely why we have to think more seriously about the possibility of moral truths and their relationship to living in freedom.”¹⁵

The Future

The status of the human embryo is essentially a matter of human rights, and thus cannot be seen in isolation: life itself is a fundamental right without which all other rights become meaningless. Today, many things are elevated to the level of “rights” without adequate discussion of what the term means. As a commentator noted in the 1990s, when Pope John Paul was visiting the United States: “How can its citizens permit abortion – which John Paul, a survivor of the Nazis, considers nothing less than the outright murder of innocents – while worrying about the ethics of wearing animal furs?”¹⁶

In *DV*, a strong plea is made for the rights of the human embryo; in *DP* this is strengthened and the language used is more forceful. *DP* has passionate words about the destruction of embryos, and their loss through unsuccessful attempts at in-vitro fertilisation. It suggests that, in addition to the contempt shown for human life in these practices, they are also very bad medicine: “One is struck by the fact that, in any other area of medicine, ordinary professional ethics would never allow a medical procedure which involved such a high number of failures and fatalities” (*DP* 15).

The Vatican II document *Gaudiam et Spes* notes that “man is growing conscious that the forces he has unleashed are in his own hands and that it is up to him to control them or be enslaved by them. Here lies the modern dilemma.”¹⁷ In *DV* and *DP*, the Church continues her task of helping modern man to exercise genuine control and thus to avoid slavery. Given that unethical – even horrific – things which *DV* warned us against were becoming more prevalent by the time *DP* was issued, and are with us still, it is clear that the message will continue to be taught with increasing vigour.¹⁸ 

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Notes

¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2271, quoting *Didache* 2, 2: Sch 248, 148.

²*Declaration on Procured Abortion*, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974.

³Weigel, G. *The End and the Beginning*, page 355.

⁴Moody, J. *Pope John Paul II*, page 160.

⁵Malinski, M. *Pope John Paul II: the life of my friend Karol Wojtyla*, page 110.

⁶Woodall, GJ. *Humanae Vitae 40 years on: a New Commentary*, page 43.

⁷Grisez, G. “Healthcare as part of a Christian Vocation”, in *Issues for a Catholic Bioethic* (Luke Gormally, ed), page 158.

⁸West, C. *At the Heart of the Gospel: reclaiming the body for the New Evangelisation*, page 60.

⁹The ethics of doing this are discussed in detail in by Mary Geach and Helen Watts. See “Are there any circumstances in which it would be morally admirable for a woman to seek to have an embryo implanted in her womb?” in *Issues for a Catholic Bioethics*, London: Linacre Centre, 1999, pages 341-352.

¹⁰Pope John Paul II, address to the participants in the Symposium on *Evangelium Vitae* and Law, 24 May 1996.

¹¹Oder, S; Gaeta, S. *Why he is a Saint: the Life and Faith of Pope John Paul II and the Cause for Canonisation*, page 114.

¹²For an analysis of how Christian politicians and lawmakers could and should tackle these issues in these difficult times, see Fr (now Bishop) Anthony Fisher: “Some problems of conscience in lawmaking” in *Culture of Life, Culture of Death*, 2002.

¹³For the Church’s teaching on marriage, see *Gaudiam et Spes*, 50, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1601-1658, *The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults*, pages 281-284.

¹⁴*Humanae Vitae*, section 31.

¹⁵Weigel, G. *Witness to Hope*, page 689.

¹⁶Mood, J. *Pope John Paul II*, page 102.

¹⁷*Gaudium et Spes* 9.

¹⁸*Gaudium et Spes* 52; see also John Paul II: *Familiaris Consortio*.

A Good Way of Implanting the Best of Sunday Habits *By Alan Bancroft*

Alan Bancroft is a retired lawyer. His translations of works by Blessed Columba Marmion have appeared in this country and the the United States, and he is also a translator of the poems of St Thérèse of Lisieux into English verse. In this article he describes a remarkable phenomenon he encountered at a church in Italy.

A parish success story is always good news. It's I who call it a "success" story. Those organising and operating the success seem to think it nothing unusual.

Ca' Savio is reached by the half-hourly boat across the Venetian lagoon to Punta Sabbioni, and then a short bus ride. It is a small place, with some local shops of quality, fronting and off the road to Jesolo.

The parish church, San Francesco ad Litus, is a modern building with a very wide altar sanctuary. A transverse aisle marks off an "oblong" of pews at the front, covering a third in depth of the church's seating area. And on that large front oblong of seats, the first time I went there for the 10.30 Sunday morning Mass, was a crowd, a phalanx, of children.

I wondered what special occasion this could be; so at the end of Mass I asked a parishioner. "No special occasion," he replied; "this is usual at 10.30 on Sundays." (My own later observation has borne that out.) No special dressing-up or anything; just a lot of children in casual attire. I was impressed by what I saw and was told, and by what I learned later concerning the formation of the children for regular attendance at Sunday Mass.

What is the secret at Ca' Savio? I have been asking questions over there, to try to discover this. I think there are three beneficent strands in what is happening.

Don Alessandro

The first centres on the priest at San Francesco, Don Alessandro. He is a gentle person, with brown eyes, widened sometimes. A parishioner indicates what he says to parents. He is of course very happy to arrange for their children to be given instruction for the sacraments. But he tells parents very strongly that they should set themselves to accompany their young children to Sunday Mass or the vigil, and not only during periods when catechesis has been given during the preceding week, but on and on after that. (And it is not unreasonable of him to tell them this, is it? Catholic parents should be at weekly Mass in any case – it is a Commandment of the Church, for their spiritual good; and the parents have an obligation to steer their children towards a similar good habit. Parental accompanying, week after week, is a powerful didactic message in itself.)

Don Alessandro gives himself no especial credit for parents doing as he asks. He and the other parish priests, he says, are simply tapping into the piety of the Veneto, a heritage particularly of the family-oriented teachings of the popes

who came from the Patriarchy of Venice – St Pius X and Blessed John XXIII. It is Don Alessandro's approach nonetheless.

However, parental accompanying, though strongly urged, is not made an absolute condition determining whether a child shall proceed to receive the sacraments. Children are not to be disadvantaged simply because their parents unfortunately fail to be thus actively involved. Some of the children are accompanied by a grandparent or other responsible person. Should there be any problems regarding arrangements for enabling a child to be regularly at Mass, the parish will seek to help.

'Peer-Solidarity'

The second strand is what, for want of a better term, I call peer-solidarity. As a preliminary to explaining, I now sketch the background. The pupils are given Catholic RE in state-school. But catechesis specifically in preparation for the sacraments is given outside school hours in the church hall by knowledgeable, and very caring, parish catechists. It is there that the children who are being instructed receive encouragement of the "see you on Sunday" variety.

I spoke to one parent who cannot attend Sunday morning Mass because she has to work in a hotel. She comes with her young son to the Saturday vigil Mass, and that is fine.

There is, however, a special provision for the children at the 10.30 Mass on Sundays. It is the normal adult liturgy; but Don Alessandro directs his homily especially to the children. At the end of the homily he makes a brief comment to the adults, usually suggesting how they can be a good example to the younger members of the parish.

Some of the youngsters sit with their parents at Mass; but most of those who have received instruction during the week sit *together* in that big front oblong of pews. Some of these chatter less than quietly to their chums before Mass (whereat I observed a catechist putting the gentlest of admonitory fingers to her lips); but when Mass begins they are silent and attentive. When the homily directs their attention to one of the bright stained glass windows to illustrate a point, one can see their faces turn interestedly in that direction.

So, Sunday after Sunday, they come; and sit with their youthful peers. It is not, I think, something they are forced to do when they would rather not. It is what is *done* on a Sunday morning; it is what they do.



Timescale

The third strand, if I'm not mistaken, is the length of time across which catechesis in preparation for the sacraments is given. Over there, after due catechetical preparation, the children usually make their First Confession at the age of eight or nine, and their First Communion the next year (when they are nine or 10). In the year after that, while the children are still at primary school, the catechists try to widen their general religious knowledge: saints, rosary, hymns, altar serving etc. I asked Don Alessandro whether pupils lapsed from Sunday Mass-going once they reached secondary school age. "No," he replied, "for it's then that preparation for *Confirmation* starts" (in the church hall). It continues there for two years, as prescribed by the Italian Episcopal Conference, including Bible study and moral issues, with reception of Confirmation usually at 12 or 13.

This is a long period across which preparation for and reception of those three sacraments takes place. One thinks

"First Communion Day is not the goal or destination, but an important stage in a continuing journey of regular Mass-going"

of the opposite extreme, as in a small minority of English schemes whereby First Confession, Confirmation and First Communion take place in a single year, in that order. The priest's homily at the First Communion Day, which crowns such one-year English schemes, will rightly be joyous. But, also, when gently or imploringly he adds a reminder to parents that that day should be not the goal and destination but an important stage in a continuing journey of regular Mass-going with parental support, he is saying a good and distinctly apposite word.

But to return to the subject of the long (indeed the very long, and three-stranded) arrangements that apply at Ca' Savio. Over there, certainly, one sees a process of preparation continued from one primary year to the next; and the good habit already being formed by the children is then carried forward to that period of burgeoning independence which is secondary school age.

Of course, each of those three strands or something not entirely dissimilar is to be found in our country too. And, thanks be to God, we do not lack churches where parents and their children abound at Sunday Mass. What I am saying is that over there the three strands in combination, each strand complementing the others, seem to work remarkably well in effecting and underpinning that happy situation. ☺

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The Collapse of the Manualist Tradition

By Fr John McDermott SJ

Fr John McDermott SJ is a faculty member at Sacred Heart Seminary, Detroit. He was formerly professor of theology at Fordham University in New York and at the Gregorian in Rome. He served for years on the International Theological Commission and is widely published on the New Testament, modern Thomism and moral questions. In this extended article he explains the background to the situation in which contemporary Catholic theology finds itself.

The Manualist Tradition

The numerous virtues of manualist theology can scarcely be denied. Otherwise its epochal dominance would remain completely inexplicable. Presenting the faith clearly to students, it distinguished essentials from theological speculation and legitimate pluralism. Thus the unity of faith was readily perceived and preserved. Continuity from the basic catechism to its most elaborate theological expansion for seminarians also facilitated learning. Since most manuals were composed in Latin, this universal language daily reminded students that the unity of faith encompassed the whole world and was centred on Rome. Its method likewise emphasised continuity with Scripture, Tradition and magisterial pronouncements since all these sources of revelation and authentic teaching were listed and learned. This allowed priests readily to answer questions from believers and respond to criticism from Protestants and non-believers. The perception of the faith's inherent intelligibility was available even to intellects not especially endowed with speculative genius. In morality, norms of conduct provided the lived unity of expectation and reward necessary for a vital community. Simultaneously, casuistry adapted the universal norms to particular circumstances and difficult cases in such a way that principles were preserved and equity guaranteed. The witness of the Church was clear in faith and morals, as might be expected from an institution divinely established and promised perpetual duration.

The Origins, Development and Presuppositions of the Manualist Tradition

The manualistic tradition's sudden collapse after Vatican II can only be explained when its theoretical presuppositions are recognised. Manuals did not spring fully formed from theologians' brains, as Athena from Zeus's headache. Catholic faith depends totally on Jesus Christ, His words, actions, and life. Jesus formed His disciples, leaving them a message to be proclaimed and entrusting them with sacraments communicating His life. The Church was commissioned to preserve and propagate the deposit of revelation for salvation. This mission entailed not only understanding revelation but also communicating it intelligibly to the audiences addressed. Jesus spoke in human words, indeed parables, to His contemporary Israelites. When His message was proclaimed to Gentiles, some adaptation to their understanding was required. St Paul provided the perfect model for adapting the message to new times and circumstances. Especially in the Hellenistic world, where philosophy flourished, the need for intellectual unity and cohesion in belief became imperative. Theologians found their place early in Christianity. But theological adaptation

is a perilous undertaking, as St Paul's opponents remind us. Opinions differ, and religious differences can create deep antagonisms since the ultimate meaning of reality and of one's own life is at stake. Change can signify decay as well as organic development. Theology is always in tension between fidelity to an entrusted message and adaptation to time and place, and only the Spirit can guarantee authentic continuity. That is why theology always demands prayer and asceticism as well as wide historical knowledge and speculative acumen.

The Latin Church had long been dominated by Augustine's theology. His genius had reworked neo-Platonism, opening it to Christianity and thereby resolving many inner tensions. Neo-Platonism located ultimate meaning in a transcendent realm. Augustine balanced that emphasis by insisting on immanent meaning revealed in the incarnate Son of God. Nonetheless, meaning is anchored beyond the material world in the immutable God; faith in an unseen God is demanded since the material, mutable universe provides no ultimate certitude. Grace is also needed in a fallen world to right a disoriented will. When Aristotle was rediscovered and introduced into the medieval West, theologians encountered a thinker insisting on inner-worldly intelligibility. Change is intelligible and is based upon natures, principles of activity and rest whose motion can be predicted, at least "for the most part".

Moreover, Aristotle reasoned to a Prime Mover, who could, with important distinctions, be assimilated to the Christian God. Thus reason could discover the universe's meaning, even if the Prime Mover is very similar to a Platonic Form and change is ultimately referred to a God transcending the material world. Thirteenth-century theologians began to elaborate a distinction between a natural order and the supernatural order of Christian revelation and grace. Thomas Aquinas, brilliantly synthesising Aristotelian philosophy with neo-Platonism, also employed that distinction.

Besides allowing for Aristotelian intelligibility, the natural-supernatural distinction offers many advantages to Catholic theology. First, it allows for the historical novelty of Christian revelation. Jesus, calling for conversion, brings to the world a salvation which men cannot attain from fallen nature. Second, it preserves human freedom vis-à-vis revelation. Men can understand what revelation proposes and are free to take a stand regarding it. If the world made no sense without revelation and grace, human freedom would be impaired; no reason could be offered for any choice, and faith's assent would be irrational and, hence, immoral. Finally, it preserves

God's justice and freedom. After the primordial sin the natural order remains. God is not required in justice to reveal anything to man who can find meaning in the world. Hence the Incarnation is purely gratuitous, God's gift beyond any human claim.

Since the mind seeks clarity, subsequent theologians tried to conceptualise reality as far as possible. Natures were understood by abstraction, and being itself was conceptualised in an analogous concept. The search for rational clarity sometimes undid itself. Given an infinite God, who creates and knows material singulars, universal concepts can be seen as mere abstractions, not comprehending existent singulars, and thus as mere human constructions. In Ockham's nominalism the value of human abstractions is relativised and truth is found only in God's revelation, which can be understood, nonetheless, according to logical and grammatical laws. Luther drew the conclusion that the natural order is unintelligible in itself. It is fallen, and man can find no definitive meaning outside supernatural revelation. Luther preferred God's word to scholastic philosophers and theologians. Rediscovering Augustine, he insisted that man is incapable of doing God's will unless freed by grace and revelation.

Luther's denial of a human freedom before grace led the Council of Trent to insist that man is free to co-operate with or refuse grace (DS 1525-26, 1541, 1554-57). Freedom belongs to human nature. The natural order seemed entrenched in Catholic theology, and Vatican I affirmed that natural reason can know God's existence from created realities (DS 3004). If reason could not of itself know God, how could it understand the Bible? Without understanding words about God, how might men affirm the faith defined in ecclesial creeds?

Revelation's supernatural truths transcend human reason. Though no one can comprehend revelation, it is accepted as true on the basis of veridical historical testimony, which culminates in Jesus Christ. As God's legate, His trustworthiness is proven by miracles and fulfilled prophecies, especially the resurrection, a stupendous miracle which He predicted. What He said and did, as recorded in Scripture and Tradition, should be believed. Since revelation comes from without in history, it must be accepted on authority. But testimony of various authorities must be evaluated. Melchior Cano OP (d 1560) developed a method to weigh authorities before assigning a theological note to various propositions, ranging from "defined dogma" and "clarity of Scripture" to "offensive to pious ears", "close to heresy" and "heretical". His understanding of truth in terms of propositions was buttressed by two historical conditions. First, disputes with Protestants, who accepted Scriptural authority alone and rejected allegorical interpretations, meant that the literal sense of the Bible was fundamental and almost exclusive. Second, Galileo's new science was discovering physical laws expressed in universal concepts that predicted earthly as well

"The witness of the Church was clear in faith and morals"

as celestial movements. Since reality was conceptualised so well in physics, there was no reason to doubt conceptual validity in metaphysics and theology.

Unfortunately, appeal to Scripture resolved no divisions among Christians. After the Thirty Years War exhausted Germany with the God of battles awarding victory's palm to neither side, many intellectuals resorted to reason to resolve life's basic problems. In some ways they were developing the Catholic position about nature's intelligibility to an objective human intelligence. The new physics supported them. Descartes, though proclaiming himself a loyal Catholic, developed a mechanistic physics without reference to God. Alongside revelation a natural physics developed. But balance is not easily maintained; reason soon acknowledged only one ruler, itself. Newton, who synthesised the laws of terrestrial and celestial motions, believed in Scriptural miracles and needed God to explain anomalies in physics. How do body and soul interact? How can inert masses attract each other in gravity? Moreover, God had to intervene in cosmic processes to keep exceptions to physical laws from causing disorder.

But Newton's epigones soon saw no need for divine interventions. The universe ran well according to mechanical laws. God seemed a superfluous hypothesis. Besides, Newtonian physics basically contradicted Aristotelian physics. In the latter the finite universe was almost alive, filled with self-moving bodies seeking their natural place of rest: natures moved teleologically to seek fulfilment; the earth occupied the central, lowest point, to which all heavy bodies tended. By contrast Newton had inert mass remaining perpetually at rest or in uniform motion until another body altered it from without through efficient causality; the earth revolves about the sun in one solar system in the midst of an infinite universe. Natures, internal principles of action and rest, became superfluous and in a heliocentric cosmos Joshua's halting of the sun seemed erroneous. In the 19th century mechanistic physics developed into a rational determinism, Darwin contradicted not only the Bible but also Aristotelian natures, which, known through abstraction, should remain always the same. Then archeological and other studies in the Middle East uncovered civilisations whose written histories did not always accord with the Bible.

The rationalisation of the physical world evoked greater precision in theology. By the late 17th centuries theologians were producing manuals in dogmatic, moral and pastoral theology. Instead of scholastic questions and disputations based on Lombard's *Sentences* or Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, professors now engaged in writing their own textbooks, geared to pedagogical clarity. At the same time many borrowed Enlightenment philosophies in order to adapt the Church's teaching to current interests and needs. Unfortunately, Enlightenment philosophy, based upon Newtonian physics, remained superficial before Kant, and Kant's division of reality into deterministic phenomena and

The Collapse of the Manualist Tradition continued

unknowable *noumena* contradicted the radical realism of the Catholic *Weltanschauung*, or world view, in which ultimate Reality became sensibly perceptible. The revival of Thomism from the second quarter of the 19th century gave the Church a means of confronting European thought, criticising it and improving it. Already Romanticism was shaking off the Enlightenment's cold, abstract rationalism. It sought meaning in concrete history and acknowledged sin and mystery. Admittedly, despite its disregard of human freedom and biological teleology, which Darwin's theories were bringing again to the fore, the Newtonian synthesis was so dominating science in the century's final half that some philosophers championed rational determinism. Neo-scholasticism agreed with the latter in upholding the validity of universal abstractions and laws for the essential order, while insisting on contingency and freedom in the existential order. But the intellectual climate of Europe was to undergo a radical change, which undermined the presuppositions of the manualist theology.

The Breakdown of the Manualist Tradition

Close to the turn of the century two breakthroughs in physics occurred. The Michelson-Morley experiment in 1887 demonstrated that light's velocity is not augmented by the earth's movement in the same direction. That implied that space and time are not objective parameters within which motion occurs and by which it can be measured. Instead, as Einstein saw, light's velocity must serve as an absolute measure for space and time as well as for other motions. Macrophysics deals with a four-dimensional space-time continuum in which limitless space curves back on itself like a Möbius strip and time is diversely calculated by bodies in motion. In microphysics Planck postulated in 1900 that electromagnetic energy is emitted in quantised forms and its study must rely on statistical probabilities instead of classical laws. This ultimately led to Heisenberg's formulation of the uncertainty principle, whereby the action of an electron or proton can be only approximately predicted; moreover, subatomic realities cannot be known in themselves since any introduction of a gamma ray to study their position or speed affects their position and speed.

Although quantum theory undermines deterministic philosophies, it and Einstein's theory posed problems for traditional Thomism. The world of the physicist is no longer perceived through the senses. How are the abstractions of physics related to the philosophical abstractions of natures attained through Aristotle's senses? Jacques Maritain distinguished man's direct, though abstract, knowledge of natures, whereby certitude is obtained, from the physicists' "beings of reason" (*entia rationis*), ideas that approach reality through superficial characteristics. But must the mind approximate reality on some occasions when otherwise it directly grasps reality? Why do not accidental characteristics studied by physics reveal a material reality's essence, or nature? Inversely, even if we know human nature from within, does not its complexity and freedom impede any simple

grasp of it in a concept? What can be known definitively through abstraction?

At the 19th century's end philosophers also began turning against determinism and philosophical abstractions. In France, Henri Bergson noted that reality is a dynamic flux, like a cinema, from which abstractions, like single frames of the film, are made; for intelligibility the abstractions must be referred back to the *élan vital* from which they were originally drawn; intuition is more perceptive of reality than abstractions. The Catholic Maurice Blondel similarly criticised abstract philosophical schemata in order to confront men with the necessity of finding an Absolute in history that grounds freedom and reveals life's unified sense. Contemporary German philosophers became dissatisfied with Kantian abstractions and Hegelian necessary processes and turned back to concrete living reality in *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology.

As the 20th century progressed, these currents would evolve into existentialism, whose diverse forms insisted on the primacy of existential individuals with unique freedoms over science's abstractions and necessary laws. Yet Catholic theologians were reluctant to surrender the value of conceptual abstractions lest the meaning of dogmas be relativised and theological method undermined. Maritain, one of the century's most brilliant minds, postulated an intuition of being which results in a concept of being. Then the autograph of Thomas's commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate* was discovered; there Thomas held that the metaphysical abstraction of being was attained in a judgement, not a concept. So Maritain showed how the existential judgement, which presupposes a concept of being, simultaneously gives rise to the analogous concept of being. Thus results the paradox that being's concept contains the whole judgement of which it is part. Maritain, like Thomas, sought to maintain the balance between the concept's finite intelligibility, without which no thought is possible, and the infinite reality transcending abstractions, whose recognition prevents reality from being reduced to necessary laws of rational thought. The balance of analogy between finite and infinite is delicate, yet essential for sanity as well as freedom. It would be imperilled by the one-sidedness of some transcendental theologians.

Transcendental Thomism

Transcendental Thomism was a novel interpretation of the Angelic Doctor which, influenced by Blondel and Bergson, arose among French-speaking Jesuits, especially Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Maréchal and Henri de Lubac, and to which Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan later adhered. Developing Thomas's neo-Platonic heritage, they insisted that truth is found primarily in the existential judgement which actively synthesises subject and predicate, essence and existence, in the intellect's quest to know. Since no essence grounds its existence, all affirmations of their unity imply God, the ultimate ground of knowing, in whom

essence and existence are one. Implicit in every judgement is, therefore, a desire to know God as He is, not just in concepts. Hence every natural act of knowing contains a natural desire for the beatific vision. Transcendental theologians all affirm this paradoxical desire at the basis of their theologies, yet none explains why the paradox is only apparently contradictory. Instead, similar paradoxes can be found throughout their writings. For example, although a valid concept is presupposed in every judgement, judgement's synthetic movement joining subject and predicate, essence and existence, transcends the concept. In other words, the concept's truth is dependent upon a reality beyond abstraction. Hence the concept is always in danger of relativisation. Although the best transcendental thinkers sought to ground conceptual validity, many disciples anxious to make "theological progress" overlooked the need of preserving valid concepts. Influenced by the surrounding intellectual culture, they readily dismissed concepts as productions of limited perspectives, which later experience can and should modify. Since the distinction between natural and supernatural orders tends to dissolve if the desire for the beatific vision is built into every natural judgment, the normativity of Scriptural statements and magisterial pronouncements is undermined.

“The revival of Thomism . . . gave the Church
a means of confronting European thought”

Contributing to the relativisation of the natural-supernatural distinction was the very success of theologians in explaining mysteries of the faith. Recognising the analogy between truths of faith and truths of reason (DS 3016) and wishing to make faith's truths more relevant and intelligible to believers, they showed how supernatural truths accord with experience. Faith involves not merely a message beyond reason indoctrinated from without. But the greater their success in coordinating faith's mysteries and human experience, the less clear became the distinction between faith and reason, supernatural and natural orders. Indeed some of the mysteries assigned to the supernatural realm were conundrums in the natural order. God's omnipotence follows from His existence as naturally known, and human freedom is a concrete datum of experience as well as a presupposition of the Gospel. But how may they be reconciled? The conundrum is particularly pressing when a concept of God is juxtaposed to the concept of man as if they were two opposed centres of activity (natures). Then their "co-operation" is imagined in terms of "motions" or "pre-motions," like little bursts of electricity in Newtonian physics, that enlighten the intellect and prepare or move the will to a decision. Bañezians (Dominicans) and Molinists (Jesuits) squabbled over the understandings of freedom and (merely) sufficient grace, which was really insufficient to produce a good act. This was not a recondite debate of supernatural theology. It concerned the natural understanding of the God-man relation.

“The best transcendental thinkers sought to ground conceptual validity”

Tied to the previous difficulties was the analysis of the act of faith. Conceptualist theologians sought to preserve its rational basis – an irrational act would be contrary to man's rational nature, and hence immoral – as well as to make place for grace and human freedom. A developed apologetics showed the reliability of the fact of revelation culminating in Christ. But the stronger the rational proof of revelation's facticity, the less room was left for freedom and grace. Indeed, it made all non-Catholics seem ignorant, stupid or perverse for not believing.

Transcendental Thomists offered a different, psychologically more appealing analysis. They understood the intellect as a dynamic faculty seeking the Truth as its Good, the goal of its quest. Thus intellect and will, usually distinguished by their formal objects, the true and the good, are joined in mutual causality whereby choice determines understanding as much as understanding determines choice. Furthermore, since the act of judgement-love transcends objective concepts and involves the knowing subject's active synthesis to perceive the meaning of objects – there is no objectivity apart from subjectivity – external facts need an interpretation under grace's elevating influence to produce the act of faith. God must grant "eyes of faith" in order that men correctly interpret the natural order's evidence as signs of the supernatural revelation's truth. This analysis of faith means that intellect is intimately involved in the perception of supernatural truth. Moreover, the object of faith is generally said to be a "person", or the "personal God", rather than a proposition.

Such an understanding of faith also offers an apparent solution to the great problem of dogmatic development. With the widespread expansion of historical research in the 19th century, original sources were edited and published. As theologians began to trace the influence of various Church Fathers and Councils upon each other, it became undeniable that a development occurred in understanding and defining the Christian message. At first the conceptualist "regressive method", formulated by Ambrose Gardeil, sought to control the problem by postulating the Holy Spirit's constant assistance to the Church. It started from development's terminus, conciliar definitions, and worked backwards to demonstrate doctrinal continuity; any lacunae in documentary proofs, it was presupposed, were filled by oral tradition agreeing with later dogma. But the theory scarcely covered all cases. For example, at the Council of Nicea (325) the word *hypostasis* was equated with *ousia* (essence) and was translated in Latin as *substantia* (substance) (DS 126), yet in 451 the Council of Chalcedon distinguished *hypostasis* from *physis*, the equivalent of *ousia*, as person from nature, or substance (DS 301-02). Similarly the word "transubstantiation" was first propounded to explain Christ's Eucharistic presence during the Middle Ages and employed at Lateran IV, Lyons II, Florence and Trent (DS 802; 860; 1352, 1642, 1652).

In other words, the conciliar Fathers understood something of the supernatural mystery which they were defining as they

forged words to match their intentions. The clear distinction between supernatural mystery and human reason was being erased. Transcendental theology easily explained dogmatic development insofar as faith's object was a personal God experienced in a manner surpassing concepts. This experience might subsequently be progressively expressed in concepts, as time and the response to heresies brought more profound insights into the mystery experienced. Thus God was fully experienced in Jesus Christ, but that experience allowed for further conceptualisation. New formulations proposed faith's constant content. For the personal object of belief is both known and loved from the beginning of the Church's tradition.

The Impact on Other Branches of Theology

Ecclesiology underwent revision. The manualists considered the Church as the institution established by Christ to preserve and proclaim His truth. But supernatural truths are discovered by an examination of history. Turning to revelation's historical sources, theologians like Maurice de la Taille and Emile Mersch found that New Testament and patristic authors considered the Church primarily the Body of Christ, an intimate, graced union between Christ and believers. The Church is first a lived reality, more like a developing organism than an external structure authoritatively imposing belief. Indeed, belief could never be separated from the lived experience of sacraments and grace. While this ecclesiology accorded with dynamic modern philosophies, with the felt need for community and with democratic egalitarianism, it tended to subordinate creedal formulas to lived experience, propositional faith to personal faith. Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis* (1943) attempted a synthesis between the new and the manualist ecclesiologies, but tensions between them remained.

Biblical scholarship further loosened faith from propositions. From the middle of the 19th century liberal Protestant exegetes, rejecting miracles, painted so many varying portraits of Christ that it was hardly necessary to refute them; they refuted themselves. Catholic apologists easily upheld the Gospels' historical trustworthiness. Already Old Testament scholarship recognised that such books as Job, Jonah and Esther were more edifying novels than history. Then in New Testament studies the form-critical method, championed by Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Debelius, stressed the similarity of formal structure in many sections of the synoptic Gospels, a similarity attributed to oral traditions previous to the Gospels' commitment to writing. These "forms" assisted memory in passing on Jesus's word or stories about Him. They were also adapted to the needs of their audience, the church whom they addressed. While Catholics rejoiced to see Protestants admitting a gospel tradition previous to its commitment to papyrus, the method undercut the New Testament's historical accuracy. Parallel synoptic passages manifest additions, subtractions and changes in emphasis. Since the early traditions were transmitted by various Christian communities adapting them to their own needs, and since Christian

prophets claimed to speak in Jesus's name, did not the Gospels reveal more about those communities than about the historical Jesus? Even though exegetes differ radically about which words of Jesus are authentic and which are community creations – one can hardly recognise exegesis as a legitimate science, so diverse are conclusions from allegedly the same methodological principles – the new method imposed an obstacle to proofs from Scripture which the manualists cited. Exegetes dismissed as naïve the manualists' "proof-texting". Thus modern exegesis obfuscated the alleged "clarity of Scripture". Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) had encouraged an exploration of the Bible's diverse literary genera, while insisting that the Bible's historical value be maintained.

Ecumenism also contributed to burning the manuals. So long as faith was based on authority communicating supernatural propositions, there seemed little hope for dialogue with Protestants. One accepted or denied Roman authority. Theologians might discuss or dispute apologetics, but the search for compromise creedal formulae seemed excluded. Rome was long wary of ecumenical agreements. But the rise of imperialist secular ideologies which exploded in the Second World War and transformed the face of the globe made Christians aware of the need for a common front and obedience to Christ's prayer that all believers be one (John 17:11). Vatican II's decree *Unitatis Integratio* opened the doors to ecumenical hopes. More conducive to dialogue than initial insistence on obedience to authority is a personal understanding of faith that allows diverse formulations of a common content. Admittedly crafting acceptable formulas of personal faiths has proved to be a daunting task, but the very acknowledgement of a possible plurality in dogmatic formulas undermined the clarity of the manuals.

Finally, the increased material prosperity of the West must be mentioned. Material riches encourage individuals to think themselves special, more important than others. More respect is paid to rich than to poor people; they have money to dispense. What is more, the accumulation of possessions demands more attention from the possessor, and a superfluity of time and money encourages their possessors to take it easier on themselves and enjoy the pleasures of leisure, or, if they are overworking, to seek pleasurable distractions. Riches lead easily to self-centredness, emphasising one's uniqueness. The laws which apply to the commonality of believers seem not always to apply to a rich man's circumstances. Hence universal moral norms are readily disparaged and exceptions justified. A vague personal faith without many restrictions becomes preferable to abstract formulas and universal laws. Since manualist moralists sought to uphold universal norms even while exercising casuistry for difficult cases, it became fashionable to denounce casuistry and leave individual choices to the individual's informed conscience. For that, manuals were superfluous, especially once proportionalism was introduced into Catholic morality. Universal concepts no longer satisfied.

The coincidental confluence of so many intellectual, societal and historical streams contributed to the demise of manual theology. Their common source lies in nominalism, a perennial problem. God knows individuals; our abstractions fall short of reality. Institutional structures are readily criticised since no rational justification is acknowledged as valid, and frustration renders people dissatisfied and critical. With reason relativised, people are tempted to attain reality through a felt experience, a leap of faith, an effort of will, or simple scepticism. Yet no thought is possible without concepts, and human life requires intelligible structure. So does the life of faith. Words mean something, and meaning is ultimately grounded in God.

As the Catholic faith reflects upon itself and the tradition of the great ecumenical Councils is more profoundly scrutinised, better theologians refuse the simplistic answers of liberal theology and return to ecclesial tradition. They realise that Catholic faith has an inherent intelligibility and structure in which the Infinite and the finite are reconciled, not played off against each other. The Catholic sacramental vision in which God offers Himself in finite, intelligible signs, calling for a response of love, unites all the mysteries of faith. God is utterly beyond the finite universe, yet out of love He has entered into time to prove His limitless love for sinners in the sacrifice of His Son. That sacrifice, glorified in the resurrection, challenges us for love's free response on which each individual's eternal salvation or damnation is decided. This structure keeps the balance between a rationalism that

would submit God to human categories and an irrationalism that would eviscerate all finite intelligibility, even God's word. Thomistic and Augustinian traditions at their best have maintained the balance between transcendence and immanence, Infinite and finite, nature and grace, essence and existence, form and matter, universal and particular, human freedom and divine omnipotence.¹

After the post-Vatican II upheavals simmered down, not only was the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* produced, but useful manuals for incipient theology students have been published. These have concentrated on tracing dogmatic development from Jesus to Scripture to the Fathers and ecumenical councils before explaining the mysteries' inherent intelligibility. Doubtless, manuals such as Joseph Ratzinger's *Eschatology*, Walter Kasper's *Jesus the Christ* and Luis Ladaria's *El Dios Vivo y Verdadero* will be imitated and published in the future.² The Catholic tradition retains what is useful even when progressing beyond the past. For the mystery of love has become incarnate and wishes to be understood in and through human concepts. ☪

Notes

¹Cf. J. McDermott SJ, "Faith, Reason, and Freedom" in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002), 307-32, for the intellectual grounding of the balance of finite and infinite necessary for freedom, and "What Went Wrong with Catholic (NT) Exegesis and Christology?" in *Angelicum* 86 (2009), 795-833, for the beginnings of another approach to the "historical Jesus".

²Ladaria's book has been translated into English as *The Living and True God* and published by Convivium Press. Though the second edition of the translation still contains many mistakes, I use it for my Trinity class. Readers desiring a (partial) list of corrections may request them at mcdermottjohn@shms.edu



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Comment on the Comments

by William Oddie

“He leaves the exposition of doctrine to others, and reserves for himself the merciful style of the care of souls”

Pope Francis’ New Style

Many traditionalist Catholics continue to be seriously worried by Pope Francis and the way he has so far conducted his pontificate. Much of this anxiety is being expressed in comments on mainstream Catholic blogs. Following one of my own pieces for *The Catholic Herald*, for instance, appeared the following, from one of my regular commentators, who in early November pointed to “the *Christian Science Monitor* suggesting that Catholic Illinois politicians ... changed their position against Same-Sex Marriage [allowing the bill to be passed] using the equivocation of Pope Francis’s ‘Who am I to judge’ [on homosexuality].” He pointed to a general atmosphere of resurgent Catholic liberalism, with “everyone re-creating Pope Francis in their own image as the exemplary freedom-fighter for their own particular cause ... because he’s so lovely and he cares so much and he is not constricted by anachronistic, intolerant, uncharitable legalism...”

“It’s never”, he concluded, “been those outside the Church about whom we need to worry. It’s never been Pope Francis ‘being conservative in the fundamentals’ that’s been a problem. It’s the plain and simple fact that despite his claims to simple ‘all-embracing’ worldly wisdom and his portrayal of spontaneity, Pope Francis is playing a VERY dangerous game.”

Others go further. It isn’t just Pope Francis’s conduct of his office that makes it possible for Catholic liberals to recreate him in their own image (even though in the fundamentals he himself remains conservative). For those ultra-traditionalist Catholics who tend to think of Popes Benedict and John Paul as theological liberals (preposterously, these people do exist) he is blundering around, sentimentally ceding territory defended to the end by nearly all previous popes (even by Popes John Paul and Benedict XVI). His continuing popularity with the secular press has been bought, so they think, by a large-scale abandonment – or at least,

the appearance of being willing to countenance such a thing – of Catholic teaching on faith and morals.

Wherever you are on this spectrum of opinion, we are all still wondering how to understand what his strategy actually is. Father John Zuhlsdorf, “Father Z”, has his own way of understanding it, which the new title of his blog – “Reading Francis through Benedict” – indicates: we should perceive the pontificate of Francis as continuous with that of Benedict, just as, I suppose we all perceived the pontificate of Benedict as being continuous with that of John Paul.

But this is a pontificate which appears at times to be distinctly discontinuous with what has come before: the quasi-SSPX view sometimes looks almost plausible. Either Pope Francis is just blundering around, a papal loose cannon with no coherent strategy (unless it is to get back to the bad old days of that intensely destructive entity the “spirit” – rather than the reality – of Vatican II); or he does have a strategy, which doesn’t at all entail abandoning wholesale what the Catholic Church has always believed, but which does involve concentrating more on the Church’s positive teachings.

I would certainly myself argue that that’s what he is actually doing: and so, in November, did Conrad Black in *The Catholic Herald*, in an article entitled “How Pope Francis fooled the Guardianistas”, published with the subtitle “Despite the enthusiasm of the left-wing media, the Pope is not abandoning the traditional battlements of Catholicism”.

“If the most militantly outspoken of the Church’s critics had understood what Pope Francis was saying”, Lord Black wrote, “they would be less (self-) satisfied. He [Pope Francis] said that the ‘Church is the home of all, not a small chapel that can hold only a small group of selected people ... a nest protecting our mediocrity. The Church needs most

... the ability to heal wounds ... nearness, proximity. ... When God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person? We must always consider the person, the mystery of the human being. God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, with mercy’.”

“What the Pope was really saying”, says Lord Black, “was that the Catholic Church must not allow its critics to continue to portray it successfully and falsely as obsessed with the vagaries of people’s sex lives, and as fanatically and principally preoccupied with such matters; that it must be clear that all human life is sacred, that all people are souls to be cared for and respected, and that it is a reasonable surmise that any plausible characterisation of God would not be a deity who approved the creation of life that was condemned to be irredeemably evil from the start and would not be deserving of any consideration.”

But this, as Fr Z indicated on his blog, in a post entitled “a workshop on misunderstanding Francis”, is not a papal stance that Pope Francis invented at all. Who would you think said this:

“I remember, when I used go to Germany in the 1980s and ‘90s, that I was asked to give interviews and I always knew the questions in advance. They concerned the ordination of women, contraception, abortion and other such constantly recurring problems. If we let ourselves be drawn into these discussions, the Church is then identified with certain commandments or prohibitions; we give the impression that we are moralists with a few somewhat antiquated convictions, and not even a hint of the true greatness of the faith appears.

“I therefore consider it essential always to highlight the greatness of our faith – a commitment from which we must not allow such situations to divert us.”

That sounds like Pope Francis, but actually it’s Pope Benedict in an address he gave in November 2006. If you are wondering, comments Fr Z, “what Pope Francis is doing, this is what he is doing. He has taken a page from Benedict XVI’s play book. Francis, however, is giving this strategy far more energy than his predecessor. But make no mistake: what Francis is doing is original in the extent of the application of the strategy, not in the strategy itself.”

That’s right, surely. The way he does it is to avoid high-profile personal rhetorical contact with particular issues and with the endless wrangling about them which allowed the pontificates of Popes John Paul and Pope Benedict to be traduced and distorted by the media and by liberals within the Church. Do not mistake me: the wrangling had to be done. The objective and binding character of Catholic teaching about faith and morals had to be re-established: and that included all those prohibitions from which the secular world still recoils. But we don’t need to carry on with that particular strategy forever. Ratzinger locutus est: causa finita est. And the reason the Catholic Church says “no” to a particular belief or moral choice has to be understood: it is to clear the ground so we can say “yes” to a much better and more abundantly life-giving alternative. Pope Francis has judged that it is now time to start saying “yes”.

Pope Francis, like every other Pope, has his own personal style. In an interesting article on Sandro Magister’s website Chiesa, about the now famous interview with Pope Francis in the Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Robert P Imbelli draws attention to the comments by Antonio Spadaro, the Jesuit who conducted the interview, which accompanied its original appearance but which were omitted in the English translation. “I think it important to recall these comments”, says Imbelli, “because placing the Pope’s remarks in the genre of conversation may serve as a better guide for their ongoing interpretation. The conversation transpired between two believers, two fellow Jesuits, who share a commitment, vision and

common language. However, it is being overheard by a world avid to detect any hint of change in Church teaching, but that is often deaf to the deeper language of faith. Thus, we see the predictable fixation by the secular media upon the issues of abortion and gay marriage – the very subjects that they charge portions of the hierarchy with obsessing over.”

However, continues Imbelli: “As many have already noted, Pope Francis does not dispute what has become settled magisterial teaching in this regard. ‘The teaching of the Church’, he insists, ‘is clear; and I am a son of the Church.’ Significant, however, is his repositioning of these moral teachings in relation to the heart of the matter, which is the Church’s proclamation of the good news that ‘Jesus Christ has saved you!’ Though he does not use the term here, it seems evident that what Francis discerns to be the pressing need of our time is a new evangelisation, a renewed proclamation of the love and mercy of God embodied and made available in Jesus Christ.”

That is the “Yes”, which can be proclaimed with confidence once the boundaries have been established, and the foundations set in concrete. And the “noes”, it is important to note, continue quietly to be reaffirmed. “May I remind you”, Father Z concludes, “that we are only six months into Francis’s papacy and we already have: an excommunication of the priest who supports “gay” marriage and women’s ordination; an extemporaneous jaunt into the streets of Rome to meet an anti-abortion march; an explicit affirmation of the impossibility of women’s ordination; a public endorsement of *Summorum Pontificum*; a speech to Catholic physicians not to perform or co-operate in abortions; a call for a ‘profound’ theology about women (read: a good theology that isn’t, as he put it, ‘female machismo’).”

And for good measure, to show that Pope Francis didn’t invent all the fluffy crowd-pleasing stuff that he goes in for, Father Z ends with a photo of Pope Benedict kissing a baby’s head (as popes have always done).

One key to understanding Pope Francis is that he works within his own limitations. As Sandro Magister, among others, has pointed out, he is not a theologian – but he is insistent that he accepts the teachings of the Church in their entirety; and he has renewed the appointment of the Ratzingerian Archbishop Gerhard Müller as Prefect of the CDF. Quite simply, Pope Francis keeps others to do doctrine for him: he himself believes the time has come for a different, twofold emphasis.

“Just as”, suggests Sandro Magister, “in the Gospel Jesus is very demanding in the commandments but turns to individual sinners with mercy, so also Pope Francis wants to be. On disputed questions, on birth, on death, on procreation, he is of undisputed doctrinal orthodoxy: [as] he bluntly stated in the interview with *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

“But he leaves the exposition of doctrine to others, and reserves for himself the merciful style of the care of souls.”

“The most striking example of this joint action came a few days ago, when on the disputed question of communion for divorced and remarried Catholics Pope Francis set to work [Archbishop] Müller, who in an extensive article in *L’Osservatore Romano* reiterated from top to tail the reasons for the ‘no’ to communion.”

“The inauguration of this twofold communicative register”, Sandro Magister concludes, “... almost entirely escaped the notice of the media, still dazzled by the presumed ‘openness’ of [Pope Francis]. But it is likely to be repeated with other issues.”

Does this mean, in the words of the commentator I quoted at the beginning of this article, that the Pope is “playing a very dangerous game”? Very possibly. Risky? Certainly. All the same, my own feeling is that anxieties of this kind, as the pontificate unfolds, will become progressively calmer and then fade away. I think the Holy Father will pull it off.

But we cannot actually know. Not yet.

Letters to the Editor

The Editor, St Mary's and St David's, 15 Buccleuch Street,
Hawick TD9 0HH, editor@faith.org.uk

THE CHURCH AND THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II

Dear Fr Editor,
Benedict XVI, when launching the Year of Faith in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (way back in October 2011) saw a "crisis of faith" in the Church and in the world. He directed us, as a consequence, to study the four main documents of the Second Vatican Council as well as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which flowed from the same source.

This would enable us to deepen our knowledge of our faith so as to understand its eminent reasonableness, accept it, live it and be able to explain it to each other and to the world around us (the New Evangelisation for the salvation of the world).

It is evident, however, that there is, within the Church, a deep-seated and widespread distrust of the Church and of its teaching. This has resulted in a marked lack of the proper response to Pope Benedict's direction. This has to be due to a willful misinterpretation of the Council documents and of the true nature of the Church – certainly on the part of those with a leadership and interpretative role.

Any straightforward reading of the documents and the *Catechism* would show that:

"The Church is this Body of which Christ is the Head: She lives from Him, in Him and for Him; He lives with Her and in Her."

"The Church is the Bride of Christ."

"The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Soul, as it were, of the Mystical Body."

A beautiful and important summation is provided in paragraph 778 of the *Catechism*:

"The Church is both the means and the goal of God's plan: prefigured in Creation, prepared for in the Old Covenant, founded by the words and actions of Jesus Christ, fulfilled by His redeeming Cross and His Resurrection; the Church has been manifested as the Mystery of Salvation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She will be perfected in the glory of Heaven as the assembly of all the Redeemed of the Earth."

Any dissent from the authoritative teaching of our Holy Church has to contend with the inconvenient truth that when we reject the Church and its teaching we reject Jesus Christ Himself.

Yours faithfully,
Frank Donohoe
Dorset

EVOLUTION AND CATHOLICISM

Dear Fr Editor,
Just a quick word to say that browsing through back issues of your good magazine I read with great interest about the debate between the biologist Richard Dawkins and Cardinal Pell (July-August 2012). Every age has an angry atheist and I think we are lucky in having such an entertaining one as Dawkins on the war path.

At school I was taught that science and Christianity can happily go hand in hand. I think this is true as science "simply" explains the mechanics of things and Christianity the why and reason for these mechanics.

However, if one tries to argue a 7,000-year-old universe, dinosaurs on the ark and so on, it will be a happy hunting ground for the likes of Dawkins. Evolution and Christianity are not in conflict.

Yours faithfully,
Jonathan Brewer
Cornwall

BALTHASAR AND OUR LADY

Dear Fr Editor,
The recent articles and correspondence on Hans Urs von Balthasar and Our Blessed Lady, as well as on Fatima, once again underline the crucial role that Mary plays in the work of our redemption and the truly remarkable way in which God has reconciled His creatures to Himself. Understand her role and you understand the marvellous way in which God has brought us back into His love!

That "Fiat" at the Annunciation is why we are here today united to each other in faith and reality in the Mystical Body. Von Balthasar continually sees a fusion between Christ, His Church and Mary. The importance of the "Fiat" has not been lost in the writings of the Church. Heaven waited with bated breath for Mary to acquiesce and co-operate. This frisson was beautifully put by Ambrosius Aupert, Abbot of the monastery in Benevento in the 8th century, when he wrote:

"O Blessed Mary, the entire entrapped world implores you to say yes; the world makes you, O Mistress, the pledge of its faith. Do not hesitate, Virgin, but hasten to answer the messenger and conceive the Son; have confidence and feel the strength that comes to you from above."

Von Balthasar continually stresses this union of Mary with Christ and the Church as he says: "At the heart of the Church, however, stands Mary, and what applies to her Son's Eucharist applies analogously to her: it is not that she is in heaven or on earth, but she is earth lifted up to heaven and turned toward earth. Nor is there anything strained here: it is all perfectly natural, for this is how the creature's ultimate state was envisaged" (*You Crown the Year*, p199). The priest at Mass says "This is My Body" and Mary can look at her Son and also say "This is My Body!" This is the clearest statement of the unity of Mary with Christ and with His Church.

In 1986 Cardinal Ratzinger, long before he became Pope Benedict, echoed this view of Mary and the Church when he wrote: "The Church is not an apparatus; she is not merely an institution; she is not even one among many social entities – she is a person. She is a woman. She is a mother. She is living. The Marian understanding of the church is the most decisive contrast to a merely organisational or bureaucratic concept of the Church."

"We cannot make the Church; we must be the Church. And it is only to the degree in which faith stamps our being more than our doing that we are the Church, that the Church is in us. It is only in being Marian that we become the Church. In her origins, the Church was not made, but born. She was born when the *fiat* was aroused in Mary's soul. That is the deepest desire of the Council: that the Church awaken in our souls. Mary shows us the way."

"There are many who would like to see a fifth Marian dogma, namely Mary proclaimed as Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate"

Canon George D Smith wrote a book in 1938, published by Burns & Oates, called *Mary and Our Redemption*. In it he outlines why Mary is Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of grace. This is Mary's role now. Her apparitions have only this end in view, and the actual promises and predictions she gives are incidental to her main role of helping her Son bring to fulfilment the destiny planned for the human race when the Father decided to create. Just as Mary started the work of our Redemption so she is integrally connected with working for its fruition.

There are many (especially the Franciscans of the Immaculate) who would like to see a fifth Marian dogma, namely Mary proclaimed as Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate. After all in the *Salve Regina* we say: "O most gracious Advocate". However, it must be stressed that such an understanding in no way detracts from

our belief in Christ the Supreme and Sole Redeemer, but enhances it because it underlines the human co-operation in the salvific act. As St Augustine said: "God who made us without us will not save us without us!" God always seeks our co-operation. He does not impose on us. Our will is always free, if unfortunately vitiated by original sin. God wants us to love Him but love has to be free. You cannot force someone to love you!

It would seem that only ecumenical sensitivities are preventing a movement towards this fifth dogma. But unity among Christians will not be achieved in spite of Mary, but because of her. Get non-Catholics to say the Rosary and it won't be long before they become Catholics.

Yours faithfully,
Christopher Bull
Canterbury

Catholicism: a New Synthesis

by Edward Holloway

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

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Book Reviews

Heralds of the Second Coming: Our Lady, the Divine Mercy, and the Popes of the Marian Era from Blessed Pius IX to Benedict XVI

By Stephen Walford, Angelico Press, 228pp, £10.95

Heralds of the Second Coming is a remarkable work that will appeal to all Catholics. Drawing together history, theology and spirituality, Stephen Walford offers penetrating insights into the “signs of the times”. Today, it is easy to be quite sceptical any time the “Second Coming” is mentioned, especially after the furore that the Mayan calendar caused in the media, but by focusing on the words of the popes of the Marian era and avoiding any talk of specific times and dates Walford ensures that this book remains credible and authoritative. In fact, the depth of research is astounding and is one of the real strengths of the work. It stands alone as an anthology of papal addresses. I was often surprised by how many significant events had happened in the Church in recent years that I was oblivious to. The first of these, and the main subject of the book, was the notion of the “Marian era”.

The phrase was first used by Blessed John Paul II in an address in 1999. According to him, it began with Blessed Pius IX’s proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and marks a definitive moment in the life of the Church as a sign of drawing ever closer to Christ through his Holy Mother. Walford’s intention is to confirm the significance of this period by alluding to the historical context, the unprecedented number of Marian

apparitions and, most importantly, the many pertinent addresses of the Marian-era popes. He concludes with Pope Pius XII that, although they do not offer a specific date, there is a growing sense among the popes that “there are numerous signs that [Christ’s] return is not far off” (Pius XII, *Urbi et Orbi*, 1957).

The book begins within an examination of the last two hundred years and the incredible number of threats to the Church that have emerged. Not only the regimes of Nazism and Communism but also the ideologies of Modernism and secularism have contributed to attacks on the Church’s faith. We are told that in the end times there will be a great persecution of the faithful and also a great apostasy from the faith. Walford’s work is posing the question, if we are reading the signs of the times then what is the significance of these events? Are they the beginning of the great persecution and apostasy prophesied? In this sense, the book seems to be a risky undertaking, but the answer he offers comes directly from the popes, giving it worthy credence.

The historical examination is for me a particularly important section of Walford’s book because it forms the context for understanding the copious papal quotations that are found on every page. The material, made up of all the significant allusions to the Second Coming, is examined in chronological order, starting with Pius IX. Very often it is just snippets from longer addresses or a significant story in the life of the Pope, such as the writing of the St Michael prayer by Pope Leo XIII. This risks losing the context of the material within the particular address it is given, but also within the historical context.

It is important, therefore, to have this first chapter in mind while reading the book. The sheer volume of papal addresses and homilies mean that the book cannot be read quickly but requires pauses for reflection: even a chapter at a time might be too much.

The bulk of the book focuses on the life of Blessed John Paul II, for whom Mary played a pivotal role. In particular, Walford examines the apparitions of Fatima and the Divine Mercy as essential moments for understanding this papacy and its relation to the Second Coming, but he also draws out from the World Youth Day speeches the significant theme of “Watchmen of the Morning”, which appears to have been ever present in his addresses to young people. In this part, Walford makes a convincing argument that Blessed John Paul II saw his papacy as a significant moment of preparation for the Second Coming. He described the Marian era, characterised by so many apparitions of Our Lady, as a “New Advent” when Mary is preparing the world to receive her Son, as she brought him into the world in Nazareth two thousand years ago.

Walford’s book is well written, well researched and well worth reading. It gives a sense of the urgency of the Christian message and provides a jolt to the faith of anyone who reads it. In a sense, we are always living in the age of the Second Coming, but we must read the signs of the times to understand where we stand. The book is significant for understanding the papal perspectives on the world for the last two hundred years and the weight they carry. It is the opinion of this writer that Walford succeeds in persuading the reader that what Pius XII said could be applied to all the popes of the Marian era – that “there are numerous signs that [Christ’s] return is not far off”.

Phil Cunnah

Sexuality Explained: A guide for parents and children

By Louise Kirk, Gracewing, 188pp, £12.99

A world without sexually transmitted disease or broken relationships appears quite a distant prospect.

It seems only too hard to help young people avoid the promiscuity that leads to such outcomes. Perhaps, then, the next best thing is just to try to mitigate the consequences of a selfish approach to one’s sexuality?

This guide to sexuality by Louise Kirk offers a quite different response. The book provides a carefully thought-through programme of sex education based on a set of stories. It is aimed at parents and their sons and daughters, rather than at teachers and pupils. The stories essentially model a set of discussions about sexuality between a mother and a father and two of their children. This might seem to be something of a naïve way forward.

What we can expect, though, is that a father or mother will want what is best for their own son or daughter. No one wants their own child to develop cancer from a sexually transmitted virus or to lose the capacity to bond with another person in a stable marital relationship. And yet if you want to reduce the rates of sexually transmitted disease or the prevalence of teenage pregnancy across the country as a whole, then you will be interested in trying to cut the odds for a whole cohort of youngsters.

So why not tell a sexually active 15-year-old girl the blunt reality that she has a 40 per cent chance of getting pregnant in the next five years while on the pill? Or that condoms aren’t always that effective, and that they can give you a false sense of security? These are exactly the sorts of (carefully referenced) findings that take their natural place in this guide.

The guide gives a genuinely honest view of how our sexuality affects our health and well-being. It does not seek to hide “inconvenient” truths. It provides a comprehensive view of the way that sexuality forms a part of who we are as human persons. It is easy to imagine the informative stories that Louise tells, replete as they are with insights and humour, providing the

“What is the significance of these events? Are they the beginning of the great persecution and apostasy prophesied?”

starting point for discussion between parents and their adolescent children.

Of course, after years of sex education in schools we have not managed to stem the high rates of teenage pregnancy or been able to prevent ever increasing rates of sexually transmitted disease. Sexuality evidently doesn’t work in a simplistic fashion, a notion that this guide conveys very effectively. I would heartily commend the guide to all parents. Schools, also, would do well to encourage parents to use it.

Peter Kahn

The Promise of Christian Humanism: Thomas Aquinas on Hope

By Dominic F Doyle, Crossroad Publishing, 243pp, £20.01 (\$25.58)

Does belief in a transcendent God help or hinder human flourishing in the world? Christianity, in answering this question, must confront two groups of critics. First, there is the assault of a growing number of atheists, who accuse Christianity of using hope in an after-life to sap societies of their ameliorating strengths. Christianity, they say, has nothing positive to offer humanity in *this* life and therefore robs cultures of the desire to promote the potential of the species.

Second, there is the interior threat of Christians who, in their desire to respond to such criticisms, seek to eliminate transcendent hopes in Christianity and direct the Gospel toward the betterment of temporal societies. Thus some attempts to promote justice often render Christianity nothing more than a social service organisation that uses the scriptures and the liturgy as tools for galvanising the masses.

Dominic Doyle, in *The Promise of Christian Humanism: Thomas Aquinas on Hope*, tackles this question through a recovery and rereading of Aquinas’s

understanding of the theological virtues. Doyle masterfully demonstrates that the virtue of hope inspires a distinct Christian humanism that offers “concern for the human good and promotion of religious transcendence” (p16).

Doyle begins by surveying some contemporary positions regarding Christian humanism. In particular, he highlights the work of Charles Taylor and Nicholas Boyle, which while critiquing various aspects of postmodernity – the dehumanising nature of the growing secularism and the rise of the consumerist ideology – positively suggests the potential of Christian humanism to contribute to a renewal. In the end, Doyle praises the penetrating analyses of both thinkers but finds their Christian humanism lacking: Boyle’s for his failure to integrate the theological virtues in his thought, Taylor’s for an inadequate account of the connection between the desire for the common good and the drive for religious transcendence.

A consideration of Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray focuses upon the importance of the Incarnation in the formation of Christian humanism. This fundamental Christian doctrine, for both thinkers, demonstrates the divine love for the world and demands an active response from Christians: “It is this divine love, embodied in the Incarnate Word, that sustains humanistic care for the world. Moreover, the very union of divine and human in the Incarnation means that secular loves cannot be detached from God” (p33). God’s *philanthropia*, manifested in the Incarnation, must become humanity’s *philanthropia*.

Yet, for Doyle, the Incarnation establishes the essential “theoretical” component of Christian humanism but lacks the dynamic or practical basis for engagement with the world. For this he turns to the virtue of hope as the dynamic link between activity in the world and the human hunger for transcendence.



After briefly summarising contemporary critics of the Thomistic notion of hope – Gordon Kaufman, Jürgen Moltmann and Nicholas Wolterstorff – Doyle gets to the heart of his project. This requires, first, an overview of key Thomistic anthropological positions: creation’s participation in the Creator as the origin of its being, including the paradoxical transcendence and immanence of the Creator in a continuing relationship with the cosmos; the natural human desire for the Good which transcends the human powers of acquisition; and the need for grace that perfects nature and moves humanity to its end in God.

Next, Doyle considers the nature of the theological virtues as infused gifts, along with distinctions and relations among faith, hope and charity. While his focus remains on hope, this virtue cannot be separated from its companions.

The key to Doyle’s argument lies in the Thomistic emphasis upon the dynamic nature of hope in relation to faith and charity: “faith hope, and charity constitute, respectively, the potency, motion, and act of Christian humanism” (p101). The gift of faith, ordered to divine truth, moves through hope in divine omnipotence and compassion, and finds its active rest in the participation in the life of the Creator. Hope, therefore, in actualising the potential of faith, confronts all obstacles within temporal life – the temptations and persecutions that constitute the cruciform existence of the Christian – in the dynamic desire for the transcendent Good. As an infused grace, this hope perfects and elevates human aspirations and actions for divine union.

Yet, since hope is ordered toward an end that will only be fulfilled at the end of time, does it not separate man from concerns within the world? Doyle highlights three points that refute this accusation. First, Christian hope prevents secular hopes from becoming false absolutes and, in turn,

totalitarian: one need only consider some of the tragic secular utopias of the 20th century to understand this point. Second, it liberates positive secular hopes – the hope for justice, peace, etc – from despair in a fallen world that often impedes such aspirations.

Finally, it places secular hopes within the human desire for God. Secular hopes, in effect, prepare one for the enjoyment of higher goods: love of neighbour opens up one’s capacity for the enjoyment of God. There is a correspondence – established in the two great commandments and often lauded by the saints – “between one’s desire for natural goods and one’s fittingness for the supernatural good” (p135). Hope makes the Christian an active participant in the recreation of the world that may only be fulfilled through union with the divine. (In these reflections, Doyle both draws upon and critiques Benedict XVI’s *Spe Salvi*.)

Overall Doyle has written an important work that provides a much-needed reflection upon hope’s relation to Christian activity in the world. Two criticisms, however, are in order. First, no consideration is given to the problem of hope and the possibility of hell – a part of the eschatological horizon that has traditionally shaped the Christian understanding of hope. The hope in acquiring the Good has always been accompanied by a healthy awareness of the possible free rejection of that supernatural Good.

In fact, contemporary Christian universalism may be a contributing factor to the loss of the transcendent in Christian activity in the world: why bother *hoping* in the promises of Christ, if the end is a done deal? Why not invest in secular hopes alone as short-term goals? Doyle requires a further consideration of the possibility of hell in his examination of this virtue.

Second, Doyle concludes the book with a curious promotion of the dynamic nature of hope and the need

for the acceptance of change in the Church. Citing the work of Jesuits John O’Malley and Stephen Schloesser on Vatican II, he critiques a kind of Christian fundamentalism that substitutes “security”, ie the refusal to accept dynamic change in the Church, for the virtue of hope. Granted the need to recognise legitimate doctrinal development in the Church, along with the important contributions of Vatican II, the Church does provide the *security* of a tradition that rests upon unchanging, divinely revealed truths. Doyle’s unnecessary plug for a progressive reading of the Council seems truly out of place given his fine examination of tradition.

Overall, however, this book offers an important reflection upon some pressing issues that contemporary Christians face. I recommend it highly.

John Gavin SJ

Why We Venerate the Saints

By Patricia A Sullivan, Herder and Herder, 305pp, \$27.07; also available through Amazon

When I first saw the title of this book I assumed it would be a pamphlet along the lines of those very useful booklets published by the Catholic Truth Society, setting out Catholic doctrine in simple terms for the interested reader without the time or inclination to read more weighty theological works. In fact, this volume runs to over 300 pages, accompanied by considerable academic apparatus, and at times plunges the reader into some fairly serious theology.

Nevertheless, it manages to be readable and accessible throughout and can be recommended for a wide readership. I certainly found it helpful as a priest; it would be extremely valuable for a seminarian or student of theology and might well be made use of in preparing RCIA or other adult catechesis. Indeed, at the end of each chapter we are given a list of “Terms

for Study” and “Suggested Reading” which will take the reader even deeper into the subject, if they so choose.

The book begins, properly, with Sacred Scripture, “the soul of theology”, and examines biblical ideas of intercession, concluding that “the New Testament encourages human beings to intercede for each other, a possibility precisely because of the mediation or intercession of Christ. It is not that we *instead* of Christ can intercede for our fellow human beings, but that *in* Christ...we are joined to him in petition.” This Christocentric understanding of the saints permeates the whole book. Sullivan notes that the New Testament does not speak explicitly of the dead interceding for the living (or the living for the dead) – but history and archaeology prove conclusively that the primitive Church accepted the reality of such intercession from the earliest times.

This becomes clear as our book examines the saints (especially martyrs) in the Church before Constantine. Their accepted role as intercessors and the veneration paid to their relics is incontrovertible. Thus Sullivan can state with confidence that the “early Christians clearly assumed that the distinction between life and death did not constitute a barrier to mutual assistance through prayer”.

The veneration of the saints, born in the catacombs, came to fruition in the Middle Ages. Sullivan examines this period and notes how the process of papal canonisation modified (without entirely replacing) the earlier model of “popular cult”. Sullivan returns to the subject of canonisation later, noting how the process has changed (particularly in recent decades). Usefully she makes clear that, according to the teaching of the Church, “pontifical infallibility is involved” in the canonisation of a saint.

This is something that Catholics do not always seem to be aware of. It is certainly possible to argue that the

traditional process leading up to canonisation – essentially a prolonged legal process which could and often did take centuries to complete – was in some ways superior to the more streamlined system now in use. It is also open to Catholics, should they wish, to regret the ever-increasing frequency of canonisations and beatifications and the loss of the solemn ceremonies which once accompanied these.

It is also possible to debate whether such and such a canonisation seems “opportune” in current circumstances. But once a saint has been canonised by the Supreme Pontiff and offered to the universal Church for veneration, we must accept beyond doubt that they are enjoying the Beatific Vision in heaven.

Having reviewed the mediaeval period, Sullivan then looks at the Reformation challenge to the cult of the saints. Usefully, she examines Martin Luther’s theology in some detail, to show how his opposition to the veneration of the saints stemmed from his deeper convictions about the utter corruption of human nature, his denial of free will and his conviction that justification was by faith alone. Having shown how the Catholic Reformation answered these challenges and purified the Church of abuses which were undoubtedly present at times, Sullivan moves on to look at contemporary practice.

Here she places special emphasis on the idea of the saints as “companions”, taking her cue from *Lumen Gentium* 50: “Exactly as Christian communion among pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ from whom as from a fountain and head flow all grace and life.” She then goes on to examine the saints as models and intercessors – roles they continue to play today as much as ever.

Lastly, Sullivan devotes a special place to the veneration of Our Lady,

noting the antiquity and development of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. She examines briefly the four principal Marian dogmas – Immaculate Conception, Divine Motherhood, Perpetual Virginity and Assumption – noting characteristically that “all four ... are inherently Christological statements, attesting to that which has occurred in Mary through the merits of her Son”.

The book draws to a close by looking at certain aspects of the cult of the saints which have faded out and are being rediscovered, such as the veneration of relics and the obtaining of indulgences. At a time when Catholics (especially younger ones) are rediscovering the riches of the past, this chapter will be a useful one.

The book contains two appendices – the first a list of key Church documents pertaining to the veneration of the saints, which will be found very useful, and the second an abstract of Karl Rahner’s theologies of symbol and *anamnesis*, which your reviewer found less so.

To conclude, Sullivan’s volume is a valuable contribution to this subject which has already won plaudits from a number of eminent readers, and deservedly so.

Richard Whinder

Cutting Edge

Science and Religion News

By Dr Gregory Farrelly

Printing Cells

I am writing most of this article on the feast of Christ the King, at which we hear the wonderful reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians (Col 1:12-20):

“...in him were created all things in heaven and on earth... Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity.”

The Faith movement’s perspective concerning the unity of created matter as one divine work across time and space offers a real insight into the purpose and purposiveness of all material being – ordered, controlled, directed and interrelated in a mathematical, physical, chemical, biological and, by definition, metaphysical manner. In this theology, the “how” of science really does inform the “why” concerning the unity of the universe, the Person of Christ the Creator, and human existence. This unity is evident as the divide between the “hard sciences” and biology/medicine is being eroded.

The September issue of *Physics World* contains an account of the current developments in the three-dimensional printing of biological cells to produce human or animal organs. This type of printing is already quite advanced: it involves building up a physical (3D) object by printing layer by layer, spraying liquid substances that can then solidify. Interestingly, Charles Vacanti (*Journal of Cellular and Molecular Medicine*, vol 10, pp569-76) sees the first reference to this whole idea mentioned in Gen 2:21-22, referring to Adam: “...and while he [Adam] slept, [God] took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.”

Waiting lists for organ transplants always seem to grow and, even when transplanted, organs from another person’s body may be rejected, so there is a real need for alternatives to traditional transplants. Suwan

Jayasinghe, leader of the biophysics group at University College London, is involved in trying to create synthetic biological tissues. There are three essential ingredients:

- a supporting structure, similar to the extracellular matrix;
- the various living cells required for the organ;
- a network of blood vessels to deliver oxygen and nutrients to the cells and thus keep them alive.

In 1999, Anthony Atala grew a colony of bladder cells, taken from a biopsy and seeded on a “scaffold” in the shape of a patient’s own bladder. The scaffold was biodegradable within the patient’s body. Once the cells had reproduced and grown, the synthetic bladder was transplanted and blood vessels began to grow. Seven years after transplantation, all the recipients of these bladders were found to be healthy. There are, however, problems with using “rinsed” organs from donors: residual DNA from a donor’s scaffolding structure may contaminate the patient’s cells. The advantage of making an *artificial* scaffold is therefore clear. But providing a scaffold for complex internal organs is challenging. This is where 3D printing may offer a solution; it enables a layer-by-layer addition of the required cells and their requisite supporting biochemical and physical structures.

Using the idea of the inkjet printer, in which small nozzles shoot ink at the required area, the idea of inkjet-printed biological cells was considered. Each type of cell would be injected where and when required, layer by layer. However, one has to ensure that the cells remain alive, especially if passed through an inkjet needle, involving considerable shear forces and thermal stresses. To ensure survival of the cells, the blood vessels must be manufactured by the printing process. One possibility is by having several “arms” for printing different cells simultaneously.

A team in Pennsylvania has created liver tissue by first 3D-printing a sugar solution scaffold, which then hardened and was “printed” with vascular blood cells and an extracellular matrix. The sugar was then dissolved, leaving an empty network populated with blood vessels (*Nature Materials*, vol 11, pp768-774).

AC/DC

In the battle for contracts to supply electricity, Thomas Edison’s direct current (DC) system lost out to Nikola Tesla’s alternating current (AC) system. A key consideration was that very high voltages (hundreds of kilovolts) are required to reduce transmission losses in the cables that distribute the electricity; but these voltages are totally unsuitable for domestic use, and so have to be “stepped down”. This was achieved by the transformer, an electrical device that only works with AC. However, since AC is continually oscillating, electromagnetic and capacitive energy losses occur – which does not happen with DC.

Modern technology (involving integrated circuits and electronic programming) can now efficiently convert high-voltage direct current (HVDC) to AC, making the transmission of electricity using HVDC power lines attractive. Furthermore, HVDC is already used successfully in applications such as the transmission of power from solar power stations and wind generators, sources of power that are set to increase in extent.

An HVDC “grid” would enable areas in which there is a near-constant supply of wind power during the summer, for example in Morocco and Egypt, to be added to existing wind power from areas in Scotland and northern England, where wind power decreases during the summer. This offers some hope for future generations who will have to consider carefully the means by which energy is supplied as fossil fuels begin to diminish but the demands for energy increase. Even electricity has its own “ecosystem”.

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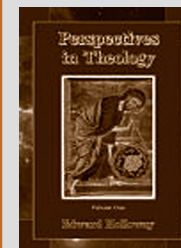
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From the Aims and
Ideals of

Faith Movement

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

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

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