

faith

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Doctrinal versus Pastoral: The False Dichotomy

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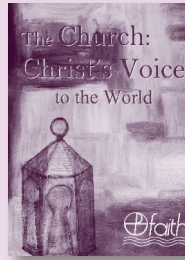
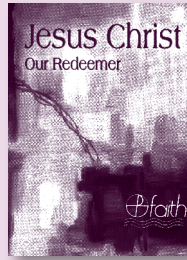
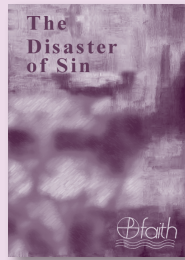
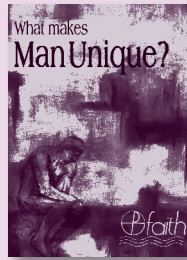
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Doctrinal versus Pastoral: The False Dichotomy *Editorial*

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15)

There is no tension between doctrinal orthodoxy and pastoral sensitivity. Quite the opposite: the latter requires and presupposes the former. To suggest otherwise is, at best, misguided and, at worst, mendacious. Yet, in recent months some “progressive” voices inside and outside the Catholic Church have again attempted to resurrect this false dichotomy.

Curiously, such a mindset is often aware of the “inconvenient truth” that no one, not even the Roman Pontiff, has the authority to change the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Therefore, they seek to drive a wedge between the Church’s pastoral practice and her doctrine. A “pressing pastoral situation” is often wheeled out as justification.

This project, however, fails on three counts. First, it misrepresents the teaching of the Church and, in particular, the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Second, it misrepresents the relationship between the Church’s dogma and her pastoral practice. Third, it misapprehends the nature of dogma itself. We must take our lead from Pope Francis himself in rejecting such erroneous and unhelpful notions.

The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council

God reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ, and, in order for the intelligible content of that revelatory event to be passed on from one generation to the next, there must be a correspondingly intelligible formulation and statement of that content. The formulation of Revelation’s content into statements is what we mean by a dogma. *Dei Verbum* is the Council’s document on Revelation. From it emerges a rich and subtle teaching on the nature of Revelation, and this, of course, has implications for how we understand the Church’s dogmas. It teaches:

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature. Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realised by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.

Note first of all that the intelligible content of the faith is affirmed: “the teaching and realities signified by the words”.

And hence the necessity of dogma is validated. However, the document goes on to stress that the *person* and activity of Christ is not to be separated from the message He bears. “This plan of revelation is realised by *deeds* and words having an inner unity” (italics added). Though we human beings must use concepts to grasp the content of our faith, in the end God does not reveal a series of ideas: He reveals the “mystery” of Himself in the person of Christ, who is “the fullness of all revelation”. With this teaching *Dei Verbum* definitively shuts the door on the idea that Revelation, and consequently dogma, can be reduced to a series of disembodied ideas. Given the “inner unity” of their relationship, the falseness of any attempt to divide theory, or dogma, from the realm of activity, ie the realm of lived pastoral reality, is clearly evident.

Moreover, God’s Self-Revelation in Christ is not some sort of inert reality that we just impartially observe. It is dynamic: it accomplishes something. The purpose of Revelation is that “man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature”. Revelation, and its subsequent formulation into dogma, changes the final goal of our lives. But this new goal, coming “to share in the divine nature”, is not tacked on to the end of our earthly existence as an afterthought; rather, this new goal changes the whole trajectory of our earthly lives. Already in this life, it points us towards heaven. And this comes about through a real novelty in our lives here and now: a new and personal relationship.

“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, [giving] life a new horizon, a decisive direction”

Recent Popes have been at pains to stress the personal nature of Revelation. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, quotes his predecessor with approval. “I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’”

As we have seen, our faith does have an intelligible content, but it cannot be reduced to a mental yes to a series of ideas. It is a living relationship with a person. This is why the Council teaches that in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ “the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them”. Every relationship with another person that is in any way real has an influence on how we live our lives. When one becomes a parent or a

“The false dichotomy between pastoral reality and dogma has as its root cause a lack of faith”

spouse, certainly one gains a great deal, but one also has to give up old ways of living and patterns of behaviour. In a similar way, when we enter into relationship with God who reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ this will have real consequences for the way we live our lives.

The Second Vatican Council teaches, and the continuing Magisterium of successive popes bears witness to, the indissoluble link between God’s revelation, our final end and the way we live our lives here and now as us Christians. Dogma, doctrine, call it whatever you will, is indissolubly linked to the pastoral reality of the Church’s life.

Blessed John XXIII’s opening address to the Second Vatican Council has been mentioned already. In that same address he put it quite succinctly:

The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously. That doctrine embraces the whole of man, composed as he is of body and soul. And, since he is a pilgrim on this earth, it commands him to tend always toward heaven.

The Relationship Between Dogma and Pastoral Practice

In fact the word “pastoral” contains within itself an intrinsic link to the doctrines and dogmas of the Church. Its origins are to be found in the Latin term *pascere* which means “to feed”. In the 21st chapter of John’s Gospel, Christ uses this verb three times, telling Peter to feed His sheep. This raises a question: on what should Peter feed the Lord’s flock? Catholics will immediately think of the Eucharist. While this true, there are reasons why one might legitimately expand the meaning of *pascere* a little.

In Ephesians, when St Paul is talking about the various ministries in the Church, he gives a list in which he seems to place “pastors and teachers” in the same category (Eph 4:11). One should not perhaps make too much of this, but it does seem to imply that the pastoral dimension of the Church extends to teaching as well, that is, to the feeding of our minds with sound doctrine. This insight has a particular and pressing resonance for all those who have any sort of teaching role in the Church. And it is worth remembering that this applies not just to ordained bishops and priests, but also to catechists and teachers and, in a most particular way, to parents.

Ideas, theories, doctrines have a momentum of their own. Wanted or unwanted they have an impact upon our lives for good or for ill. To take just one example, five hundred years ago, during the Reformation, there was a debate over just how broken human nature truly is. Certain extreme Protestants held that human nature is entirely corrupted by sin. Catholics, by contrast, held and still do hold that “human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded” (CCC 405). At one level this is an abstruse argument about

the finer points of theological anthropology. But follow the arguments to their logical conclusions and they have powerful implications. If human nature is totally corrupt then everything that flows from this nature, our ability to think, our capacity for love and friendship, our sexuality – all of this is totally corrupt and depraved and to be avoided. But if, as the doctrine of the Catholic Church has it, human nature is wounded but not totally corrupt, then these human realities of reason, affection and sexuality, while they are affected by the wound in our nature and so must be redeemed, remain essentially good. Far from being scorned and rejected these expressions of our human nature are to be valued and cherished.


Doctrines and dogmas, if we really believe them, inevitably affect our self-understanding, our values and our grasp of the world around us. Trying to divorce doctrine from life, dogma from pastoral reality, is unworkable. Either we must simply give up believing the dogmas in any sort of real way, or our approach to life will become schizophrenic.

“The teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ. This is not an encumbrance or an impediment; it is, as He promises, ‘the truth which will set you free’”

Dogma

The false dichotomy between dogma and pastoral reality has as its root cause a lack of faith. The teachings of the Church are not an arbitrary imposition that infringes the legitimate freedom of individuals; nor are they a merciless burden imposed upon the weak. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ – that institution which, despite the failings of her human members, Christ founded and which he continues to will. And, in the words of Blessed John Henry Newman, we “hold in veneration... her teachings as His own”. The teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ. This is not an encumbrance or an impediment; it is, as He promises, “the truth which will set you free” (Jn 8:32).

Turn on the news of an evening or pick up a newspaper and we are assaulted by the plethora of social ills that afflict our society. And, of course, our hearts go out to those who are suffering in whatever way. But there is not one of these problems that will be solved by a Gospel bowdlerised for so called “pastoral” motives. Only Jesus Christ in His fullness, undiluted by our ingenious “pastoral” accommodations, can alleviate the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. We have an obligation to offer the fullness of what we have received.

The notion that doctrine and pastoral practice are in conflict cannot stand. It has no precedent or place in Church teaching. It is untrue and unsustainable. We and the world need the truth in its fullness. We need Christ, who is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). 

Interview:

Bishop John Keenan of Paisley



John Keenan was ordained as Bishop of Paisley on 19 March, St Joseph's Day. The 49-year-old was previously the Catholic chaplain to the University of Glasgow. He was also vocations director for the Archdiocese of Glasgow. Bishop Keenan's episcopal appointment is the third in Scotland to be made by Pope Francis.

Editor: Congratulations on your appointment. So what's your vision for this new job?

Fr John Keenan: When I heard St Paul in that second reading on Sunday say "I didn't come to you with any philosophy or knowledge", I thought to myself that in modern times you'd be saying: "I never really came to it with any strategy, just a sense of the power of God."

So I don't really have any kind of programme or strategy or plan. I'm not frightened about that because I've got the confidence to know that every morning I get up, I say my prayers and, as the prophet says, "every morning he wakes me to hear and I listen like a disciple". And I know that he'll then say to me: "This is what to do today." And I'll work very hard that day and go to bed at night and then get up the next day early and we'll do it all again; and gradually I'll watch his design emerge. So I think that's the underlying thing for me.

Then I am anxious to be a priest with my brother priests. I want to make them happy, to make sure that they are as happy and joyful as they can be. Many of them are older than me. So I want to be, at least for very many of them, a real brother who is looking after their welfare while they are looking after the welfare of their parishioners. I think, probably, as things go on, I'll grow into the idea of being a father to them as I get older, but just now I feel more a brother with brother priests.

Beyond that, if there's one idea that I want to really get across to the diocese, it's the great joy of being Christian.

Tell us about the events of the past few weeks?

Two weeks ago I was in spiritual direction and I noticed my phone was ringing. As I drove home I looked at the number but didn't recognise it. So I just left it. Two minutes later, however, a text came through saying it was the nunciature and could I call them. Well, at that point I thought: "I'm either really in very big trouble here or they're going to ask me to be a bishop!"

So I went down to the nunciature a couple of days later and met with them. They were very friendly, very pastoral and they just informed me that Pope Francis had

appointed me as the Bishop of Paisley. So I knew 10 days before it was announced. That was nice as it meant I had time to think about it myself, pray about it, speak to my spiritual director. So by the time it was announced I was already quite familiar with the idea. What overwhelmed me, though, was this tidal wave of well wishes and support that I've had.

There were over 500 texts and 500 emails that came in within two days. You know, it's lovely to feel that, but it's also kind of humbling and almost unnerving to think that you could be the cause of all of this excitement and all of this joy. That also gives a great sense of the responsibility, as people do look to their bishop to be a source of hope.

So although the job is daunting, when you are surrounded by all of this good will and support it is almost as if the job is shared, the task is shared. It is all those people and their prayers that are holding me up.

So, in that moment when you were asked to be the Bishop of Paisley, what were your emotions?

I think it's the same as for everyone else, which is not just a notional sense of unworthiness, a spiritual sense of unworthiness. It's more than that. It's a concrete sense that "I really don't know that I can do this".

The nunciature were very kind and pastoral. They've been through all this before. They've seen every single man who's been chosen to be a bishop sitting on the sofa with them and having that same kind of experience. So the conversation that I had with them was profoundly reassuring to me, and I would say spiritually reassuring. I felt that there was a grace in the conversation, a grace of reassurance.

In your new role, what would you say are the biggest challenges that lie ahead?

My first thought is to listen an awful lot. You could say that the list of challenges facing each diocese in western Europe is well-rehearsed: the secularism that we're fighting, inside and outside the church; the pressures on

“If there’s one idea that I want to really get across to the diocese, it’s the great joy of being Christian”

families; the pressures on education; engagement with the young; the problems caused by a kind of poverty that just alienates people from life and also from the Church. I’m sure every one of them applies to Paisley but I feel that I want to go and really listen to what the nuances are in Paisley.

You’ll be installed on St Joseph’s Day. What’s the significance of that day to you?

The nunciature recommended an installation before Easter. So there were two feast days that would have been really fine. One was the Annunciation, as I’ve got such a spiritual dependence on Our Lady.

St Joseph’s Day appealed to the heart, too, as it’s also a Marian feast of sorts, given it’s the feast of the husband of Mary, but also because my late dad’s name was Joseph.

In the past few couple of years, I’ve often reflected upon how much of my personality is now like my dad’s. My dad was an enormously loving man; he just had an enormous capacity to love. I certainly felt that he loved me. A lot of the way that I now find I’m expressing my priesthood as a father is very much according to the fatherhood that I experienced from my dad.

What’s your message to your priests, the priests of the diocese of Paisley?

That I can’t wait to be working with them, as a brother priest. That I can’t wait to be with them in the brotherhood of their priesthood and I really want us to enjoy ourselves as priests. I know that there is a good sense of joy in the Paisley priests already. It’s really just the sense of the joy of working in the Lord’s vineyard together with them.

And you see yourself more as a brother than a father?

Initially, yes. I mean, I think you grow into fatherhood, but I do see myself initially as a brother priest with them.

What’s your message to the lay people of the diocese?

My message to the lay people is to rejoice in the Lord – to rejoice that we are baptised, that we are a people of salvation and, no matter what troubles come and go, that nothing ever undermines the profound joy of the Gospel, the joy of being a member of the Church and the joy of

being in the Kingdom of God. So I want them to rejoice in all that and be happy in their faith.

You’re becoming a bishop just over a year since Pope Francis was elected to the See of Peter. What influence will his lead have upon your episcopate?

The profoundest. From the moment of his election I felt a real joy and a spiritual connection with him and I’ve really been overjoyed with him so far. I went to World Youth Day in Rio and it was a delight to be with him and all those four million youngsters. It was just the most wonderful experience. Coming back home, we then had the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. I started reading that slowly, day by day, and when I’d finished it, unusually for me, I just went back to page one and started reading it again.

I think he’s an amazing man really. I think in his interface with the world he’s got this incredible Franciscan simplicity about him that has really engaged the world. Behind that Franciscan simplicity, however, there is enormous Jesuit subtlety and genius. So I’d like *Evangelii Gaudium* to be the Magna Carta for the Diocese of Paisley. I’d love to see it as the principal means by which we understand the Gospel and understand the Church.

“He’s got this incredible Franciscan simplicity about him that has really engaged the world”

So where stands the project of new evangelisation?

I think the project of new evangelisation, for me, has been given a definitively more fascinating and exciting depth because of *Evangelii Gaudium*. I think those ideas of Pope Francis’s were also there in Pope Benedict and in Pope John Paul, but they seem to have been given a dramatic turn with his idea that we have to be a Church on the margins, a Church on the outskirts, a Church which is for the poor.

There’s a lovely part in the document in which Pope Francis says he prefers a Church with shoes that are dirty and messy, because they have trod the back streets of the world, to one whose shoes are shiny because it has stayed within itself. And I think that is just enormously exciting. I mean, it’s a challenge. The thing about it is that it’s not at all obvious how we get from here to there, but the idea that that’s where we need to is so hopeful, isn’t it? We can be confident to go out with the belief that there are

Interview: Bishop John Keenan of Paisley continued

many more people who are waiting for us to come than there are opposed to our coming.

So do you think that the Catholic Church is destined to shrink in numbers and become “a creative minority” within western society?

I don't think there's any inevitability about the size of the Church. That's in our hands, and it's obviously in God's hands too. However, I think we should have at least the confidence to hope, to assume, that the Gospel should always be growing. The Kingdom of God is always growing and even if that doesn't always mean it has to numerically grow I don't think there's anything wrong with a default presumption that, provided we are fervent in our faith, then we will become increasingly attractive to the population.

What does your experience as a university chaplain tell you about the future of the Church in the world?

Well, what it tells me is that when young people have priests and sisters who are very close to them and to whom they are very close, those young people become the solution for the Church, not the problem for it. Because they are full of enthusiasm, they're full of idealism, they're full of fun, they're full of joy. That's not to say that they'll be saints, but they have got a great trust in going to confession.

They have a great natural trust: they can be open and honest, confess their sins and be forgiven. They also have more time on their hands, so they're much more able to be involved in the pastoral work of the Church as they don't usually have the commitments that a husband and father, wife and mother, have with family and children.

“That's not to say that they'll be saints, but they have a great trust in going to confession. They have a great natural trust: they can be open and honest, confess their sins and be forgiven”

They also want to know what Catholics believe and why they believe. It's a danger to young people not to know what they believe and why they believe it, because they are much more sensitive to the accusation of hypocrisy that “you are in a Church, and you don't understand what it believes”. So when we leave them not knowing what they believe and why they believe it, we leave them in great danger of abandoning their faith or of succumbing to worldly values.

However, when we teach them the faith, we see them having a real confidence. That's especially true when we teach them the faith as a proposition, as the most reasonable explanation of the world as it is; when we tell them that faith doesn't mean that you forsake reason, that faith is far and away the most reasonable proposition that explains the world as it is. If you give them that sense that their faith is reasonable, that it has an internal consistency, if you give them a vision – then they lap it up, they love it and they're only too keen, then, to go out into the world of their peers and to pass on those truths.

You touched briefly upon family life. There's been much debate in recent times across all the countries in the UK as regards marriage and the family. What can a diocese do to help build up a culture based on marriage and the family?

Well, yes, that's a very good question. I think, first of all, we need to give families a particular pastoral ministry in the dioceses and in parishes. It can be as simple as families getting together once a month for a pot-luck lunch and, perhaps, some activities for the children so that the parents can just socialise together. I think if parents are given the opportunity to socialise together, to befriend each other, to become friends, that then provides a very powerful sense of belonging.

That's quite important because in any parish set-up there are all different sorts of family and home arrangements. There are some which would be of the traditional kind of families, you know married with children, but there are lots who wouldn't fit into that but they'd still be very Catholic and very much belong to the parish church.

So what can unite them all together? It's a sense of belonging and friendship because in friendship we accept everyone as they are. And I think if we can provide something for that, then gradually, bit by bit, we can look at what it means to be a family and what the Gospel tells us about family life today.

Marriage preparation is also very important – having a really thrilling vision of what marriage and family is, in order to put that to couples in their engagement period. It's something that the Archdiocese of Glasgow has done a lot of work on recently and it looks as though it's of great benefit.

And then there's schools. We've moved away now from talking about “sex education” to talking about relationships and moral education; but, essentially, the Church refers to such education as “remote marriage preparation” because the vast majority of those young people in school, you're going to hope, are going to get married.

“When we teach young people the faith, we see them having a real confidence – especially when we teach it as a proposition, as the most reasonable explanation of the world as it is”

You're also known as a supporter of the pro-life cause. What can dioceses do to help build a culture of life?

The profundity of a culture of life comes from a stable culture of love, doesn't it? It comes from a stable culture of family love. To an extent, a lot of these problems in regard to life stem from a kind of fear of abandonment.

Take, for example, a young woman or young man who doesn't feel a strong culture of love surrounding them. They can too easily get involved in sexual relationships outside marriage, and then – when, as so often happens, life comes out of that – they feel: “I'm isolated, I'm on my own, I'm afraid.” They don't have a strong culture of love and so can often make the wrong decision.

Our political and cultural establishment still seems determined to define freedom as “the permission to do what you want, when you want, as you want and how you want”. They still have this ideology suggesting that to be free means to have a maximisation of choices and then, if you make the wrong choice, to be able to get yourself out of the wrong choice.

“Our political and cultural establishment still seems determined to define freedom as ‘the permission to do what you want, when you want, how you want’”

From our point of view, you're really free when you can give yourself absolutely in love, for life. That means you're really free when you can get rid of virtually every other choice and possibility in order to give yourself to the one choice or possibility. So we're at odds with the establishment about what freedom means.


So we need to have a close, pastoral care for the vulnerable; but we also have to have a patient, consistent dialogue with the establishment to try and get them to see that their idea of freedom is not correct.

When you look across the British Isles, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the Church?

I'm optimistic. I would say that Pope Francis has given me a new sense of optimism and excitement not to principally see the Gospel as under attack, in such a way that we have to put up the defences, but rather to have the confidence to go out into the world with that Gospel. That way we're much more likely to find a positive response from very, very many people on the ground than we are to find a negative one.

How do you, or how will you, sustain yourself in terms of your own spiritual life, in terms of your own relationship with Jesus Christ, as you embark upon this new stage in your life as the Bishop of Paisley?

I'll just continue to have the same priestly spirituality and plan of life that I've always had, and continue to hope to deepen it all the while. In the last 13 years at the university in the chaplaincy, and also at St Patrick's Church, I've found that the love of the people is so important too. Real people, real faith, real names – they really become brothers and sisters, they become a part of a family. That I do really feel.

I'm no less part of a family than if I were married and living with my own family. I feel no less surrounded by the love of a family. That sustains me – that really sustains and keeps me going. 



“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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Truth at the Service of Freedom: Building the Civilisation of Love Through the Family – An English Perspective By Edmund P Adamus

Edmund Adamus has been the director for marriage and family life in Westminster diocese since March 2012 and was its director for pastoral affairs from 2003. His work covers marriage preparation, marriage support and enrichment, and help for couples in difficulty. He also promotes the doctrine of parents as the primary educator of their children.

On 13 May 2004, in an address to the Italian Senate entitled “Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (who one year later would be Pope Benedict XVI) proclaimed these words, indicating the contemporary challenge facing the family:

Believing Christians should look upon themselves as a creative minority and help Europe espouse once again the best of its heritage, thereby being at the service of the whole of humanity.

The words “creative minority” might well describe the Christian family: a household of Christocentric faith with an explicit matrimonial and sacramental identity.

Christian social teaching speaks of the option for the poor. But if our social fabric is to retain anything of a civilised identity, then we must proclaim a radical option with the family in order to “safeguard ... its task of being the primary place of humanisation”.¹ I say option *with* the family because the family is the “chief subject” (not object) “of social rights and obligations”.²

The phrase “civilisation of love”, which describes the domestic church, that is, the family, means that in order to be a citizen of such a civilisation, one has to be – in every sense of the word – civil.

In transmitting values, conscientious parents striving to love their children authentically, know how important it is to inculcate virtues. Pope Paul VI invites us to ponder what it means to communicate in truth and freedom in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, on the subject of the Church. It describes four qualities essential to authentic dialogue, which when applied to the family (particularly to the role of parents) make it more evident why John Paul II compared their role to the ministry of priests.³

Four Qualities of Authentic Dialogue

The first quality necessary for genuine dialogue is clarity.

“Clarity [says Pope Paul] demands that what is said should be intelligible. We can think of it as a kind of thought transfusion ... all of us who feel the spur of the apostolate should examine closely the kind of speech we use. Is it easy to understand? Can it be grasped by ordinary people? Is it current idiom?” (Ecclesiam Suam n81)⁴

Parents often have to exercise this quality in communicating with their children. A careful choice of words, as well the appropriate facial expression or physical gesture, in all the

stages of a child’s development, deepens self-awareness. The apostolate of dialogue takes place par excellence in the family and enlivens its sense of mission, which for parents is the divine mandate to carry out the ministry of love, the “love that casts out fear” (1 Cor 13:7).⁵

The second quality of authentic dialogue is meekness. This is the virtue required to combat anger or frustration in the home. As the encyclical puts it:

It would indeed be a disgrace if our dialogue were marked by arrogance, the use of barbed words or offensive bitterness. What gives it its authority is the fact that it affirms the truth, [...] avoids peremptory language, [and] makes no demands. It is peaceful, has no use for extreme methods, is patient under contradiction and inclines towards generosity. (Ecclesiam Suam n81)

Here, we must not confuse meekness with weakness.⁶ The father of the family must be always strive to be a gentle-man. The mother must display a true Marian spirit towards her children, “treasuring all these things in her heart”, but she must never allow caution to be a prelude to inaction. To be meek, therefore, is not to be weak. To be meek is to foster a sexual complementarity in which the masculine virility of the father and the feminine tenacity of the mother both work to preserve the peace and harmony of the home.

The third mark of true dialogue is confidence, which can only be sustained through prayer in the home.⁷

Confidence is also necessary; ... not only in the power of one’s own words, but also in the good will of both parties to the dialogue. Hence dialogue promotes intimacy and friendship on both sides. It unites them in a mutual adherence to the Good, and thus excludes all self-seeking. (Ecclesiam Suam n81)

The more the family becomes *familiar* with gathering in prayer, where sacred words are uttered, the more communication within it will bring “peace to ... homes”.⁸

The final quality required for authentic dialogue is prudence:

the prudence of a teacher who is most careful to make allowances for the psychological and moral circumstances of his hearer [Mt 6:7], particularly if he is a child, unprepared, suspicious or hostile ... [who] is always at pains to learn the sensitivities of his audience, and ... [who] adapts himself ... to the susceptibilities and the degree of intelligence of his hearers. (Ecclesiam Suam n81)

“The family is a microcosm of the nation, so parents need to learn the art of statecraft. Fathers especially can take as their model the patron of statesmen, St Thomas More”

This is particularly important for the moral formation of adolescents, who with the exuberance of youth display a natural thirst and energy for social justice. Their formation presents an urgent challenge, as the youth of today are exposed to a language of “rights” without responsibilities, especially with regard to the unborn (whom Pope Benedict described as being among the “poorest of the poor”⁹) and to freedom of sexual expression.¹⁰

Fundamentally, it is a question of the way in which truth is nurtured in the family by the parents. When parents exercise their “unrenounceable authority”¹¹ as a service to the well-being of their children, the children’s gifts of love, respect and obedience become their specific contribution to the building up of both Church and society.¹²

The family is a microcosm of the nation, so parents need to learn the art of statecraft. Fathers especially can take as their model the patron of statesmen, St Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England in the 16th century, who was once described in *The Sunday Times* newspaper as “the most saintly of humanists, and the most human of saints”.¹³

He was a husband and father who personified and embodied with joy the deepest sense of duty, to encourage his family and others to flourish as human beings. Though renowned for his wit, he never lost sight of the seriousness of his role or lacked paternal vigilance in exercising it.

St Thomas More embodies and personifies truth serving freedom precisely because his ability to excel as a lawyer and statesman was based upon his fidelity as a husband and father. Furthermore, it was his authentically English identity which added unique value to his and his country’s contribution to humanising culture and civilisation. But what is this “Englishness”?

England’s Role in the Economy of Salvation

There is a long-established maxim in this country that “an Englishman’s home is his castle”. It was established as common law by the lawyer and politician Sir Edward Coke (pronounced Cook) in *The Institutes of the Laws of England*, published in 1628:

For a man’s house is his castle, et domus sua cuique est tutissimum refugium [and each man’s home is his safest refuge].

This enshrined in law the popular belief expressed in print by several authors in the late 16th century. It was even argued that outlawed English Catholics still enjoyed the protection of this maxim, at least culturally if not always technically. Henri Estienne wrote in 1581 in *The Stage of Popish Toyes: conteining both tragicall and comicall partes*:

The English papists owe it to the Queen that “your house is your Castle”

What was meant by “castle” was defined in 1763 by the British Prime Minister William Pitt, also known as Pitt the Elder, who said:

The poorest man may in his cottage bid defiance to all the forces of the crown. It may be frail – its roof may shake – the wind may blow through it – the storm may enter – the rain may enter – but the King of England cannot enter.

The principle was also imported into the United States, where Henry W Grady, a journalist and writer on the US Constitution, proclaimed:

*Exalt the citizen. As the State is the unit of government he is the unit of the State. Teach him that his home is his castle, and his sovereignty rests beneath his hat.*¹⁴

From time immemorial, the English have had a passion for the sovereignty of hearth and home. They have the widest variety of chimneys in the world as well as more garden sheds than anywhere else.¹⁵

“One of the sources of the British sense of liberty is and has been our cultural and spiritual association with the Blessed Virgin”

I am convinced that one of the reasons the English have such an innate sense of natural justice about the authority they feel ordained to exercise within their own four walls is that long before England became a political reality, she existed as a spiritual realm. At the time of the arrival of St Augustine (the Apostle to the English) in AD597, a one-nation entity did not exist. Augustine and his monks first worked in the kingdom of Kent under the patronage of King Ethelbert and Queen Bertha (later Saints Ethelbert and Bertha). It was not until long after the synods of Whitby and Hertford (AD664 and AD672 respectively), which made England a united spiritual realm, that the country began to cohere into one political reality – a process only completed in the 10th century, under the descendants of King Alfred the Great.

During his visit in 1982, Blessed Pope John Paul II referred to Great Britain as having an “exalted destiny in justice and in peace”, and I believe we have clung to this sense from our earliest times. We British like to pride ourselves on being exemplars of fairness, supporting the underdog and coming to the defence of those who are treated unjustly, whether at home or abroad.

I believe, along with others, that one of the sources of that sense of liberty is and has been our cultural and spiritual association with the Blessed Virgin. England has the unique title “Dowry of Mary”. In the 14th century King Richard II dedicated the kingdom to Our Lady and used the title with

Truth at the Service of Freedom continued

papal approval.¹⁶ The word dowry, from the Latin “dos”, means gift; and a dowry is a gift that traditionally formed the basis of material security for marriage. So in a sense England, as given or “gifted” to the Mother of God, has a special role to play, both as a nation and as a culture, in sustaining the matrimonial family. But what the king decided to do formally and solemnly in the 14th century was inspired by sentiments that already ran deep in the national psyche and consciousness of the English people.

Richeldis de Faverches was a Saxon noblewoman who lived in the small village of Walsingham, in the east of the England. She had a deep faith in God and devotion to Mary and was renowned for her good works. In 1061 she was rewarded by a vision in which she was shown the house in Nazareth where the Archangel Gabriel had greeted the Blessed Virgin. Mary asked Richeldis to build a replica of that house in Walsingham. This is how Walsingham became known as England’s Nazareth. The shrine rapidly became one of the most popular in Europe and later helped to develop and deepen the idea of England as the Dowry of Mary.

But it wasn’t just the intense devotion of the English to our Lady that characterised the English sense of national identity. It was also the fact that the replica Holy House of Nazareth depicted for them their profound and long-held appreciation for the homestead as the sanctuary of family rights and duties founded on sacramental matrimony. Walsingham, in a sense, crowned in the physical context what the English had for centuries – perhaps sub-consciously – understood to be the source and summit of all liberty and justice, the marital and family home. In 597 AD, the evangelisation of Britain under Pope St Gregory the Great was able to happen precisely because that faithful married couple St Ethelbert and St Bertha, King and Queen of Kent, by their material – and more importantly their moral – power, enabled it to happen. In other words it was the witness of the primary agents of the evangelisation of culture, a husband and wife, that made the work of St Augustine and his monks possible.

We shouldn’t be surprised at this. In 1992 the Institute of Economic Affairs published a book on the crisis of the family entitled *Families without Fatherhood*. Its authors, Norman Dennis and George Erdos (neither of them Catholic) quoted *The Ecclesiastical History of England* by the Venerable Bede to remind readers of an earlier time when society had been in an equally parlous state. When St Augustine arrived in England, he wrote to Pope Gregory to describe the aggression, lawlessness and promiscuity, the broken families and the neglect of children, which his monks had encountered there. All these things, he felt, made his work futile.

The Pope told him to concentrate on teaching the Anglo-Saxons about marriage and its many benefits. Augustine and his missionaries did so – and, according to Bede, England recovered. So we see that a renaissance of marriage and

family life based on natural law has taken place once already in Britain, serving the good of society and upholding the absolute sacredness of human life from the moment of conception to natural death. Despite all the odds, it can be achieved again with God’s help.

Such a renaissance emphasises that in marriage the spiritual precedes the material and that the vows are intended to be made in the heart before the two are united in one flesh. The reason the English took to their Marian devotion with such intensity and fervour is that, in their cherishing of marriage from the sixth century onwards, they could instinctively perceive how Mary was the exemplar (through the power of her own assent to God) and the national emblem of the way in which the spiritual precedes the physical. This is especially true of a vow – in particular the marriage vow, which gives rise to the physical establishment of the home as the microcosm of society, shaping a universal commonwealth.

“The replica Holy House of Nazareth in Walsingham represented a profound and long-held appreciation for the homestead as the sanctuary of family rights”

The fact that England had this Holy House, that it was Mary’s land, that it honoured marriage as Pope St Gregory wished, led over centuries to that long continuity of our institutions, in which Christian values became writ large in national life. And just as out of the small house of Nazareth came a child who grew into a man who was the salvation of the world, so out of this domesticity, grounded in the pre-eminence of the values of the spirit, came the fidelity to a sense of covenant with God in justice and freedom. It is the seed of family life inspired by the Gospel of Life within the cell of the home, symbolically venerated in Walsingham, which multiplied through generations to make a Christian society; and strong cultural traces of that society remain in British life even today. There is no need for me to enunciate the many and diverse risks facing the family. The message of the 2008 World Day of Peace puts it succinctly:

Consequently, whoever, even unknowingly, circumvents the institution of the family undermines peace in the entire community, national and international, since he weakens what is in effect the primary agency of peace.

Thus fidelity, the bonds and ties of marriage and home, the unconditional love of parents for their children, the value we attach to small, domestic things – all these become the building blocks of a society that coheres. The 19th-century Irish poet Thomas Moore wrote that “the ordinary acts we practise every day at home are of more importance to the soul than their simplicity might suggest”. If the family really is the domestic church and parents the primary educators and

“The bonds and ties of marriage and home, the unconditional love of parents for their children... all these become the building blocks of a society that coheres”

protectors of their children, then we must be more creative in promoting and supporting them as the first and best of teachers in the home, the school of human virtues.

Against the backdrop of what was once a strong national conviction, and which even today is not completely obscured – namely, the intrinsic link between the free choice of the heart in marriage and the collective appreciation of Our Lady’s consent to become God’s mother – is the whole idea of voting. The word vote, which comes from the same root as vow or votive (as in votive candle), expresses both liberty and the protection of liberty, for a vow always emphasises and underpins the primacy of spiritual values in the interior world of choice, love and truth.

This deep sense of natural justice afforded by the state for the home is echoed by Pope Benedict’s analysis of John of Salisbury (c1120–1180), an English author, educationalist, diplomat and secretary to St Thomas Becket, the martyred Archbishop of Canterbury. In a thesis entitled *Policraticus* (the Man of Government) John of Salisbury claimed that natural law is characterised by “equity”, that is, the attribution to each person of his own rights. From this conviction stem precepts that are legitimate for all peoples, and in no way can they be abrogated. In his general audience of 16 December 2009, Benedict XVI said:

The theme of the relationship between natural law and a positive juridical order, mediated by equity, is still of great importance today. In our time, in fact, especially in some countries, we are witnessing a disturbing divergence between reason, whose task is to discover the ethical values linked to the dignity of the human person, and freedom, whose responsibility is to accept and promote them.

Perhaps John of Salisbury would remind us today that the only laws in conformity with equity are those that protect the sacredness of human life and reject the licitness of abortion, euthanasia and bold genetic experimentation, those laws that respect the dignity of marriage between a man and a woman, that are inspired by a correct secularism of the State, a secularism that always entails the safeguard of religious freedom and that pursues subsidiarity and solidarity at both the national and the international level. If this were not so, what John of Salisbury terms the “tyranny of princes”, or as we would say “the dictatorship of relativism”, would end by coming to power: a relativism “which does not recognise anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires”.

Given the ethic espoused in *Policraticus*, we can see how England moved towards and beyond the formulation and application of the Magna Carta in 1215. That great charter of the liberties of England was once described as “the greatest constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot”.

The 800th anniversary of Magna Carta will occur in 2015. It presents a wonderful opportunity to rediscover and revive the “concealed heart of the English identity”,¹⁷ namely, the home as the seedbed of virtues and the sanctuary of life. The modern European family may have chosen to ignore its Christian roots, but Benedict XVI is correct when he says that “the roots remain alive”.¹⁸

If we do not reclaim justice for the family then the stark warning of Blessed John Paul II, the pope of the family, in *Familiaris Consortio* speaks for itself:

Families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference. ☩

Notes

¹ *Christifideles Laici* n40.

² John Paul II: Address to the Members of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, May 2001, n5.

³ “The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a ‘ministry’ of the church at the service of the building up of her members. So great and splendid is the educational ministry of Christian parents that Saint Thomas has no hesitation in comparing it with the ministry of priests: ‘Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God.’” *Familiaris Consortio* n38.

⁴ cf Cardinal Masella: “A person of dialogue is one who has the patience to become thoroughly acquainted with his conversation partner. He appreciates him, he loves him, interprets his hidden aspirations, shares in his passion for the Truth and for Good and is desirous of walking with him to seek together new elements of light and goodness.” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 23 November 1968, as cited by MMasciarelli in Teacher of Dialogue; Architect of the Council, written to commemorate the 29th anniversary of the death of Pope Paul VI on 6 August 1978. *L’Osservatore Romano* 1 August 2007, English edition.

⁵ cf *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. Pontifical Council for the Family.

⁶ cf *Back to Virtue*. P Kreeft, Ignatius Press, pp139 ff.

⁷ “Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother – exercising their royal priesthood – penetrate the innermost depths of their children’s hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface.” *Familiaris Consortio* n70.

⁸ General Audience Address. Pope Paul VI, 11 August 1976.

⁹ In an address to the Diplomatic Corps at the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI said that “the poorest human beings are unborn children” (1 August 2009). And in his annual Message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2009, Benedict XVI noted: “The extermination of millions of unborn children, in the name of the fight against poverty, actually constitutes the destruction of the poorest of all human beings.”

¹⁰ “Youth is the period for the conscience to be formed so that that young people can become people who are clear-sighted in life, people of principle, people who inspire trust and are credible. It is through rightness of conscience that young people make the most important contribution in the world and in the Church.” *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to Young People, John Paul II, 1985.

¹¹ *Familiaris Consortio* n21.

¹² “...diciamo, e costituisce una piccola Chiesa, un ‘elemento’ della costruzione dell’unica e universale Chiesa qual è l’intero Corpo mistico di Cristo. Questa sacralità della famiglia cristiana nulla toglie all’integrità e alla naturalezza della famiglia ordinaria, anzi la illumina interiormente d’uno Spirito nuovo di amore e di felicità, la fortifica nelle prove e nelle pene della vita, le conferisce la coscienza d’una missione sua propria...” General Audience Address, Pope Paul VI, 11 August 1976.

¹³ Hugh Trevor-Roper in *The Sunday Times* newspaper, 27 November 1977.

¹⁴ See the biography of HW Grady by Joel Chandler Harris (1800).

¹⁵ *The Tablet*, 29 September 2012. Markie Robson Scott book review of *How England made the English*. From *bedgerons to Heathron*, Harry Mount.

¹⁶ *The Wilton Diptych*, completed about 1395, depicts King Richard II formally handing England to the Mother of Christ. It confirms and commemorates the dedication of England as her “dowry” (from the Latin word *dos* or gift/donation).

¹⁷ See Tom Paulin’s review of Clare Asquith’s book on Shakespeare.

¹⁸ Message to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and the Pontifical Council for Culture, for the occasion of a day of study on the theme: “Dialogue between Cultures and Religions”, 9 December 2008, Benedict XVI.

The Tailor-Mystic Who Inspired a Pope

By Clare Anderson

Among the priests of his time, Pope John Paul II was unusual in that he owed much of his spiritual formation to lay people. His lack of clericalism was doubtless due to the influence of his father and, later, of a Krakow artisan with a gift for teaching the spiritual life. Clare Anderson co-authored *John Paul II, Man of Prayer*, which is due out in May. She will also shortly co-present an EWTN series on the influences that shaped the life and work of Blessed John Paul II.

"It's not difficult to be a saint!"

Nothing very surprising about that sentence, you might think, although the reality might be a struggle for most of us. But in 1935, when spoken from the pulpit to a Sunday congregation in Krakow, the idea was revolutionary to at least one hearer. Sanctity was for priests and religious. Lay people could aspire to great goodness by going to Mass, saying their prayers and doing good to others. What else was there? Yet that Salesian priest made it sound almost easy.... For the fair-haired young man with the intense expression, hearing these words was to change his life.

Jan Leopold Tyranowski was born in Krakow in 1901 into a middle-class household. His father owned a tailoring workshop but the family had other plans for their elder son. Jan duly became an accountant, a discipline which suited his orderly mind. An introvert and a loner, he liked to walk the Beskid mountains on his own and indulge his talent for photography. Everything interested him, from science and gardening to learning foreign languages. He also took an interest in the new science of psychology, especially the emerging theories of personality types. Rumour later had it that he had received psychiatric treatment himself.

In 1930 a chronic stomach ailment, possibly worsened by stress, compelled him to give up accountancy and join his father's tailoring business. Working from home, he was much happier than in an office of people. His faith began to deepen and he joined Catholic Action, becoming a familiar face at parish events. Yet despite all this "busyness" he still felt that something was missing.

Then came the sermon in 1935 with its irresistible challenge. Tyranowski suddenly knew that to be a saint was his vocation and he felt called to deeper conversion. Thirsting for greater union with God in his spiritual life, he approached one of the parish priests for advice. It is greatly to this priest's credit that he was able to give excellent help. He lent Tyranowski a manual of prayer commonly used in seminaries at that time, *Ascetical and Mystical Theology* by Adolphe Tanqueray, which Tyranowski devoured, coming back for more. Finally he came across the works of St Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The work of this last writer was to be Jan's constant companion until his death 12 years later.

John of the Cross is not an easy read; his poetry is highly symbolic. Whether writing in poetry or prose, St John's topic is prayer beyond the beginning – at that point where

consolations dry up and the first fervour of the spiritual life has worn off. His remedy is complete detachment from everything that is not God: "If you desire that devotion be born in your spirit and that the love of God and the desire for divine things increase, cleanse your soul of every desire, attachment and ambition in such a way that you have no concern about anything" (*Sayings of Light and Love* 28).

Becoming detached from possessions, the soul mysteriously gains a clearer knowledge of them, and a better understanding and appreciation of them. The soul that is no longer intent on possessing things finds a freedom of spirit, and curiously "those whose joy is unpossessive of things rejoice in them all as though they possessed them all" (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*). St John's message is clear: to possess God fully, you must desire God and God alone and pursue only those things that lead to him.

Tyranowski, possibly because he was supporting his mother, became intent on living the contemplative life in the lay state. Shortly after hearing the sermon he took a vow of chastity, and, convinced that God was calling him to a more hidden life, began to detach himself from church activities. At the same time, his accountant's mind organised a daily routine according to a quasi-monastic rule. A fragment of card from 1941 shows something of this. He rose at 5am and attended early Mass with Holy Communion, followed by spiritual reading and the rosary. A frugal breakfast would be followed by more prayer and reading, including Scripture. At 2pm he would start his work, meditating on the virtues of faith, hope and charity. Dinner was at 5.30pm, followed by the Angelus and more meditation and reading. Bed would follow at 8.30 pm.

Such a regime might seem oppressively prescriptive but it suited Tyranowski so well that his confessor Alexander Drozd later described him as a spiritual mountaineer, so advanced in the spiritual life that he was difficult to direct. The Salesians of St Stanislaus Kostka parish would say "Look, there goes the saint" and "The glory of God dwells in Rozana Street" (where Tyranowski lived at number 11). In his chosen way of life, Tyranowski practised the presence of God both in work and in prayer. This would have been almost impossible in a busy office.

Earning one's living by simple manual work while being constantly mindful of God is of course not new; the desert fathers wove baskets while they prayed. In one of the paradoxes that surround the spiritual life, the ascetic, having reached spiritual maturity and wisdom, would find

“I can safely say that if it hadn't been for Jan Tyranowski neither Wojtyla nor I would have become priests” (a friend of John Paul II)

himself attracting followers who went to him for guidance and advice. He would become what the Eastern church calls a “staretz”. Tyranowski certainly never entertained any ideas about advising others; by temperament and inclination he was a loner. If the life of a tailor working from home was chosen to facilitate his prayer life, it is also possible that his choice was a convenient one for an introvert with little self-confidence. Had he chosen his hidden lifestyle as a way of avoiding having to deal with people?

The Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 would change his life in more ways than one. Eleven of the Salesians in the parish were to die in concentration camps; only a couple of elderly priests were left to take charge. The church today bears witness to the terrible sacrifice; a row of faces, forever young, gaze down from the walls of the side chapel. A successful preached retreat in 1940 had led to a discussion group and afterwards there was a feeling in the parish that the momentum should not be lost. Something permanent was needed, but by then the priests were already stretched to the limit.

In the days when priests were plentiful, parish work was solely a clerical responsibility, but now one third of all priests in Krakow had been deported. Towards the Salesians, whose special charism is work with youth, the Nazis were especially ruthless. In what might be called an early example of collaborative ministry Jan Tyranowski was asked to form a Living Rosary group among the youth of the parish. Jan was initially terrified, protesting that he was no speaker and wouldn't know how to communicate with young people. Do not be afraid, the Lord will help you, he was told.

And so Jan would wait by the church door, observing the young men as they attended Mass, silently discerning who would be suitable for his Living Rosary. He cut a strange figure, with his rather high voice and intense manner; many of the young people thought him odd, a religious eccentric. Several times he was suspected of being a German spy.

The Living Rosary group met in the parish church to pray the rosary together. In addition, small cells of 15 young men would be formed, under a leader who reported back to Tyranowski; one of these leaders was Karol Wojtyla. Each member had to pray one specified decade of the rosary daily – so each cell would cover the entire rosary every day. As well as this, Tyranowski began to meet with members individually in his apartment for direction; he was concerned about the spiritual well-being of everyone in the group entrusted to him, giving generously of his time. Using his wisdom and powers of discernment, Tyranowski was able to lead many young people into a deeper relationship with Christ. He recommended books, different ones to different people, in accordance with their temperament and level of spiritual attainment.

It is interesting how sometimes God works through his enemies, using them unwittingly to do his will. By depriving the St Stanislaus Kostka parish of most of its priests, the Nazis gave it Jan Tyranowski, who discovered that he had a talent for nurturing souls. His apostolate numbered a few hundred at most, and had Karol Wojtyla not been among its members, no one outside Krakow would ever have heard of Tyranowski or his work. Yet his influence was profound. From among the members of his Living Rosary group came 11 vocations, including a future pope.

The Holy Father would never forget the influence Tyranowski had on him; he had a small picture of him in his bedroom in the Apostolic Palace and credited him with bringing his vocation to fruition at a time when he wanted to be an actor. He would write: “He was one of those unknown saints, hidden amid the others like a marvellous light at the bottom of life, at a depth where night usually reigns. He disclosed to me the riches of his inner life, of his mystical life. In his words, in his spirituality and in the example of a life given to God alone, he represented a new world that I did not yet know. I saw the beauty of a soul opened up by grace” (from *Be Not Afraid!*, a book-length interview with André Frossard).

“He was one of those unknown saints, hidden amid the others like a marvellous light at the bottom of life, at a depth where night usually reigns”

Mieczyslaw Malinski (*Pope John Paul II: The Life of My Friend Karol Wojtyla*, 1979) describes a rather fusty apartment, the sitting room full of ancient furniture, books, old portraits and pictures. People came in groups or singly. It was in this place that the young Karol Wojtyla would be introduced to John of the Cross and told that anyone can be a saint. As he was with himself, Tyranowski was a hard taskmaster – a notebook was to be ruled with columns under headings such as “Scripture reading”, “Morning prayer”, “Afternoon recreation” etc. Each day the columns would be filled with a tick or a cross and once a week the list would be discussed with Tyranowski.

It is easy to imagine that the young Wojtyla, the child of an army officer, would have taken to this manly, no-nonsense approach. In any case, the intention was not to enforce a military-style routine, but to lead each young person into a continual encounter with God. When Malinski mentioned Tyranowski's oddness to his friend, Wojtyla replied protectively that he seemed the most normal person in the world.

Karol's father died in 1941. He had no immediate family left and now no country either; under the shadow of the Nazis and their daily cruelty he must have felt utterly alone and

The Tailor-Mystic Who Inspired a Pope continued

beraft. However, Tyranowski may have stepped in as a tentative father-figure. The two certainly became good friends. They were a familiar sight, walking side by side along the bank of the Vistula river talking about the things of God. When Karol laboured at the chemical plant outside Krakow during the German occupation, Tyranowski would sometimes accompany him on the long walk to work in the early morning. It was safer to discuss religious matters in this way, with no eavesdroppers around.

It's hard to forget the conversations with him. One of these that remains in my memory was a time when this simple man, who complained to his confessor that he does not know how to speak, talked late into the night about the nature of God and indeed what life with God is. He didn't quote others' words but drew on his own experiences... he was the apostle of God's greatness, the beauty of God, the transcendence of God.

(John Paul II, *My Friends*, Rome 1993)

Jan Tyranowski was not to be present at the ordination of his friend in November 1946. That year he had developed tuberculosis in his arm, and it had spread throughout his

body. The arm was amputated, but the disease could not be stopped. After a long and agonising illness borne without complaint, he died on 15 March 1947, embracing the crucifix. Sadly his spiritual son, Karol Wojtyla, was abroad at the time. In his memoir *Gift and Mystery*, the Pope wrote that his friend was given the death that he had wished for. To surrender one's life in this way as a spiritual offering for others takes a heroism that is beyond most of us.

In 1997 the cause for his canonisation was opened by the Salesians and the remains of the brave little tailor were taken from his family vault and placed in the church of St Stanislaus Kostka in the Debniki district of Krakow. They are kept in a casket inside a glass case. The house at 11 Rozana Street has a small plaque indicating that he once lived there, but it is now a children's hospice and can only be seen from outside.

Malinski would write: "I can safely say that if it wasn't for him neither Wojtyla nor I would have become priests."

Servant of God Jan Tyranowski, pray for us. 🌹

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Cutting Edge

Science and Religion News

By Dr Gregory Farrelly

Consciousness and the Self

There is a belief among many atheist scientists that self-consciousness, and indeed the concept of the self, is completely explicable in materialist terms; that this is yet another nail in the coffin of theistic belief. Christian doctrine holds that the self results from the divinely created, spiritual, individually distinguished soul. Self-consciousness, of course, will involve physiological and psychological factors and any insights into these will be welcome. We believe that we are still “ourselves”, so to speak, even when unconscious, and that our “selves” continue after death.

In the journal *Physics of Life Reviews*, Stuart Hameroff and Sir Roger Penrose suggest that quantum vibrational computations in microtubules (components of a cell’s structure) are “orchestrated” by synaptic inputs and memory, and terminated by “objective reduction”. Consciousness results from fine-scale activities inside the brain’s neurons. This “orchestrated objective reduction” has received corroboration from a research group in Japan, confirming a “proto-conscious” quantum structure of reality.¹ In their paper Hameroff and Penrose write:

In our model, quantum coherence emerges, and is isolated, in brain microtubules until the differences in mass-energy distribution among superpositioned tubulin states reach a threshold related to quantum gravity. The resultant self-collapse, irreversible in time, creates an instantaneous “now” event. Sequences of such events create a flow of time, and consciousness.²

Essentially, they are arguing that a detailed working out of quantum mechanics pertaining to the microtubules could explain our “unitary” sense of self-consciousness.

Susan Greenfield, a professor of pharmacology at Oxford University, holds that the mind consists of the

physical connections between neurons, evolving slowly and influenced by our past experiences. This “explains” why each brain is unique. She believes that consciousness is an emergent property of the brain, like the “wetness” of water, the result of molecular interactions.

The self and self-consciousness are, of course, not identical. When we are anaesthetised we are not conscious, yet we are still ourselves. What’s needed is an over-arching philosophical perspective that can account for the human self as a coherent being within the universe, linked to matter, yet not determined by it. In Fr Edward Holloway’s system, mind is that which controls and directs; matter is that which is controlled and directed.

By contrast, the views outlined above seem to ignore centuries of well argued, admittedly sometimes contradictory, explanations of being and reality from philosophy, particularly epistemology (theory of knowledge) and metaphysics (theory of being). While scientific theories can (usually) be tested by experiment and/or observation, philosophical theories are tested by their self-coherence and their conformity with reality. The idea of a sort of “emergence” of complexity, self-consciousness etc, whether described by quantum physics or not, invites the question why the universe allows such self-development, such self-complexification. There is a fundamental distinction between the self as a philosophical reality and self-consciousness as describable by biochemical (and quantum) science.

Questions relating to our free will and its impairment are important, so this sort of research should spur on Catholic scientists involved in neurobiology, and Catholic philosophers/theologians, to enter into a constructive debate with scientists such as Penrose and Hameroff. Both sides need to display humility and a willingness to study what may be foreign to them. Catholic philosophers and theologians must familiarise themselves with current scientific thinking through serious study, and not just settle for a nodding acquaintance with some scientific ideas.

For their part, scientists should humbly accept that it may be worth reading what philosophers and theologians have had to say about things such as reality and self-consciousness, accepting that these are philosophical rather than purely physical principles.

The Catholic physicist and philosopher Dominique Lambert offers some illuminating considerations:³

Many, many great scientists are writing books on their activities, but books which are in fact philosophical works... Science produces metaphysical questions and, in fact, great scientists tend to solve these problems... The problem is to believe that these solutions belong to science, or to believe that a philosophical solution is given immediately by science. It’s not true. We cannot say biology leads to atheism because we cannot extract from science something that is not scientific. But we can say, for example, that a religious, theological point of view can illuminate scientific research and can help to extract some coherent meaning... In the Catholic Church, we have a theology of creation whose point of view ... gives to evolution an additional meaning which is not directly present in the scientific research, but that scientific research is coherent with this point of view.

Printing Cells

As outlined in the previous Cutting Edge column (Jan/Feb 2014), 3D printing of cells offers impressive possibilities for medical treatments and research. In the journal *Biofabrication* (Vol 6, No 1), Barbara Lorber, Wen-Kai Hsiao, Ian M Hutchings and Keith R Martin outline a technique for printing new eye cells that could be used to treat sight loss. A “proof of principle” work was carried out using animal cells, though more tests are needed before human trials can begin.

Notes

¹<http://www.scienceagogo.com/news/20140017222508.shtml>

²<http://www.quantumconsciousness.org/penrose-hameroff/orchor.html>

³<http://www.strangenotions.com/lambert>

St Thomas Aquinas and Abortion

By Dr William Newton

Dr William Newton is associate professor of theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

In a debate with an advocate for abortion, one occasionally comes up against an informed opponent who seeks to undermine the Church's position on the issue by pointing out that the Universal Doctor of the Church, St Thomas Aquinas, held to the doctrine of delayed animation or hominisation. According to this theory, ensoulment did not occur at conception but only later: for St Thomas at least 40 days later. This, of course, seems to open the door to the possibility of abortion, a fact disquieting to the average pro-life Catholic.

Certainly, it would be easy to respond that Aquinas is not the Magisterium and so he did, very occasionally, get things wrong – the Immaculate Conception being a stellar example. Or, one could point out that even if Aquinas did ascribe to a theory of delayed hominisation, he still held that abortion before ensoulment was wrong, at least to the degree that it is a form of contraception or that it risks killing a “formed” foetus.

These responses are good and useful but I fear they do not do justice to Aquinas for while he was, of course, almost certainly wrong in subscribing to a theory of delayed animation, there remains much truth in his general approach to ensoulment. Therefore, in this short article, I wish to explain St Thomas's approach and to suggest that his metaphysical principles are ultimately sound. Moreover, I shall suggest that if we were to replace his outmoded embryology with what we now know, the Angelic Doctor himself would be more than likely to conclude that ensoulment took place at the moment of conception.

Aquinas's Metaphysical Principles

Aquinas's anthropology is firmly constructed on the foundation of the hylomorphic theory – the idea that all material things are a composite of a material and a formal principle. In the case of the human being, the formal principle is the soul. While it is the form that gives to matter all its particularity, matter itself must be disposed towards the reception of a given form. So, for example, chickpeas must be soaked and cooked if they are to be digested. This boils down (no pun intended) to saying that the matter currently configured as chickpea cannot receive the form of human flesh without first being disposed. Another example, more classically Thomistic, is that wet wood must be disposed – through the process of drying out – to receive the form of fire.

When this notion of disposition is applied to human generation it leads to the conclusion that the material element of the human being that is given by the parents in procreation must be ready to receive a rational soul before it can actually receive it. Remember, the parents themselves do not give the child his form (the *spiritual* soul) because they only contribute something material, namely a sperm and an ovum; and their own souls – being spiritual and so without parts – cannot divide to provide a soul for their offspring. Hence, the soul must come directly from God through an act of creation, and it is on account of this that we have the term “procreation”.

Given these principles, Aquinas's approach was to say that the rational soul is infused as soon as the matter of the body is ready for such a form. Now, the rational soul gives to a human being the ability to do typically human activities, such as thinking and willing. While at their highest point such activities, particularly conceptualising, are immaterial and so are not ultimately dependent upon the body, Aquinas held that in this life the whole gamut of rational activity needs various interior sense powers that come with the body. He was quite aware that damage to the body – especially damage to the brain – impeded rational activities like thinking.

“If we were to replace Aquinas's outmoded embryology with what we now know, the Angelic Doctor himself would be more than likely to conclude that ensoulment took place at the moment of conception”

The question then becomes: how developed does the body need to be before we can say that it is ready for the rational soul? Aquinas certainly did not think that the brain needed to be fully developed. He knew that the bodily component to rational thinking was not fully developed until well after birth, since children are not capable of rational thinking until after early childhood. Rather, it seems likely that Aquinas held that those organs needed for thinking should at least be visible. He does not say this directly; he says only that the rational soul does not exist “before the organisation of the body”. In Aquinas's day, this organisation could only be verified by the unaided faculty of sight. Hence, the visible presence of the brain (as the requisite presence) seems a reasonable interpretation of Aquinas on this point.

A Human Cause of Development

The question remains, however, how – in St Thomas's view – the body develops to the stage where it is ready to receive a rational soul, by a divine act of infusion. Aquinas very much followed Aristotle on this point. He thought that the male semen acted upon the menstrual blood of the woman, forming this blood into the body of the fetus. Of course, since there is quite a developmental gap between menstrual blood and a fetus, he surmised that this process took some time: hence the delay in hominisation.

More importantly, Aquinas held that the sperm of the man acted like an agent of the male (whom he took to be the active partner in generation) in carrying out the work of developing the blood into a body fit for a rational soul. This development would pass through three stages, marking the three distinct grades of living things. Aquinas says:

Therefore the vegetative soul, which comes first, when the embryo lives the life of a plant, is corrupted, and is

“We must distinguish St Thomas’s perennially valid metaphysical principles from his antiquated embryology”

succeeded by a more perfect soul which is both nutritive and sensitive, and then the embryo lives an animal life; and when this is corrupted it is succeeded by the rational soul introduced from without: although the preceding souls were produced by the virtue in the semen.
(Summa Contra Gentiles, II, 89)

It is important to note here that, for Aquinas, the semen acts as the instrument of the father in bringing about the development of the foetus’s human body – or at least a body fit to receive a rational soul and, by that reception, to become a fully human body. The silent but crucial premise here is that an effect must be proportioned to its cause. Or, we might say, an effect is always somehow contained in its cause. Hence, if water is to be raised to boiling point, it can only be on account of the cause (the fire) being itself as least as hot as 100 degrees Celsius. To apply this principle to the issue at hand, we would have to say that given the effect – the development of a human body – the cause bringing this about must be a human cause. Aquinas respects this metaphysical principle by arguing that the semen is operating like an instrument or tool of a fully human cause, namely the father.

Wheat From the Chaff

What we need to do now is to distinguish the perennially valid metaphysical principles that undergird St Thomas’s account from his antiquated embryology. We have seen that the first metaphysical principle at stake is that material things must be ready to receive a new form. In this case, the form is a rational soul and the requisite disposition on the side of the matter seems to be that those bodily organs needed for thinking must in some way already be present. Now, this is the really critical point: what does it mean for these organs to be present? At least three possibilities present themselves:

- (a) the organ is present and mature (it is operative).
- (b) the organ is present but immature (so not operative).
- (c) the power to develop the organ is present.

As we have seen, St Thomas seems to have held to option (b). What I shall now argue – following in the footsteps of others – is that if we separate out the chaff of Aquinas’s outmoded embryology from the wheat of his own metaphysical principles, this will lead inexorably to option (c). That being the case, the modified Thomistic position tends towards the doctrine of immediate ensoulment.

St Thomas, as we have seen, thought that the development of the body to the level corresponding to option (b) was brought about by the semen acting on the menstrual blood as an instrument of the father. It will be remembered that the principle underlying this was that an effect (the development of a human body) will always be proportioned to its cause. We now know, of course, that the semen does not act as an enduring instrumental cause of the soul of the father. Yet, having stripped away the defunct embryology, we still have the valid metaphysical principle: we still need to find a human cause

that could account for the development (a specifically human development) of the bodily organs needed for thinking.

So, what is this cause? The answer can only be that the zygote is itself that cause because it clearly has within itself what it needs to bring about this development. Certainly, it needs nutrients and oxygen from outside (as we all do) but it has within itself the capability to assimilate and use these things in the pursuit of its development. But, and here is the punch line, if the human cause of the development of the bodily organs is the zygote, then the zygote is already human; and, if it is already human, it already has a rational soul. Thus, we see how stripping away the ancient biology but applying the self-same metaphysical principles leads inevitably to the conclusion of immediate ensoulment.


Addendum

Before concluding, let me at least note one other way that authors have occasionally come to the defence of St Thomas in this matter. We now know that the flesh of the zygote is human flesh in the sense that it has the 46-chromosome constitution proper to human beings. Might it be argued from this alone that we have proof of the existence of a human soul because, according to the hylomorphic theory, the matter is what it is by way of the form, and so human body matter indicates the presence of a human form?

The problem with this argument is that it does not always prove the existence of a human individual. After all, a few cheek cells floating in a petri dish, or a cadaver kept alive by artificial means, would also be examples of the existence of living human flesh; but there is not also the presence of a human person. Hence, what appears to be more important is that the conceptus is the cause of its own development. By this it manifests itself as a self-subsisting, integrated and complete organism of human type.

Conclusion

My objective in this short essay has been to show that in “stripping off the shell of the out-of-date science, we find the permanently valid kernel of ... [Aquinas’s] thought on the soul,” as John Saward wrote in *Redeemer in the Womb*. The obstacle before St Thomas that prevented him from seeing the reasonableness of the doctrine of immediate animation was his belief that the sperm, acting as an instrument of the father, was the enduring agent behind the construction of the foetal body to a state ready for a rational soul. This also led him to make an exception for Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit is an uncreated cause of infinite power He was instantaneously able, Aquinas argued, to build from the blood of the Blessed Virgin a body ready for a human soul.

With this obstacle removed by modern embryology, Aquinas’s durable metaphysics leads us to make Christ’s immediate ensoulment not an exception to the rule, but the exemplar for all. As Vatican II teaches: “Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” 



Comment on the Comments

by William Oddie

Pius XII and Soviet Propaganda

In February, The Vatican insider Sandro Magister wrote a piece headlined “The Thousands of Jews Saved in Churches and Convents”. He drew attention to an article by the Jewish historian Anna Foa which had been picked up by *Osservatore Romano*, and also to the fact that Pope Francis will as soon as possible make available the complete documentation of the pontificate of Pius XII, from 1939 to 1958, which runs to 16 million pages. The work of organising this vast mound of papers has been going on for six years and, says the prefect of the Vatican secret archive, Bishop Sergio Pagano, “will take another year or year and a half”.

The point that emerges from Anna Foa’s researches, however, is that the question of access to this huge archive has quite wrongly dominated the whole controversy of what the pope did or didn’t do for the Jews for many years, with frequent insinuations that the archive’s inaccessibility was motivated by attempts to suppress the shameful secrets it supposedly contains. Now, Anna Foa suggests that this was quite unnecessary, since there was always plenty of evidence of what was happening during the German occupation, outside the archives, in the witness of those Jews directly involved. This is now being properly researched by historians like Dr Foa, who insists that, as a result, we can be sure that the “more recent image of the aid given to Jews by the Church arises not from pro-Catholic ideological positions, but above all from thorough research into the lives of Jews during the occupation, from the reconstruction of the stories of families or individuals. From field work, in short”.

The research in this regard, noted Sandro Magister, is highly advanced. And from this it is becoming ever more clear that the saving of many Jews was not only permitted but also co-ordinated by the highest leadership of the Church. And as Anna Foa unambiguously

makes clear, this research “erases [my emphasis] the image proposed in the 1960s of a Pope Pius XII indifferent to the fate of Jews or even an accomplice of the Nazis”.

When, in February, I wrote a piece about Anna Foa’s research in my *Catholic Herald* blog, I added that I was still mystified by the hardening of Jewish opinion against Pius XII in the aftermath of Hochhuth’s play *Der Stellvertreter*, which had depicted him virtually as a Nazi collaborator, given that the universal feeling expressed by Jews immediately after the war was one of gratitude and warmth towards Pope Pius. When Pius died in 1958, it was still quite natural that Golda Meir, then the Israeli Foreign Minister, should send a cable to the Holy See paying tribute to him. “During the decade of Nazi terror,” she recalled, “when fearful martyrdom came to our people, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims. The life of our times was enriched by a voice speaking out on the great moral truths, above the tumult of daily conflict. We mourn a great servant of peace.” All that collapsed virtually overnight. What happened?

My attention was drawn to a link to an article by a lieutenant general in the Romanian Securitate, published in *National Review* online, where the whole thing is credibly explained. The *National Review* is a paper I have written for myself back in the days when it was still edited by Bill Buckley: this is no fly-by-night old rag, but a paper that stands up its facts before it publishes. There had to be an explanation, and here it was: the revolution in Jewish – and even in much Catholic – opinion had been achieved by a classic and brilliantly executed example of Soviet disinformation. Here’s the story.

In February 1960, Nikita Khrushchev authorised a covert plan to discredit, because of its fervent anticommunism, the Vatican’s moral authority in Western

Europe with a campaign of disinformation, Pope Pius XII being the prime target. According to General Pacepa, who had KGB links:

In 1963, General Ivan Agayants, the famous chief of the KGB’s disinformation department, told us that ‘Seat-12’ [the code name for the campaign] had materialised into a powerful play attacking Pope Pius XII, entitled The Deputy, an oblique reference to the pope as Christ’s representative on earth.

Agayants took credit for the outline of the play, and he told us that it had voluminous appendices of background documents put together by his experts with help from documents purloined from the Vatican. Agayants also told us that The Deputy’s producer, Erwin Piscator, was a devoted communist who had a longstanding relationship with Moscow. In 1929 he had founded the Proletarian Theater in Berlin, then sought political asylum in the Soviet Union when Hitler came to power, and a few years later had ‘emigrated’ to the United States. In 1962 Piscator had returned to West Berlin to produce The Deputy.

The motto of Seat-12 was “Dead men cannot defend themselves”: Pius had died in 1958. Pacepa says that the KGB employed Romanian spies to feign that Romania was preparing to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Under this ruse, Pacepa claims that he obtained entrée to Vatican archives from the Church’s head of secret discussions with the Warsaw Pact, Monsignor Agostino Casaroli. Over two years, three communist spies in the guise of priests secreted materials out of the archives for copying and transfer to the KGB. “In fact,” Pacepa reported, “no incriminating material against the pontiff ever turned up.” But the documents purloined were used in the preparation of the forged documentation which accompanied Hochhuth’s play.

“Soviet attempts to smear Pius had commenced as soon as the Red Army crossed into Catholic Poland”

How credible is all this? Well, according to the *National Catholic Register* (www.ncregister.com/daily-news/disinformation-and-a-dubious-source) it's not credible at all. A book called *Disinformation*, co-written by General Pacepa and the American professor of law Ronald Rychlak (best known for his book *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, a well-researched defence of Pius XII's record during the Second World War), which spells out these revelations at greater length, is “dubious at best” – or at least, the bits written by Pacepa are: the reviewer *NCR* admits that “what Rychlak contributes, drawn from his earlier work on Pope Pius, appears solid”.

Of the *National Review* article, *NCR* says: “Under scrutiny, Pacepa's story began to unravel, with doubts expressed by historians and Vatican experts.” *NCR* gives a link to some of these doubts by “Vatican experts”: unfortunately, these “experts” include John Cornwell, author of *Hitler's Pope*, who said he had never heard the claims described by Pacepa and considers them “most unlikely”, though “as a supporter of Nato and the Western Alliance, it's not inconceivable the pope could have been targeted [by the KGB]. But I haven't seen any credible documents indicating anyone doctored material”. *NCR* seemed particularly affronted that “by casting suspicion on Cardinal Casaroli's judgment and character, Pacepa undermines the integrity of the entire Vatican strategy between 1963 and 1989, known as ‘Ostpolitik’.”

“The policy”, they explained, “involved maintaining dialogue with communist regimes in order to assist the oppressed Church and believers behind the Iron Curtain without legitimising dictatorships. In his memoirs, Cardinal Casaroli described this effort as ‘exceptionally difficult’.” But the Ostpolitik wasn't just difficult, it was disastrous: it didn't help believers behind the Iron Curtain; on the contrary, it undermined them. The Ostpolitik's greatest victim was Cardinal Mindszenty, who was ordered by the

Vatican to resign so that its Ostpolitik could proceed on its disastrous way unhindered by all the awkwardness with the communist authorities which he was causing. The assumption behind the Ostpolitik was that the Eastern bloc would always be there and so had to be accepted as a permanent fact of life: the future Pope John Paul II already knew that it must not be accepted as a fact of life, and that it was itself vulnerable, especially to the Catholic Church. The communists knew that too: hence the disinformation campaign against the anti-communist Pius XII.

Back to General Pacepa. *NCR*'s ultimate debunking of his claims is provided by a quotation from Fr Peter Gumpel, the relator of Pius XII's cause. *NCR* claims this shows that he too is sceptical about Pacepa's claims. Unfortunately for the newspaper, however, Fr Gumpel read its article and absolutely denied any scepticism about Pacepa's claims: not only that, he insisted that *NCR* publish a letter from him, to appear immediately after the “uncouth review” in which it had misquoted him, to express his “outrage”:

My 2007 comment was simply meant to encourage a proper scholarly evaluation of Gen Pacepa's statements at that time – not to dismiss all of them outright, much less declare none of them could ever be established. In fact, the Zenit story referenced misleadingly in your review actually notes that I “agreed” with Pacepa in large part; and what I also told Zenit, but which your review of Disinformation left unmentioned, was the following: “One needs to be extremely prudent and try to verify the facts.” I did not – I repeat – say every aspect of Gen Pacepa's account could never be verified, only that it needed to be carefully considered – which it has been, by numerous scholars, since 2007, during which a considerable amount of new information has appeared supporting it.

Moreover, the way in which my 2001 quotation was used, in the Register's review of Disinformation, leaves the impression that I doubt Pacepa's

statements dealing with the communist disinformation campaign against Pius XII, and consider them nothing more than a spy-induced fabrication. In fact, as anyone who reads the 2007 Zenit news article can see, I made it abundantly clear at the time that there was in fact a concerted communist campaign to infiltrate and compromise the Vatican, and to defame Venerable Pius XII.

Therefore, both Professor Rychlak and Gen Pacepa deserve to be praised, not attacked, for recounting and documenting this indisputable historical reality in Disinformation.

So, where does that leave us? Certainly not with any convincing debunking of General Pacepa's claims. *NCR* gives a link to an article quoting some of those sceptical about them (including John Cornwell, who would be, wouldn't he?). But it doesn't quote any of those who take them seriously. These include, for instance, the German historian Michael F Feldkamp, who writes that “Pacepa's report is wholly credible. It fits like a missing piece in the puzzle of communist propaganda and disinformation aimed at discrediting the Catholic Church and its Pontiff.”

The eminent English historian Michael Burleigh agrees with Feldkamp, and adds that “Soviet attempts to smear Pius had actually commenced as soon as the Red Army crossed into Catholic Poland”. He notes that the Soviets “hired a militantly anti-religious propagandist, Mikhail Markovich Sheinmann” – and that “Hochhuth's play...drew heavily upon Sheinmann's lies and falsehoods...”

Victor Gaetan, the author of the *NCR* story, persisted in saying, even after Fr Gumpel's rebuttal of his “uncouth” piece, that “there's no evidence for [Pacepa's] particular story”. But that's rubbish: Pacepa is a witness, so what he says is itself evidence. And for me, the fact that both Fr Gumpel and the impressive Michael Burleigh take Pacepa seriously has to mean that so must I. And so should the *NCR*.

Baptised Imagination: A Review Essay

By John Gavin SJ

John Gavin SJ is the assistant professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts. He previously taught theology and Greek at the Gregorian University in Rome and at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

“Reason is the natural order of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning” (CS Lewis)

How can an artist depict ritual? On the one hand, any rite possesses perceptible signs and symbols that the artist may pluck from the temporal flow and convert into permanent images: light, water, incense, bodily gestures, garments and sacred spaces may inhabit the canvas or fill the fresco. On the other hand, the full spiritual import of a religious ceremony, informed by text and tradition, eludes even the most devoted artist. How can one convey the experience, the emotional impact, of passing through the material and into the transformative spiritual realm?

In early Christianity, mystery, a quality that modern technocracies have laboured hard to erase, still surrounded the rite of baptism. Initiates, after a lengthy period of preparation, would enter into communion with the Church during an evening ritual replete with natural and biblical symbols. Stripped of their old garments they would plunge naked into the pool of rebirth and emerge with the prelapsarian image restored: baptism realised the platonic ideal of becoming “like God”. The fourth-century poet Ephraem the Syrian could sing of the newly baptised: “They go down sordid with sin; they go up pure like children, for baptism is a second womb for them. Rebirth in the font rejuvenates the old, as the river rejuvenated Naaman.”¹

Robin M Jensen explores the intersection of art, ritual, text and tradition in her new book *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions*. For some years Jensen has made important contributions to our understanding of the creative vision of nascent Christianity. Her *Understanding Early Christian Art* has served as a fine introductory text to the field, while other works, such as *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*, tackle the complex theological problems surrounding the Christian desire to portray the divine. This latest volume demonstrates the importance of early images not only for the study of Christian origins, but also for contemporary theological reflection.

The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar said that the theologian must practise his discipline “on his knees”, and perhaps one may apply this principle to the art historian as well. At the very least, the interpreter of early Christian art must have a spiritual, or even empathic, relationship with the artist who sought to convey his or her transformative experience. Being biblically or culturally informed is not enough. Jensen succeeds in her efforts because she understands that, in baptism, “visible images and actions, along with verbal recitation of ancient stories, prayers, hymns, all contributed to making an invisible presence more palpably sensed” (Jensen, *Baptismal Image* 3). She strives to see the artistic works with a baptised imagination.

As Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, told the recently initiated: “You must not trust, then, wholly to your bodily eyes; that which is not seen is more really seen, for the object of sight is temporal, but that other eternal, which is not apprehended by the eye, but is discerned by the mind and spirit” (Ambrose of Milan, *De mysteriis*, III, 15).

Jensen identifies five themes inherent to the sacrament of initiation: the cleansing from sin and sickness; incorporation into the community; sanctification and illumination; death and resurrection; and new creation. These represent the various facets of the baptismal experience that liberate one from despair and thrust one into a new mode of existence. Any successful artistic representation of such an event, therefore, must encompass varied levels of personal transformation.

The surviving examples of baptismal imagery from the first five centuries can certainly confuse the average viewer, since they reflect this often obscure synthesis of faith and experience. For instance, two easily recognisable scenes from the Jewish scriptures, Jonah emerging from the belly of the whale and Daniel standing unharmed in the lion’s den, grace the walls of catacombs, churches and sarcophagi. If the interpreter remains at the level of text for the hermeneutical key, these depictions easily convey God’s beneficence and protection – themes that suggest baptism, though not necessarily.

Other details, however, invoke the imagination and lead towards a fuller sacramental interpretation. Why, one may ask, are Jonah and Daniel often shown in the nude? Such a detail does not appear in the biblical narrative. The artist may have simply followed classical conventions for depicting heroes: naked, muscular and triumphant. Yet, the ritual-experiential dimension points towards a sign of rebirth and resurrection. Jonah and Daniel, escaping their respective perils, pass through death and return to the paradisiacal state. The shame of nakedness has left them and they, like Christ, abandon their garments in the tombs of a former life. The fact that these images are often found on sarcophagi or in catacombs indicate that Jonah and Daniel anticipate the victorious rising of the baptised Christian: death cannot hold one who is an adopted child of God.

New Testament scenes also contain elements that puzzle the modern observer. Take, for instance, the shrinking of biblical protagonists. The dramatic raising of Lazarus provided rich details for the narrative artist – “Lazarus, come out!” – and proved a popular subject for catacombs, glasses and other objects. But who is the small child often standing at Jesus’s feet? Not just another member of the crowd, but Lazarus

“The Christian who views Lazarus restored recalls his or her own rebirth and liberation from the tomb through the power of the sacred waters”

himself! Not only has the reeking corpse returned to life, but the man has recovered his lost youth. Jensen links this rejuvenation of Lazarus to other images, such as the depiction of Jesus as a child in the baptism by John in the Jordan, or Adam and Eve portrayed as infants at the moment of creation. The Christian who views Lazarus restored recalls his or her own rebirth and liberation from the tomb through the power of the sacred waters. *Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem meum!*

And then there is the menagerie that populates the sacred spaces: fish, lambs, deer, doves, and sea monsters. The fish – *ichthus* – had become a Greek acronym summarising the fundamental Christian truths: *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*. Yet, it also represented the baptised newly caught in the net of faith and rescued from the turbulent waters of the world. Jensen quotes a marvellous fourth-century inscription from southern France, the Epitaph of Pectorius:

*Divine race of the heavenly fish, keep your heart holy,
having received the immortal spring of divine waters.
Comfort your soul, friend, with the ever-flowing water of
wealth-giving wisdom.* (Jensen Baptismal Imagery 73)

One also finds deer that, having long yearned for running waters, at last quench their thirst from the four rivers of paradise; lambs washed in flowing fountains, joyful members of a new flock; and the pure-white dove, the Spirit, who descended upon Jesus during his baptism and now hovers over the Christian faithful. Baptism transforms the believer's understanding of the natural world, which now preaches the Gospel in the language of paradise. One need only consult the fantastic bestiary in the *Formulae spiritalis intellegentiae* of Eucherius, the fifth century bishop of Lyon, to discover the riches of creation's peculiar idiom: the birds are saints, the pelican is Christ, the turtle is the Holy Spirit, the hen is the Church ... (Ciccarese, *Animali* 42-55). Eucherius gives more than allegories; he immerses the reader in the wonder of a new heaven and a new earth.

Architecture also speaks to the imagination that is open to other worlds. Everett Ferguson offers ample material for consideration in his monumental *Baptism in the Early Church*. For example, he takes one on a tour of the baptistery in the early-third century house church of Dura Europos (Ferguson, *Baptism* 440-443). In the baptistery, protology and eschatology intersect in images that demonstrate the restorative and transformative power of sacramental immersion. In one fresco, Adam and Eve confront the serpent, reminding the viewer of humanity's pristine origins and the necessity for freedom from sin; in another, Christ the shepherd stands in paradise, symbolising the liberation from death through divine union. As the initiate stood in the central pool, he or she could also look up at the starry sky depicted on the ceiling, recalling the cosmic significance of the sacred rite. Through art a remodelled home became the site of reformed persons.

The fourth-century baptistery of San Giovanni alle Fonti in Milan stands out for its most important bishop, St Ambrose, and his most famous initiate, St Augustine. Its octagonal shape, typical for such dedicated sanctuaries, makes reference to the “eighth day”, the day of the resurrection. St Ambrose's verses, once inscribed on the baptistery's walls, proclaimed the meaning of the sacred space:

*With eight chapels [niches] the temple rises high for holy use;
the font is eight-cornered, which is appropriate for its gift.
With this number [eight] it was fitting the hall of holy baptism
to erect, by which true salvation returned to the peoples
in the light of the rising Christ, who releases from the prison
of death and raises up the dead from their graves;
and, freeing from the stain of sin the guilty who make
confession, he washes them with the clear flowing water
of the font.* (Ferguson, *Baptism* 638)

The images that surround the sites of early Christian baptism, therefore, not only conveyed interpretations of the rite, but also contributed to the believer's very experience. While the water and trinitarian formula remained the essential instruments of grace, the art and architecture shaped the participants' disposition. The principle of *ex opere operato* – the effectiveness of the sacrament does not depend upon the spiritual state of the celebrant, but upon the proper performance of the rite in the Church – does not preclude the importance of a spiritual openness on the part of initiate and celebrant. Thus, on the night of the Easter Vigil, flickering candles illuminated the artistic signposts that guided the imagination on the road from the confines of temporal existence to the eternal freedom of the eighth day.

Our age, now sadly bereft of biblical literacy, is left to ponder these once startling images. Historical reconstruction and critical tools will help us to interpret them. But will we be able to see them? Such a vision calls for an imagination baptised in the font of spiritual wonder. ✚

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Notes

¹Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymns on Virginity* 7,7, in *The Harp of the Spirit*, trans Sebastian Brock, London: The Fellowship of St Alban and St Servius, 1975, p. 49.



Book Reviews

The Church and New Media – Blogging converts, online activists, and Bishops who tweet

By Brandon Vogt. *Our Sunday Visitor*, 2011, 224pp paperback. Available from Amazon at £8.95

Despite the image of a professor pope who would prefer a quiet library, Pope Benedict enthusiastically promoted the use of the new media in the task of evangelisation in his messages for World Communications Day over several years. Brandon Vogt, a young married man, is an upbeat apostle who has enthusiastically used the new media himself and made great efforts to encourage others to do so. *The Church and New Media* is a part of this apostolate.

Vogt has gathered a collection of articles from some of the best-known bloggers and users of other new media to give guidance on the effectiveness of evangelisation using social media and to offer sound advice to those starting out in the field. In the rough labelling used today, the contributors might be described as “neo-orthodox”: they are some of the people who have used the social media in a positive and effective way in complete loyalty to the magisterium of the Church. There is a local bias in that several of the contributors come from Texas A&M College. Having come to know the contributions and style of many of the writers, I was impressed that they seem to have networked so effectively – and astonished that one college should have produced so many great apostles.

Fr Robert Barron, whose *Catholicism* series of DVDs has proved so popular a

means of building up the faith of uncatechised Catholics, writes of his engagement with those who comment on his YouTube videos. Open comment boxes on the internet provide an outlet for prejudice, abuse and the publication of opinions that do not merit serious consideration. Patience in responding to such commenters is admirable.

The internet apostolate plays a major part in the conversion story of blogger Jennifer Fulwiler. She repeatedly saw how “someone would toss out a half-baked argument against Christianity that might have sounded impressive offline, but it would be quickly demolished in the flood of facts provided by the internet”. She noticed that Catholics had the best answers in a ruthless intellectual environment and were not afraid to get involved in online debate on the most difficult questions.

The prolific blogger Mark Shea points to one of the attractions of the new media for writers: there is nobody who will change your headline “Exploring the Mysteries of the Rosary” to “My Friend the Rosary”. Writers do indeed need to edit themselves, but mistakes are quickly punished in an environment where anyone can comment, and there is a direct link between the quality of writing and the number of readers. Blogging can become a tyranny, though: Fr Dwight Longenecker speaks of how people visit his blog every day looking for the three “E’s”: education, entertainment and enlightenment. I have some sympathy with him. One time, when things were very busy in the parish I did not blog for a week. My sister rang up to check whether I was ill.

As well as direct evangelisation, Catholics are using the internet in imaginative ways to help people within the Church. Matthew Warner’s “Flocknote” project enables parishes to contact people from one source, sending the same material to a person’s email inbox, Facebook or Twitter account, or to their mobile phone by text message; the important thing is that it is the end user that chooses which of these means is the one by which they

prefer to receive information. There is also a chapter on “innovative shepherding” looking at examples from the Archdiocese of Boston and giving recommendations for dioceses and bishops. In England, the dioceses of Lancaster and Shrewsbury have made particularly effective use of the internet in pushing out good news and keeping up with the way in which people choose to receive information, but in some dioceses there is often still an attitude in which people see the internet as irrelevant, looking down on what they see as technically advanced enthusiasts who spend too much time “playing on their computers”.

Priests occasionally say in a mildly superior and accusatory manner: “I don’t know how you find the time to blog.” My stock reply is to answer immediately: “I don’t have a television.” I confess that I find it amusing when this is met with the protest: “Well, I only watch documentaries and the history channel.” As long as we are not nuked back to the stone age or sent offline by a massive solar electromagnetic pulse, the internet is here to stay and is an indispensable part of communication. In the Church we are obliged to communicate in order to spread the gospel of Christ. *The Church and New Media* is an easily readable introduction and demonstration of some of the ways in which this apostolate can flourish.

Within the Church there is much ground to be made up. The priest-blogger Fr John Zuhlsdorf once said that in the Vatican it is “yesterday’s technology tomorrow”, and this is true of many local churches. On the day that the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* was issued, Brandon Vogt set to work to make versions of the encyclical available for Kindle and other e-book formats. Fr Zuhlsdorf immediately read out the entire encyclical and published an audio file. (Lest there be any doubt, the downloads were given away free of charge, as is customary.) In both cases, letters followed from the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* complaining about copyright infringement. Brandon Vogt was even accused of “stealing from the Pope”.

“As long as we are not nuked back to the stone age or sent offline by a massive solar electromagnetic pulse, the internet is here to stay and is an indispensable part of communication”

Pope Benedict's message on the importance of using the new media for evangelisation has not penetrated everywhere, even at the Holy See. *The Church and New Media* would be a good primer for anyone who wants to understand why some of us devote some of our time trying to use the new media for the good.

Fr Timothy Finigan

The Pope's Last Crusade

By Peter Eisner. William Morrow, 292pp, \$27.99, £18.99

The successor of St Peter has probably from the very beginning had to contend with conflict from afar and intrigue nearer at home. This was certainly the experience of Pope Benedict XVI, and it was also true of Pius XI, as this book shows.

Pius XI wrote an average of two encyclicals a year. He condemned communism in *Divini Redemptoris*. But he came to realise that the more immediate menace was from the Nazis. His outspoken denunciation in *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937) was an unparalleled attack on the racism of Nazi policies. In 1938 Pius XI was considering a second encyclical which would enlarge on the point in an even more forthright way.

This book recounts how the Pope turned to Fr John LaFarge, an American Jesuit on the board of *America*, the Jesuit magazine which had already published his analysis on racism, which Pius had read and appreciated. LaFarge, who was on a fact-finding mission to Europe for his editor, was summoned to Castel Gandolfo by personal letter and asked to draft the new encyclical in the deepest secrecy as soon as possible.

LaFarge enlisted the help of two fellow Jesuits and completed the task in four months. He then left for America, because of the worsening health of his brother, and entrusted the draft of the new encyclical to the Jesuit General, Wlodimir Ledochowski. His superior had

other thoughts in mind. He shared the opinion of Pius's Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli, who considered that communism was by far the greatest danger and that criticism of Germany should therefore be muted. The draft encyclical was filed away until Pius died in February 1939 when it was shelved. The softly-softly policy was in fact pursued by Pacelli when he became Pius XII. Personally he sheltered Jews in Vatican territory, but he drew back from denouncing the Nazis' racist policies except in carefully worded terms.

It is perhaps vain to speculate whether a new encyclical would have aroused such a wave of revulsion around the world that *Kristallnacht* and the Final Solution might have been avoided. Pius XII made a tactical decision because he thought Pius XI's approach was too brutal – and because his fondness for Germany led him to consider that Hitler might eventually become more democratic. That was despite outbursts like the speech at the Sportpalast in 1938, in which Hitler raved: “In this hour the whole German people will be united to me: my will they shall feel as their will, just as I regard their future and fate as director of my actions.”

This does not take away from the undoubted holiness of Pius XII, who gave us such magisterial documents as *Mystici Corporis* and *Mediator Dei* and the revised paschal triduum. But it brings home that it takes a great pope to see the broader picture and to rise above the inner circle which surrounds him, advising, prompting and sometimes undermining him. Popes always need our prayers.

James Tolhurst

The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible does and doesn't say about human origins

By Peter Enns. Brazos Press, 161pp, £10.99

The Bible speaks about the creation of the universe and of man. The language and images it uses to describe such

beginnings have their roots in a particular time and culture. One cannot read these passages of the Bible as if they intend to give an accurate description of physical, historical reality. This is neither the way nor the reason they were composed.

Furthermore, in view of the state of scientific knowledge today, unless one is prepared simply to reject scientific evidence, adjustments to the interpretation of the scriptural accounts are always necessary. Without such development of doctrine, those of us who hold the Bible dear can be forced into closing down all dialogue with modern thought. In this book Peter Enns seeks to give Christians, who value Scripture as the Word of God, parameters by which they can understand the Bible and its message while accepting evolution as a valid description of the origin of humans.

Enns has a gift for expressing in an accessible way modern developments in biblical scholarship. The way he describes the setting, culture and language of the biblical authors is engaging. And his outline of current thought on the formation of Genesis and the other books of the Bible is clear and comprehensible. His approach takes seriously the “human dimension” of Scripture and sees it not as an unhappy condescension but as a mark of God's love and of how far He will stoop to commune with His people.

In this respect Enns, an evangelical, is close to Catholic theology, expressed by Pius XII in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*: “Just as the substantial Word of God became like men in every respect except sin, so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language in every respect except error.” This book describes well many of the facets of the “human languages” used by the Holy Spirit to communicate the Word of God to us.

However, in order to be successful in giving parameters for an authentic and modern interpretation of the Bible, one needs a clear understanding of biblical



Book Reviews continued

inspiration and a sound theology of biblical interpretation. Enns does not demonstrate that he has either in a Catholic sense. A Catholic exegete seeks to be faithful to the Church, which means resolutely seeking one's place in the mainstream of the great Tradition of the Church. Assured of the assistance of the Holy Spirit this Tradition, under the guidance of the Magisterium, in former times recognised the canonical writings of the Word of God and has never ceased to meditate on them and search their meaning. Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit is the divine author of the Scriptures, speaking the One Word of God, the Church has a vision of the unity of the Bible. In this context a development of doctrine can be positively identified and adjustments to the interpretation of Scripture, which Enns argues for, can be confidently and authentically made.

Enns does not know this Tradition and, although he recognises a kind of "development of doctrine" within the Bible itself, he does not have the theological tools to set his own thinking in dialogue with the living theology of the Church. It is inevitable that such an individualistic approach to the study of the Scriptures, which does not know how to "listen to the Church", will wander from authentic interpretation.

We see this especially when Enns describes St Paul's use of the figure of Adam simply as a "biblical idiom" available to him as he seeks to express what God has achieved in the death and resurrection of Christ. While Enns recognises that Paul uses the language and symbolism of Adam, he is unable to see that Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, brings to fruit the doctrine sown "in seed" in the book of Genesis. Paul is not only using the vocabulary, language and idioms of the Old Testament in a new context, but developing the content of Revelation itself.

The early writers of the Church expressed it thus: *The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New*. The Holy Spirit gradually unveils the nature of

God and His plan for mankind. This "unveiling" is expressed through the Scriptures, the human authors of which are inspired to write what God wishes while employing their own faculties and doing so in the language and culture of their time. In the Old Testament it was piecemeal and incomplete. In the New Testament it was perfected in the fullness of revelation in Christ. Not having such a theology of inspiration and interpretation, when Enns is wrestling with the concept of a historical Adam he strays from the doctrine of original sin, which teaches that original sin is passed on by generation, and allows for an interpretation that "all have sinned" through imitation or accident or, worse still, because we were created that way.

Enns does not fail in his intention to describe what the Bible does and doesn't say about human origins. What is more, he conveys in a simple way the cultural background which gave rise to the vocabulary, expressions, images and idioms of the words of Scripture. But the Catholic reader cannot place complete trust in Enns' conclusions. Ultimately, he does not speak from the heart of the Church.

Luiz Ruscillo

Love is his Meaning – The Impact of Julian of Norwich

By John Skinner. Gracewing, 145p, £7.99

Julian of Norwich is the best known of the 14th-century English mystics. Her famous book *Revelations of Divine Love*, with its account of the "showing" of her "courteous Lord", is loved by modern readers more than ever. If her English is quaint, her message is refreshingly contemporary with its stress on God's love for us, prefiguring devotions to the Sacred Heart and, more recently, the Divine Mercy. Julian's influence reaches beyond the Catholic world, and there are many interfaith Julian prayer groups around the country.

This being the case, a new introduction to Julian for beginners is always welcome. John Skinner, a journalist

and former Jesuit, has already translated the entire text for Gracewing into modern inclusive language. In this book he presents excerpts from his own translation with a commentary punctuating the text. These comments are most helpful when they refer to the original Middle English to resolve a textual ambiguity or bring out a fuller meaning, and when they set Julian in the context of her time. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to re-state Julian's words in a kind of summing-up, and a subjectivism that some may find off-putting. Extraneous information, such as comparing one of Julian's images with an Orthodox icon, show the author's breadth of knowledge but doesn't really help with understanding Julian. There is very little about medieval anchoritic life, for example.

When she was 34, Julian (we don't know her real name) fell seriously ill and was prepared for death. On her sickbed she received a number of visions, or "shewings", several of which concerned the Passion. The rest of her life was spent meditating on these visions and writing about her experiences. For many years she lived as an anchoress in a cell attached to St Julia's church in Norwich. It might have been helpful to describe the world of Julian, in many ways so different from our own.

The use of the word "impact" in the title is misleading; the book does not address Julian's influence on Christian thinking – a fascinating subject in itself. Anyone buying the book expecting to read about this will be disappointed.

However, as an introduction to the thought of Julian, John Skinner's book is good. The 16 revelations are each quoted in brief and discussed. To begin, a longer vision taken from the latter part of Julian's book is presented as an overview of her thought. The book's format, excerpts from a modern translation divided into short sections by commentary, would lend itself well to group study. If the editorial habit of paraphrasing Julian may seem at times patronising to the reader, it does serve to drive home her message.

“Such a shift parallels the cultural sense that a future without God is no longer felt to be a happy future, and with this cultural shift atheism has lost its appeal”

Gracewing’s edition has large, clear type with a slightly different font for the commentary. It would perhaps have made it easier to determine at a glance which is Julian and which is commentary to have the latter in italics. As they stand, the fonts are similar enough at first glance to confuse the eye.

A book like this runs the risk of being too personal, both in the selection of text and in the commentary. Some readers may find the interruptions in Julian’s text annoying and prefer to let her speak for herself. However, as an introduction for complete beginners, the book will no doubt prove useful and may help to encourage a new generation of Julia’s followers.

Clare Anderson

The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World

By Alister McGrath. Rider, 320pp, £8.99

In the past few years the “New Atheism” of Richard Dawkins and his associates has sought to make atheism seem credible and current. However, as this fascinating, educational and highly readable book indicates, atheism is an ideology past its sell-by date. How does McGrath argue this? Is he convincing, and what are the weaknesses in his account?

The narrative of this book’s subtitle, *The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, runs as follows: the corruption of the Church was so horrendous that it made belief in its God cease to be credible; atheism thus arose as a credible alternative proposing that a new, freer and happier world would arise when belief in God was rejected. However, the horror of atheist regimes in the 20th century made this claim incredible (in the original sense). In addition, at a philosophical level, postmodernity rejected the claims that atheistic modernity had made about reason’s capacity to know with certainty that there was no God. Thus at both an existential and a theoretical level atheism has lost

its appeal. He further argues that the worldwide rise of Pentecostalism fulfils a need for a faith in God that is not linked to the discredited institutions of historical Christianity (ie the mainline churches) and that likewise shares the postmodern rejection of reason.

The argument that McGrath uses to trace and explain this rise and fall is both historical and philosophical. It is historical in that his account progresses through the eras of the Western world to describe the way in which various cultural changes made certain key philosophers seem more credible in one era than they would have been in another. It is historical in that it provides useful thumbnail sketches of the pivotal thinkers involved, describing the different ways in which Feuerbach, Marx and Freud explain away religion as a delusion.

Interestingly, linked with McGrath’s description of the historically conditioned attractiveness of various thought systems is an account of their capacity to engender in the human imagination a vision of a possible society that can appeal and attract intellectual assent as well as seeming to argue for its conclusions. A less sophisticated illustration of this can be seen in the way that science fiction has envisioned various atheistic scientific futures: over the course of the past century such visions of the future have shifted from being utopias to being dystopias. Such a shift parallels the cultural sense that a future without God is no longer felt to be a happy future, and with this cultural shift atheism has lost its appeal.

The general account provided by the book is convincing in many respects, not least in the manner in which it largely fits the facts of history. That said, the fundamentally Protestant thinking of its author deeply colours the work and leads to some significant weaknesses. While the book gives an interesting summary of various authors who have argued that it was the Protestant Reformation that gave rise to atheism, the author fails to note any connection between the rejection (traceable from

nominalism) of reason’s capacity to know reality, the Protestant Reformation’s appeal to faith against reason, intellectual scepticism and current postmodernism. Similarly, given that the book attributes the rise of atheism to the moral corruption of the Catholic Church, it might be noted that this account fails to argue why atheism became prominent when it did. Why didn’t 12th-century corruption give rise to atheism rather than giving rise to great reformers like St Francis of Assisi? The book’s account of Christian history fails to address such questions. Might the influence of nominalism in the subsequent century be relevant? The book does not say.

To look at the same point from a slightly different angle, McGrath seems too uncritical in his acceptance of postmodernism’s rejection of reason’s capacity to know the truth. Thus he asserts that “nothing can be proven at all” (p98) about God by reason – a point that he doesn’t really prove (perhaps because postmodernism denies that reason can prove such things). With reason deemed powerless, all that is left is “faith”. An account that, in contrast, truly acknowledged the capacity of reason to grasp truth would have shown how authentic reason can not only demonstrate that God exists but even show many of His attributes. Another point that could have been usefully articulated is that, despite the scandal and doubt caused by corruption in the Church, the goodness of many Christians and the holiness that is inherent within the Church has led many people to believe in God. The book is thus limited by the postmodernism that it rather uncritically reflects.

This said, while McGrath doesn’t address the problems within postmodernism, the book stands as a fascinating and illuminating postmodern critique of atheism. Such a critique might provide a good morale booster to those weighed down by the triumphalism of the New Atheism, a triumphalism McGrath shows to be misplaced.

Dylan James

Notes From Across the Atlantic

by David Mills, executive editor of *First Things*



The Pope and the Press

“He’s been a bit naive,” wrote the editor about Pope Francis in the December issue of *First Things*, while admitting he’s also been “a bit astute”. Francis’s words “have given unhelpful encouragement to those who would like the Catholic Church to surrender and accept the dominance of our secular elite”, Rusty [RR Reno] wrote in his Public Square column “How to Limit Government”.

I’m not so sure Francis is as naive as Rusty and many others think. As I wrote about Benedict, the press has a settled narrative through which it interprets the papacy. The Pope can’t do much, if anything, to change it.

For Benedict, it began with the “God’s Rottweiler” nonsense and when that proved unusable because it was so clearly untrue, a new narrative developed, reaching maturity about five years into his papacy. The new story claimed that Benedict was old and feeble and an intellectual out of place, who just couldn’t run the Church. It’s the patronising story, not the insulting one, and all the more effective because the writer who tells it usually feigns sympathy.

The press frames every story about Francis as a break with the rigidity, dogmatism etc, of his predecessors – Benedict’s back in the doghouse, so to speak – and the latest example of a new, caring, open, pastoral (read: lenient) Catholicism. Whatever he says, with whatever qualifications he includes, that is the story the press will give the world.

Francis seems to understand this and decided to speak as he thinks he ought to speak, in the hope that over time his message will get out. It’s a risky strategy, but not a naive one.

The always useful blog GetReligion (<http://getreligion.org>) explained this with helpful details. Everyone knows Francis’s statement that the Church can’t be “obsessed” about abortion, Terry Mattingly notes, but pretty much no one – no one who reads *The New York Times*, say – knows about a statement he made a few days later to a group of Catholic gynaecologists.

It’s typical of other statements he’s made, equally uncovered in the papers.

Speaking of the enslaving culture of waste that “requires the elimination of human beings, especially if they are physically or socially weaker”, Francis insisted that “attention to human life in its totality has become a real priority of the Magisterium of the Church in recent years, particularly to the most defenceless, that is, the disabled, the sick, the unborn child, the child, the elderly who are life’s most defenceless”.

He continues: “Each child who is unborn, but is unjustly condemned to be aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who, even before he was born, and then as soon as he was born, experienced the rejection of the world.”

That’s not the story you’ll read in the major newspapers. It doesn’t fit the narrative. But we can’t complain that Francis hasn’t spoken clearly.

Symbols Without Substance

Between the religious belief in revelation and the secular rejection lies a popular middle ground, “the spiritual world picture”, Ross Douthat explains in his *New York Times* column, using the Christmas story as an example. It “keeps the theological outlines suggested by the manger scene – the divine is active in human affairs, every

person is precious in God’s sight – but doesn’t sweat the details”.

This, he explains, “is the world picture that red-staters get from Joel Osteen, blue-staters from Oprah, and everybody gets from our ‘God bless America’ civic religion. It’s Christian-ish but syncretistic; adaptable, easygoing and egalitarian. It doesn’t care whether the angel really appeared to Mary: the important thing is that a spiritual version of that visitation could happen to anyone – including you.”

This kind of religion “lacks the biblical picture’s resources and rigour, but it makes up for them in flexibility. A doctrine challenged by science can be abandoned; a commandment that clashes with modern attitudes ignored; the problem of evil washed away in a New Age bath.”

What Douthat calls the secular picture offers a “fusion of scientific materialism and liberal egalitarianism – the crèche without the star, the shepherds’ importance without the angels’ blessing”. It translates Christianity’s revolutionary egalitarianism into “the doctrines of liberty, fraternity and human rights”.

One can understand the appeal, because the good man’s moral passions last even when he has lost his faith in the supernatural, but as Douthat points out, “its cosmology does not harmonise at all with its moral picture”.

This philosophy “proposes a purely physical and purposeless universe, inhabited by evolutionary accidents whose sense of self is probably illusory. And yet it then continues to insist on moral and political absolutes with all the vigour of a 17th-century New England preacher. And the rope bridges flung across this chasm – the scientific-sounding logic of utilitarianism, the

“They don’t care whether the angel really appeared to Mary: the important thing is that a spiritual version of that visitation could happen to anyone – including you”

Darwinian justifications for altruism – tend to waft, gently, into a logical abyss.”

In other words, these secularists cheat.

A Model for our Times?

Papal and episcopal political statements tend to the general, to principles the application of which is left to laymen, and reasonably enough. But it wasn’t always so, and perhaps shouldn’t be so now. The Archbishop of Mainz, Christian Ketteler, for example, proposed to the German bishops in 1869 a programme to “eliminate or at any rate diminish the evils of our present system”.

Among his seven proposals were prohibiting child labour in factories and limiting the working hours of all workers, which included keeping Sunday as a day of rest; closing unsanitary workplaces; requiring companies to take care of disabled workers; and the appointment of state inspectors. The proposals also included the separation of the sexes in the workplace, undoubtedly to protect women.

His writing influenced Pope Leo XIII and his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. He was, Leo wrote, “our great predecessor”.

Tasteless ‘Virtues’

In this month’s Public Square (“Inequality and Agency”, March 2014), the editor comments on the way many people talk about farming and eating, illustrating (this is me, not him) the way verbally adept people tend to confuse taste with virtue, and the fact that some people compete at both.

In “Let Them Eat Kale”, *The New York Observer* reports that rich and powerful males in the city compete to lose more weight and eat a more disciplined (read: straitened) diet than their peers, a trend someone in the story calls “manorexic.”

“Thin is the new luxury,” a real estate developer tells the writer. A couple of decades ago “the women looked after

their weight, but the men were large,” he said, naming two very big men – physically *and* economically big, he means – from the Eighties. “They could eat prodigious amounts of food. Their girth was considered powerful.”

Today, “old-school fat is considered slothful. Old school was prime rib, new school is parmesan-roasted kale.... Just like people used to frown on smoking, now they frown on bad eating.” Count us old-school.

“I look at eating as fuel. Eating is not social. It’s a fuel event,” says another friend of the writer’s, described as “ripped”, who when invited to other peoples’ homes for dinner smuggles in fruit and nuts in his wife’s purse. Sometimes, he brags, he brings his own food and cooks his meals in his host’s kitchen, apparently without asking.

I was taught, as undoubtedly many of you were, to eat what your hosts gave you and pretend to like it, no matter how vile it was. It was a way of honouring them for their kindness. It was just good manners. But the man whose belly is his god has no interest in good manners.

The writer asks his “ripped” friend if he feels embarrassed cooking his own food because he won’t eat his host’s. “I would never be embarrassed. I’m embarrassed for them and the way they eat.”

A Lesson for Literary Critics

In “Where Does Writing Come From?”, published in *Granta*, the novelist Richard Ford mentioned his pleasure at a critic’s “singling out for approval my choice of adjectives, which seemed to him surprising and expansive and of benefit to the story”. One example he (the critic) noted was “He looked on her in an old-eyed way.”

A little later, packing up his manuscripts, Ford happened to see “the page and the very commended phrase ‘old-eyed’, and to notice that somehow in the rounds of fatigued retyping that used to precede a writer’s final sign-off on a book in the

days before word processors, the original and rather dully hybridised ‘cold-eyed’ had somehow lost its ‘c’ and become ‘old-eyed’, only nobody’d noticed since they both made a kind of sense.”

God’s own Ballpark

“That makes a difference,” said my friend at lunch, his eyes narrowing. We’d been discussing going to a Yankees game next year, as he grew up in New York, and he’d asked cheerfully if I was a Pirates fan, as we’d lived in Pittsburgh so long. No, I said, I grew up in Massachusetts and so...

After a few seconds of silence he recovered and said that the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft, a frequent sight at Fenway [home of the Boston Red Sox] and a man whose baseball passions are properly ordered, says that when he gets to heaven, as he hopes to do, he will ask God two questions: why did he allow evil and why did he favour the Yankees?

These are, of course, the same question.

Marks of Distinction

The five best punctuation marks in literature, according to a website called *Vulture*, include the parentheses in Nabokov’s *Lolita*: “My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three”; and the colon in the opening to Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*: “Marley was dead: to begin with.”

My friend Mike Aquilina suggests the period in Flannery O’Connor’s story “Revelation”: “‘I am not’, she said tearfully, ‘a wart hog. From hell.’”

I’m also fond of the conversation in one of Wodehouse’s books when the two male characters, who are supposed to be looking for a lost child or something like that, pass a pub:

“?”

“!”

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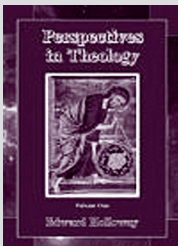
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