

faith

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Retrieving *Gaudium Et Spes*

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A Thematic Summary of *Gaudium et Spes*

Hugh MacKenzie

Descartes as Synthesiser of Christianity and Science

Leonard Ares

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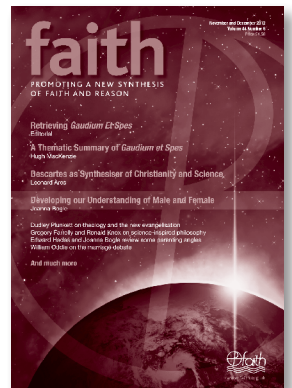
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faith

November and December 2012
Volume 44 Number 6

In its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Second Vatican Council called for a truly ecclesial intellectual development. As we explain in our **editorial** this was one of the clearest demands of the Council, yet it has also been one of the most ignored. Our **first feature** presents a thematic summary of this document, quoting from it extensively. Later in this issue **Dr Dudley Plunkett** shows how some of the newer theological institutes have borne fruit through their openness to the Council's call.

Gaudium et Spes, as the constitution is normally referred to, based many of its reflections upon the following insight: "The human race is passing from a rather static concept of the order of things to a more dynamic, evolutionary one" (n.5). Its authors, as well as Ronald Knox 20 years earlier and to some degree René Descartes 350 years earlier, recognised that such an understanding was invited by the method of the new sciences. In this issue we publish relevant extracts from Knox's ***God and the Atom***, along with a reflection on **Descartes'** attempts to prevent such a dynamic concept from affecting static aspects of traditional Catholic metaphysics. Our editorial suggests that Etienne Gilson and his school attempted something essentially similar. Knox seems to acknowledge that some of our problems arise from our "friends", when he writes:

"There will be fresh attempts to dissociate natural theology altogether from our experience of the natural world around us, to concentrate more and more on precarious arguments derived from the exigencies and the instincts of human nature itself."

Knox's words, beautifully crafted as ever, call for a new "synthesis" of classical Christianity with the philosophical implications of modern science. *Gaudium et Spes* clearly associates with such a call a spirit of openness to insights that have matured outside the visible boundaries of the Church. Our editorial suggests that the lack of such openness was a flaw of pre-Vatican II Catholicism that contributed to its decline in the western world in the second half of the last century. Knox hints at why this was so. Given the failure of the idea pushed by "the Partisans of Utopia ... that Science is the beacon-light which points the way to universal happiness" we should remember, he wrote, that

"when you have lost your way and are asking for directions, few things are more annoying than to be given, by some local Good Samaritan, an exact account of where you went wrong. Our contemporaries, and posterity if there is any, will be more grateful to a Christianity which can offer them some message of encouragement." And justly so, we would add, given the advances made in our knowledge of nature since the Enlightenment.

As this magazine has been doing consistently for 40 years now, our columns in this issue – especially *Cutting Edge*, *Letters*, *Notes from Across the Atlantic* and our new column *Continuity and Development* – explore some of the ways in which we can move forward.



Retrieving *Gaudium et Spes*

Editorial

“No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment” Mt 9:16

During this Year of Faith, 50 years on from the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, the Church is calling us to recover the texts of that ecumenical council as “normative” for the 21st century. The Council’s fourth and last “constitution” – published on the last working day of the four-year Council, 7 December 1965 – is known by its opening words *Gaudium et Spes*, although its proper title is “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”. It is, in effect, a new plan of action, or at least a statement of strategy for the whole Church in the face of a rapidly changing world. At this providential moment the actual text of the Pastoral Constitution remains profoundly applicable and prophetic. Yet its key themes are still either widely ignored or woefully misrepresented.

Central to its message is the call for a comprehensive development in Catholic thinking and the presentation of magisterial doctrine to the modern world. At the same time, that continuity with Tradition, which is an essential mark of authentic and integral Christianity, is clearly emphasised. The fact that the Constitution bears the tag “pastoral” is sometimes taken to mean that it has no dogmatic force. However, its authoritative power as a solemn magisterial document does not lie in anathemas, but in its repeated insistence on the urgency of a new evangelical imperative which is laid on the Church in these intellectually, socially and spiritually turbulent times.

Urgency

The word “urgent” is prominent in the text, and its sense of urgency has lost none of its impact over the intervening decades. It is now just over 100 years since Blessed John Henry Newman’s introduction to his *Development of Christian Doctrine* spoke of “waking up with a new world to conquer without the tools to do it”. That idea was regarded as dangerously progressive and uncalled for by the English ecclesial establishment of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In our own day the prevailing ultra-conservatism, which failed to address the need for authentic development before the Council, contributed in no small measure to the doctrinal and pastoral crisis which has followed it.

The Council called for a development of doctrine but the documents gave only a few pointers to specific developments. Cardinal Newman’s words have proved all too prophetic. In the years following the Council the very idea of “development” was hijacked by influential voices of anti-doctrinal dissent and anti-magisterial rebellion. The actual texts of the constitutions were all too often ignored in favour of vague and spurious invocations of “the spirit of the Council”, or else they were superficially raided for selective and misleading quotations.

Theological schools and pastoral initiatives came to dominate which, either in principle or in practice, downplayed the

transcendent divinity and the incarnate authority of Christ as literal Godhead made Man living in his Church as the source of truth and life for humanity. Throughout the 1970s and 80s *Faith* magazine often protested against these betrayals of Catholic truth and of God’s people, all the while calling for and offering the outlines of a development of doctrine which is faithful to the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and the tradition. Through it the re-evangelisation envisaged by the Council might be achieved.

More recently, we have seen a welcome rediscovery of the treasures of Catholic truth and tradition, especially among the young. However, a certain neoconservative reaction has also arisen which, in some quarters, recklessly criticises *Gaudium et Spes* in particular, even dismissing some of its contents as heterodox. Quite often these reactions reveal a failure to understand the implications – both positive and negative – of modern culture for the presentation of the Gospel. Thus, while rightly stressing the necessary continuity of Church teaching, they fail to grasp the concomitant need for development – a development that is now long overdue.

Polarisation and failure

Ignorance and misunderstanding of what *Gaudium et Spes* really says and calls for have done the Church and the world a tragic disservice. It is nothing less than a failure to implement the full teaching of Second Vatican Council, which is indeed an authentic council of the Church in continuity with all her other ecumenical councils. Invoking *Gaudium et Spes* to suggest that binding Church teachings can be “transcended”, modified out of all recognition or simply set aside in the name of modernity is an abuse of both the letter and the spirit of the Pastoral Constitution. Equally, to suggest that it is enough merely to reassert Catholic teaching in the language and the manner of the recent past is to ignore the core message of the Magisterium outlined in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Key themes of the Pastoral Constitution

The main themes of the document can be summed up in the following nine points:

1. Humanity has entered a “new stage of history”.
2. Science has had a major impact on contemporary thought, life and culture.
3. There are significant dangers for humanity in this.
4. There is also sincerity and insight outside the Church, which could be harnessed to good effect.
5. Humanity clearly needs a new vision of its place in the cosmos.
6. The Church has a key role in providing this crucial development in a manner which avoids the dangers.
7. It is necessary to present again the saving truths of revelation to the modern world.

8. Acknowledging Jesus Christ as the recapitulation of history and creation is at the heart of this vision and its production.
9. We should expect God to provide the grace to respond to the challenge.

The discursive, exploratory nature of the text interweaves these key themes throughout, reinforcing and developing them as the document progresses. To show this, we have produced an overview of each theme, with appropriate extracts, in the editorial article that follows.

It is difficult to deny that many of the potential dangers for humanity in the development of a scientific but secular culture outlined by *Gaudium et Spes* have now become a reality. The document did not simply call for the Church to “open itself to the world” in an uncritical and imprudent way. Where that approach has been taken it has proved a recipe for the secularisation of the Church rather than for the re-evangelisation of society. However, just as the early missionaries to England were instructed by the Pope who sent them not to destroy but to build on whatever elements of truth and goodness they found in pagan culture, so too *Gaudium et Spes* pointed out that elements of modern secular culture contain genuine insights into the cosmos and human nature, and that authentic movements towards the global integration of the human family – as well as much good will and sincerity of heart – can be found outside the visible boundaries of the Church. All of which can and should be harnessed for the glory of God and for the salvation of the nations.

“*Gaudium et Spes* did not simply call for the Church to ‘open itself to the world’ in an uncritical and imprudent way”

When we speak of a “new synthesis of science and religion”, what we mean is shedding the full light of revelation on that unified and dynamic vision of the cosmos which has been uncovered by modern research so that we can present to the world again the orthodox Catholic vision of Man and of all Creation in Christ in a powerful and convincing way. This is what *Gaudium et Spes* also called for. Yet in our opinion, apart from Edward Holloway, founder of *Faith* magazine, only Stanley Jaki and the British analytical philosopher John Haldane among prominent Catholic thinkers have taken seriously what that constitution describes as the “passing from a rather static concept of the order of things to a more dynamic, evolutionary one” in a way that maintains continuity with defined Catholic dogma.

The French philosopher Etienne Gilson did attempt to address the impact of science while remaining faithful to the tradition, and his book *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality* (1972) is still influential

among some neo-scholastics. Yet, through the claim that scientific methodology rigorously excludes final causality he sought to prevent scientific discovery having any metaphysical implications. Ultimately such a philosophy remains closed within a Kantian realm of *a priori* ideas, untouched by and unable to communicate with the discoveries of the telescope and the microscope. In this issue Leonard Ares sketches the Cartesian foundation to this approach to science. It is hard to square it with the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*.

The constitution has been described as encouraging a shift from deductive to inductive methodology, in other words one based upon a developing understanding and observation of human nature. To that extent it represents a return to the original Aristotelian tradition that recognised the need to develop metaphysics out of observation of the physical. Even Stanley Jaki’s grand attempts to develop a Christian account of the origins of science ultimately find that metaphysical hurdle difficult to jump.

On the other hand, the so called Transcendentalist school of thought – in its broadest sense including Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and Henri de Lubac – has attempted to develop a synthetic world view for modernity. However, in our opinion, and here we would include Hans Urs von Balthasar, these thinkers bear too much of a Hegelian flavour to be truly consistent with Catholic tradition – notwithstanding de Lubac’s outstanding contributions to the nature–grace debate. *Gaudium et Spes* calls for a development in our concept of human nature (paras 44 & 61, and cf. 22), made up as we are of physical body and spiritual soul (14 & 41, and cf. 29). In this magazine we have often argued the failure of the Transcendentalist tradition to do this in a way that clearly supports Catholic realism and Christology.

In *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (2007) the British Dominican Fergus Kerr has shown how the often-insightful developments of the *Nouvelle Théologie* stepped too easily beyond some of the careful and necessary metaphysical and epistemological distinctions worked out by the older scholasticism. In his review of this book R R Reno, who has since become editor of *First Things*, went further in his appeal for more careful development, stating: “The collapse of neo-scholasticism has not led to the new and fuller vision sought by [these thinkers]. It has created a vacuum filled with simple-minded shibboleths” (from his article “Theology after the Revolution”, *First Things*, May 2007).

The French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is widely known for his efforts to develop a Christ-centred vision of cosmic evolution. Unfortunately, because he makes matter and spirit twin aspects of one essential energy, the outcome of his thought tends to collapse the infinite distinction between God and creation, with Jesus Christ becoming the final flowering of an emergent godhead. In our view, the

“Ignorance of what *Gaudium et Spes* really says has done the world a tragic disservice.”

delegates who dominated the first Vatican-sponsored conference on evolution, in 2009, as well as members of the American Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, have been all too inclined to support this kind of thinking.

In his article “Rescuing *Gaudium et Spes*: The New Humanism of John Paul II” (*Nova et Vetera*, 2010) George Weigel has tried to show some of the depth of theology in the Pastoral Constitution and its connection to the work of Blessed John Paul II, who was instrumental in its composition. He brings out the document’s “prescient” focus on “the anthropological question” (the account of human nature and identity) in the modern world. John Paul II’s own writings did much to develop a new “personalist” vision of Catholic moral, spiritual and social teaching, although not perhaps a clear anthropology or philosophy of human nature as body and soul.

However, Weigel gives too little emphasis to the equally prescient emphasis in *Gaudium et Spes* on the dynamic world view ushered in by science, nor to its vision of the Christ as the recapitulation of all creation and history. This latter theme was prominent in John Paul II’s papal writings, especially in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Apostolic Letter, 1994) and *Incarnationis Mysterium* (Jubilee Year Bull, 1998) cf. www.faith.org.uk/Ideas/TwoTexts.htm#bot.

“Gilson’s philosophy of science ultimately remains closed within a Kantian realm of *a priori* ideas, untouched by and unable to communicate with the discoveries of the telescope and the microscope”

Pope Benedict emphasised the same theme in his post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010; see Canon Ruscillo’s articles in our last two issues). More recently, at the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, the Holy Father said that the aim of Vatican II was to revive a living and personal faith in Jesus Christ in individual hearts and minds. He suggested that this aim has been largely unrealised and that the real fruits of the Council are as yet undeveloped. In many ways – although not completely, nor without controversy – the other constitutions of the Council have been implemented, but *Gaudium et Spes* in its core message remains the forgotten constitution. The failure to connect Christ, man and creation in a single, coherent and orthodox vision, for the age of science, is a vital missing link in the Church’s efforts to preach “the Word who is Life” to our post-Christian world.

For Jesus Christ to be seen and accepted as Lord of individual hearts and minds, he must also be acknowledged as the Lord of history and of the whole of creation, which from its very beginning was centred and predestined upon his coming in the flesh. We must reclaim all truth and the

whole of reality as coming from the Eternal Logos and finding their fulfilment in the Logos Incarnate. Christ the Lord is the meaning and fulfilment both of matter and of spirit, and he is the answer to the enigma that is man, in whom both orders of creation are united.

“The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.” (GS 22)

Only he can heal our wounded nature and unite our troubled world in the wisdom and peace that comes uniquely from the mind and heart of God.

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council, through its Pastoral Constitution, called for an intellectual development that synthesises science, personalism and other aspects of modern culture with Church teaching, in a spirit of respectful but evangelical openness towards those outside the Church. Reviving the vision of the Greek Fathers it saw Jesus Christ as the recapitulation of the whole of history, but it did not offer much specific development of philosophy or theology to underpin a new apologetic able to inform a fruitful dialogue with modernity and a new call to faith. Pope Benedict has called for a Year of Faith in which we are to return to our own foundations – spiritual and doctrinal, especially as outlined in Vatican II – so that we can take up the task of re-evangelising our scientifically sophisticated yet now largely faithless culture.

A Thematic Summary of *Gaudium et Spes*

By Hugh MacKenzie

The Editor illustrates the nine themes presented in the editorial with quotations taken mainly from the first part of Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

Bullet points are all direct quotes from the text, except for words in square brackets. The translation we have used is from the Vatican website. Especially in theme 4 on the facing page, which contains we believe those sentences that have caused most concern among those of a conservative mindset, we have slightly retranslated a few phrases, usually making reference to the relevant Latin words. Numbers in brackets are paragraph numbers.

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1. We now Have a New Culture

We are entering "a new stage of history ... a true cultural and social transformation" (4) in which "the human race is passing from a rather static concept of the order of things to a more dynamic, evolutionary one" (5).

More specifically:

- There is "a movement toward more mature and personal exercise of liberty" (6); "new social relationships between men and women" (8); a growing thirst for a "full and free life" (9).
- "For the first time in human history all people who have [sibi habent] the benefits of culture are convinced that these benefits ought to be and actually can be extended to everyone. (9)
- There is a "growing interdependence ... a world becoming more unified every day ... [a growing awareness of] rights and duties with respect to the whole human race" (26).
- Indeed there are "new ways of thinking ... which better promote and express the unity of the human race" (57).

Gaudium et Spes summarises this new situation in para 41:

"Modern man is on the road to a more thorough development of his own personality, and to a growing discovery and vindication of his own rights ... the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by this responsibility to his brothers and to history."

2. Science Has Had a Major Impact

In its introduction *Gaudium et Spes* makes this foundational statement:

"Today's spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution. Intellectual formation is ever increasingly based on the mathematical and natural sciences and on those dealing with man himself, while in the practical order the technology which stems from these sciences takes on mounting importance. This scientific spirit has a new kind of impact on the cultural sphere and on modes of thought. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, the human race is passing from a rather static concept of the order of things to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be" (5).

"There has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis" (n.5)

Part I of the constitution, "The Church and Man's Calling", from which most of the quotations below are taken, focuses upon the nature of man who today "has won superlative victories, especially in his probing of the material world and in subjecting it to himself" (15). Part II, "Some Problems of Particular Urgency", has a section on the proper "development of culture", which provides some of the quotations below, and affirms that we now have "a culture which [has arisen] from the enormous progress of science and technology" (56). "The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which affect life" (62).

3. There are Significant Dangers in This New Culture

At the same time as these seemingly positive developments man appears "burdened down with uneasiness" (4) and "mutual distrust" (8). Before man "lies the path to freedom or to slavery" (9). So the last two chapters of Part I affirm that "Christ's Church, trusting in the design of the Creator, acknowledges that human progress can serve man's true happiness, yet she cannot help echoing the Apostle's warning: 'Be not conformed to this world' (Rom 12:2)" (37).

“Accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelisation”

For there is a real temptation toward the “annihilation” of the dignity of man (41), by “losing sight” of the fact that man has a nature (61).

So it is that “growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice; on every side they influence literature, the arts, the interpretation of the humanities and of history and civil laws themselves. As a consequence, many people are shaken” (7). The more theoretical analyses of the first two chapters of Part I bring out that:

- “Atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age, and is deserving of closer examination” (19).
- There is an already apparent need for “abundant changes in society” (26).
- “Believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for this situation ... to the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life” (19).

4. Acknowledgment of the Sincerity and Insight of Many Non-Catholics

Because of the above (cf. first sentence of Chapter IV, “The Role of the Church in the Modern World”, beginning at para 40) the Council wanted to foster a respectful “dialogue” with the great mass of people outside the Church “acknowledging their positive values” (57). For, as we have seen, these people, as well as taking some very dangerous paths, have developed insights from the Christian tradition by effectively synthesising them with new discoveries about nature. This challenging, confusing reality is faced by many Catholics every day. No “New Evangelisation” can afford to ignore it.

So Part I builds up a thread which would seem a rational development, yet involves some of its most controversial statements. The Vatican website’s translation may not be the most conservative interpretation of the text. We have retranslated a few parts of these, putting some of the relevant Latin in square brackets.

- Chapter I: “Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution” (16).
- Chapter II: “Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters ... it is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error” (28).
- Chapter IV: “The council now sets forth certain general principles for the proper fostering of this mutual exchange and assistance in concerns which are in some way common to the world and the Church” (40).

- Chapter IV: “The Church proclaims the rights of man, she acknowledges and highly values the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are promoted everywhere. ... this Council acknowledges all the true, good and just elements inherent in the very wide variety of institutions which the human race has established for itself” (40).

Paragraph 40 offers some qualification of the above: “not that there is any lack in the constitution given her by Christ”, and the Church “serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society”.

This is the context for understanding some of document’s most humble of expressions, such as: “Christian revelation contributes greatly [*subsidium affert magnum*] to the promotion of this communion between persons, ... a world becoming more unified every day” (23) and, the Church “contributes toward making the family of man and its history fully human [*humaniorem reddendam*]” (40). This might even perhaps be rendered: “the Church fosters the fully human formation of the family and history of man.”

This courtesy of Vatican II towards those outside the Church is the context for understanding the invitational and generous opening words of the whole constitution, which affirm:

“Nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in the hearts [of members of the Church], ... [which] community realises that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds ... this Council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for, the entire human family with which it is bound up than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems.”

5. The Urgent Need for a New Synthesis

Thus we can conclude that “there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis” (5). In later, more practical parts of the document some key questions are articulated:

- “How can we quickly and progressively harmonise the proliferation of particular branches of study with the necessity of forming a synthesis of them, and of preserving among men the faculties of contemplation and observation which lead to wisdom?” (56).
- “How is the dynamism and expansion of a new culture to be fostered without losing a living fidelity to the heritage of tradition?” (56)
- “How is the autonomy which culture claims for itself to be recognised as legitimate without generating a notion of humanism which is merely terrestrial, and even contrary to religion itself?” (56).

Might it be a certain failure to answer these questions which

A Thematic Summary of *Gaudium et Spes* continued

makes this statement seem a worrying anachronism: “The number constantly swells of the people who raise the most basic questions or recognise them with a new sharpness” (10). Fifty years on the needs below would seem unmet:

- “Our era needs wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanised” (15).
- “The future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping” (31).
- “The enormous progress of science and technology must be harmonised with a culture nourished by classical studies according to various traditions” (56).
- “It remains each man’s duty to retain an understanding of the whole human person ... a profound inquiry into the meaning of culture and science for the human person” (61).

6. The Church’s Role in Synthesising Modern Insights With Perennial Doctrine

As we have seen (eg in para 16), this is a shared predicament. Moreover, “it is sometimes difficult to harmonise culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith” (62).

Yet “When God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible” (36). Furthermore “faith ... directs the mind to solutions” (11).

Thus, in addition to the shared tasks of humanity outlined in the above section, we have these increasingly specialised, ecclesial tasks:

- “[Achieving] the witness of a living and mature faith, namely, one trained to see difficulties clearly and to master them ... [atheistic] questions ought to be examined seriously and more profoundly” (21).
- “By unremitting study [the faithful] should fit themselves to do their part in establishing dialogue with the world and with men of all shades of opinion” (43).
- “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word.” (44) ... “deciphering authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose” (11). “The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which affect life and which demand new theological investigations” (62).

- “Theologians ... are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another” (62).

We should remember that all these contemporary tasks are the ones termed “normative for the 21st century” by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. These duties, which might simply be termed “seeking a proper presentation of the Church’s teaching” (21), are synthesised in paragraph 62:

“May the faithful, therefore, live in very close union with the other men of their time and may they strive to understand perfectly their way of thinking and judging, as expressed in their culture. Let them blend new sciences and theories and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and the teaching of Christian doctrine, so that their religious culture and morality may keep pace with scientific knowledge and with the constantly progressing technology....Thus they will be able to interpret and evaluate all things in a truly Christian spirit, ... and priests will be able to present to our contemporaries the doctrine of the Church concerning God, man and the world, in a manner more adapted to them so that they may receive it more willingly.”

“Let the faithful blend new sciences with the teaching of Christian doctrine, so that they will be able to interpret and evaluate all things in a truly Christian spirit” (n.62)

Lest this repeated and urgent call of the Ecumenical Council appear controversial the Council reminds us that:

“From the beginning of [the Church’s] history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too” (44). Further, “the Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures” (58).

Such “accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelisation” (44).

7. Overall Purpose of Such Development

Gaudium et Spes reminds us of the perennial goal of this effort. It is that, appropriately for the modern world:

- “[The Church might] make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible” (21).
- “Revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage” (44, all repeated in 58).

“The human race is passing from a rather static concept of the order of things to a more dynamic, evolutionary one”

- “In her preaching [the Church] might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations” (58), “as well as to the needs of the learned” (44).

8. Founding the Vision: Jesus Christ as the Recapitulation of History

The last paragraph of the Constitution’s “Introductory Statement” presents the heart of the vision it proposes as the “key” to unlocking the problems it has outlined. This key is “welcoming” Christ as the recapitulation of secular and salvation history, man being “body and soul”, in his image.

“[The Church] holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history ... Under the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creature, the council wishes to speak to all men in order to shed light on the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time” (10).

It is a theme to which the document returns towards the end of each of the four chapters in its first and main part, “The Church and Man’s Calling”, linking it with the theme of the chapter:

- Chapter I: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light ... in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown” (22).
- Chapter II: “As the firstborn of many brethren and by the giving of His Spirit, He founded after His death and resurrection a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love” (32).
- Chapter III: Christ “entered the world’s history as a perfect man, taking that history up into Himself and summarising it”; this is shortly followed by a point fairly crucial for understanding the human predicament today, namely that “the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one” (38).
- Chapter IV: “God’s Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilisation, the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings” (45).

Such a vision of the Word made flesh can provide the basis for the synthetic vision that *Gaudium et Spes* has called for:

“Since it has been entrusted to the Church to reveal the mystery of God, Who is the ultimate goal of man, she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own

existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself ... For by His incarnation the Father’s Word assumed, and sanctified through His cross and resurrection, the whole of man, body and soul, and through that totality the whole of nature created by God for man’s use” (41).

“Only God, Who created man to His own image and ransomed him from sin, provides the most adequate answer to the questions, and this He does through what He has revealed in Christ His Son, Who became man” (41).

9. Filling out this Synthesis: Our Need of God’s Grace

The above is a grand task. For man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Given the needs of our time, we should have this active trust:

- “To this questioning only God fully and most certainly provides an answer as He summons man to higher knowledge and humbler probing ... led by the Holy Spirit Who renews and purifies her ceaselessly” (21).
- “With the needed help of divine grace men who are truly new and artisans of a new humanity can be forthcoming” (30).
- “It is, finally, through the gift of the Holy Spirit that man comes by faith to the contemplation and appreciation of the divine plan” (15), “purified and perfected by the power of Christ’s cross and resurrection” (37).

Descartes as Synthesiser of Christianity and Science

By Leonard Ares

Leonard Ares outlines René Descartes' attempt to prevent human knowledge, especially concerning the existence of God, from being undermined by a new scepticism and a new science. In as much as he founds metaphysics through knowledge which is *a priori* to scientific observation his is still a popular approach among neo-scholastic philosophers of science. Mr Ares is studying for a PhD in French literature at the University of Alabama.

In his *Meditations*, René Descartes constructs a theory of the universe that begins with doubt rather than faith. In putting all his preconceived opinions and ideas to the test, he questions almost everything. This is in order to ground knowledge of the truth. In mistrusting his senses, because he well knows that the senses can sometimes deceive, Descartes leans towards the mind and the intellect as reliable sources of information. In *Meditations*, he addresses both the interpretation of the physical world that is accomplished by means of the senses and the interpretation of things linked to the metaphysical domain that are conceived of by means of the intellect. Descartes wants to prove that God exists in order to found metaphysically the "new science" which Galileo's mathematical and experimental work had begun to articulate. Consequently, Descartes' texts and writings indirectly advance Judeo-Christian beliefs and traditions in a manner acceptable to the ecclesiastical authorities of his time. They meet a need to respond to the challenge presented by the new science to the old philosophy of the previous era.

Being Catholic and French in the 17th century, Descartes wants God to play a large part in his system. He works hard to find a proof of the existence of God that concurs with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 17th century, the ideas of the Reformation were spreading throughout the world and the Church did not accept very graciously the new scientific ideas that mixed themselves with God and religion. Conscious that the Inquisition was active and powerful at the time and that it was necessary to be careful not to agitate European ecclesiastics with the contents of his writings, Descartes proceeded prudently and cautiously with the development and justification of his theories. All the great philosophers and intellectuals of Descartes' time, of course, were familiar with the manner in which the Church treated Galileo and his new heliocentric theory concerning the solar system. Descartes did not want to have to appear in front of a Church commission to defend his new science, which might seem suspect or undermining of Church teachings. He hoped that his science would be viewed as completely irreproachable to Catholic authorities.

In writing the *Meditations*, Descartes stays in conformity with Catholic teachings. Throughout his texts, one observes that Descartes advances, at least indirectly, the principles of the Holy Scriptures and Judeo-Christianity. In the last paragraph of the Third Meditation, one notices a direct reference to Catholic instruction: "For, as the faith teaches us, the supreme happiness of the other life consists in that single contemplation of the Divine Majesty, of which we already experience, albeit in a much less perfect contemplation, but that causes us

nonetheless to rejoice of the greatest contentment of which we are capable of sensing in this life" (42). Descartes clearly advocates the contemplation of God. He goes beyond the science of his youth, but does not oppose Church dogma.

According to Descartes, his former Jesuit teachers think superficially because they observe the world only by means of the physical senses. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes states: "What is fairly well manifest of what even the philosophers hold for maxims in the schools is that there is nothing in their understanding that had not first been in the senses, where, however, it is certain that the ideas of God and of the soul have never been" (37). Descartes holds fast to the idea of going further than his former scholastic teachers by profoundly examining both metaphysical and earthly existence. In light of the new science, he feels the need to extract metaphysics from being founded upon that which is perceived through the senses. At a certain point in this endeavour, he comes to believe that he has discovered the needed new foundation.

Descartes' disappointment over his formation at school and university taught him to learn to mistrust the senses, that is to say the technique of interpretation of material things by means of the senses. For Descartes, moral certitude and the subject of God is the proper domain of the intellect and the spirit. Descartes puts everything carefully to the test in trying to separate that which is definitely true from that which is possibly false, in order to find a definitive proof of the existence of God, a proof on which he can base his science. However, he stays all the while carefully faithful to the religious sensibilities of the time in France. His new science, when it comes to fruition with its discoveries and metaphysical affirmations, renders a sort of moral and fresh support to Judeo-Christianity, especially as concerns the existence of God. In the context of the 17th-century's new learning, this appears fortuitous.

The fact that Descartes always wants to concur with the Church while founding the new science does not prevent him, again, from questioning all that surrounds him and all that passes through his mind. In continuing his pursuit of the truth, which carries with it a precise method of making the distinction between the definitely true and the possibly false, he employs the triage of his second precept of *Discourse on Method*: "The second, to divide each of the difficulties that I would examine as individual parcels, as much as it would be possible and required for a better resolution" (18). In mistrusting his senses, he hypothesises that material things are only a sort of illusion. But, in dividing what he examines, he reduces everything into elements rendered easier to analyse. This process eventually

“Descartes conceives that the idea of a perfect and infinite being cannot come from him, an imperfect and finite being, and consequently that this conception must come from God”

leads to his proof of the existence of God. Descartes proceeds carefully and with circumspection because, in his opinion, man is capable of making errors, but not God. With this judgment, Descartes is in complete agreement with the Church and its Judeo-Christian convictions. As we have said it was imperative for him that the Church, very powerful during the 17th century, be convinced that his writings did not contradict it in any way.

Descartes conjectures: “But maybe also I am something more than I would imagine; maybe all the perfections that I attribute to the nature of a God are in some way in my power, albeit that they are not yet evident and are not made manifest by their actions” (*Meditations*, 37). However, Descartes proposes this speculation only in order to prepare a solid base for a proof of the existence of God. Descartes conceives that the idea of a perfect and infinite being cannot come from him, an imperfect and finite being, and consequently that this conception must come from God. Descartes then concludes that he is sure that he is a creature made by God: “It is necessary that God would be the author of my existence” (39). With this declaration and by not straying from Western religious teachings of the era, he indirectly affirms Judeo-Christian convictions while he continues with determination in his search for a definitive proof of God’s existence.

Descartes proceeds cautiously with his science and his mission, while also putting forth his conviction that his existence is due to a higher being. In the first *Meditation*, he writes: “Nevertheless, for a long time I have had in mind a certain opinion that there is a God who is omnipotent and by whom I have been created as I am” (16). Descartes’ certainty in his own existence was determined before he undertook the task of discovering a proof for the existence of God: “Since I am but a substance that thinks” (39). Being sure that he exists, Descartes continues by dealing with cause and effect as concerns the idea of the existence of God.

According to Descartes, a substance “must have at least as much reality in the cause as in its effect” (39). He asserts: “There must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect, because from where can the effect draw its reality if not from its cause?” (32). Descartes proposes therefore that the idea within man of the existence of God is an effect caused by God, and reasons that this idea is innate and a gift from God: “That the idea of an intensely perfect being (that is to say God) is within me very evidently demonstrates the existence of God” (40). Descartes’ conclusion reconciles his new science to the religious teachings of his time and culture.

According to Descartes’ reasoning, the act of thinking about a substance, which, in accord with the scholasticism of his youth, he calls the *formal reality* of a substance, depends on the substance’s *objective reality* – the veritable object of what is represented. Descartes as a *res cogitans*, a thinking substance, insists that ideas are modalities of thought. Again, according to his theory of causality that establishes that a

substance has at least as much reality as its effect, his *idea* of God cannot be more perfect than God, who, as the cause, must surely exist. The ecclesiastical authorities finally have a philosopher-scientist who supports the foundation of their ideas and precepts – the existence of God rather than the changing results of scientific observation – yet in a way that is in harmony with these latter.

Descartes proceeded to make a large part of his natural philosophy a study of the relationship between God and man. Most of Europe during the 17th century was under the influence of Judeo-Christianity. The Old Testament, the Torah of the Jewish faith, combined with the New Testament to make up the Bible for Christians. The sacred texts of these two religions address not only the subject of God, but also the relationship between God and man, as well as the enigma of body and spirit. One often sees references to the duality of man in Holy Scriptures. According to Descartes, the human soul thinks and contains the *natural light*, otherwise known as common sense. Also, Descartes writes, the soul is a gift from God that is of the same nature as God, that is to say, thought. In contrast, the body also exists but is composed of material elements and accompanies the soul during its temporal existence on Earth. Although the two function together they are nonetheless separate.

Descartes proposes that a human being is two things at the same time: a material and mortal body united with an immaterial and immortal soul. With this, Descartes is in concordance with Judeo-Christian beliefs and precepts. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “Man occupies a unique place in creation: (I) he is ‘in the image of God’; (II) in his own nature he unites the spiritual and material worlds” (91). In *Discourse on Method*, Descartes asserts his ideas on the connection between the soul and man’s thoughts: “Our soul is that distinct part of the body of which the nature is only to think” (AT 6: 46). In compliance with the Church and its teachings, Descartes theorises that although the soul is separate from the body, it is still nonetheless connected to it. The basics of this conception remain a central part of Judeo-Christian doctrines.

Descartes wants to help humanity with his new science and wishes to publish his texts principally for the benefit of others. In the sixth section of *Discourse on Method*, he writes of his sense of obligation to share his ideas with his society as well as his belief that one should strive to assist his fellow man: “I believed that I could not keep them hidden without greatly sinning against the law that obliges us to procure, as much as is in us to do so, the general well-being of all men” (61). In Descartes’ works, God always remains respected and honoured, while man is always described as a creature of God, composed of a mysterious mixture of substances. Descartes indirectly extols the precepts both of Catholicism and of Judaism in his writings. Centuries later, his way of maintaining metaphysics in the light of science would still appear to be not without influence.

Developing our Understanding of Male and Female

By Joanna Bogle

Joanna Bogle shows how some post-Vatican developments can be brought together to clarify some contemporary confusions. This is in the spirit of Edward Holloway's *Sexual Order and Holy Order* pamphlet available from our subscriptions address or free online at faith.org.uk

Did God make a mistake when he created two sorts of us, male and female?

In the last decades of the 20th century, it became very fashionable, and in some circles almost obligatory, to claim that there were no fundamental differences between males and females except for a few trifling matters of plumbing. Posters from a government office urged that girls and boys be treated alike in every possible particular: teachers should not say things like: "I need two strong boys to help carry this table." Children should not be lined up separately and it should never, ever, be hinted that girls might enjoy one activity and boys another.¹ Sexual differences, it was taught emphatically, were simply a matter of conditioning. People liked to quote Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."²

The feminist movement has many strands, and not least among these is an authentically Christian one. An emphasis on women's dignity has always been central to the Christian message from the time that Christ walked this earth and people "marvelled that he was talking to a woman". Christ deliberately chose women as the first witnesses of his Resurrection, at a time when in law the testimony of a woman witness was given no credence. And down all the centuries of Christian witness, there have been women saints and martyrs and mystics and missionaries, women in public life and women in families and women in politics and in teaching and in religious enclosure who have been central in the life of the Church.

"Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity 'in the image of God.' In their "being-man" and "being-woman", they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).³

But – without going into great detail about the history and causes of 20th-century feminism – the genuine Christian aspects of the movement were swamped and crushed by other forces.

Much of the 1970s and 80s government-funded "anti-sexism" crusading looks very out of date now, and children brought up under this regime are now adults and rejecting it. Boys suffered most. Always over-represented in remedial reading classes (boys learn to talk later than girls, and are less "verbal" throughout their childhood), their problems got larger as all books and reading materials became steadily more unattractive to them by being "sex neutral". Endless pictures of talkative girls in dungarees having adventures sent out a message that boys were, at best, a very optional extra in life. School, always a place where girl-style project-

work and answering up with bright interest were rewarded, became increasingly a place where boy-style things such as competitive activities, or taking charge of open spaces, were seen as being a nuisance, even at playtime.

The denigration of marriage, and the emphasis on women and men claiming "empowerment" by divorcing sexual communion from marriage and family and even from lifelong and deep personal attachment, brought a ghastly loneliness. Deprived of fathers, and even of father-figures depicted with clear masculine identity in the mass media or in general culture, boys lost out, in some cases with almost irrecoverable results.

In the Church, of course, the feminist clichés became rampant. Down all the centuries, women have been the first teachers of prayer in the family, teaching the small children, praying with the elderly and sick, making a little shrine or prayer-corner with a statue and flowers and a candle. But the emphasis on feminisation of liturgy that began in the 1970s and 80s – all that hand-holding and "spontaneous" Bidding Prayers, and touchy-feely hymns pitched too high for men to sing – made Sunday Mass repellent to many a male.

Today, we are living – in the Church and in society – not so much with militant feminism as with its after-effects. Not least is the angry disorientation of young men. You see it in obvious things: the loss of the sense of chivalry, of male strength placed at the service of the family and the community, and the rise of a massive gang-culture. You also see it in more subtle ways. In the Church, it is now easy to get a laugh and sense of common unity among young males in any audience by references to "elderly nuns in crimplene playing guitars" as a sort of general way of sneering at the 1970s-style liturgy. But deeper issues connected to, for example, achieving good male/female relationships and above all loving and fruitful lifelong marriages, are harder to explore.

But God doesn't leave his Church to struggle alone. He is always there, and bringing the solutions. John Paul II, presenting his "Theology of the Body" complemented what had begun many years earlier with a renewed understanding of the spiritual realities of the importance of humanity created male and female, expressed in particular by the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, and developed by Joseph Ratzinger (now, and gloriously, Benedict XVI, and still developing and teaching it).

Put simply, it's all about the Bridegroom and the Bride. It's all about the nuptial meaning of things, great things, eternal

“The whole story of our redemption is a marriage story centred on Christ the Bridegroom and his Church, the Bride”

things. It's all about the “great signs” that Christ gave us. It's about the Wedding at Cana; it's about the nuptial meaning of the Eucharist; it's about Christ and his Church; it's about God and Israel; it's about Mary, the Daughter of Sion; it's about you and me made in the image of God.

Let us go – not to the very beginning, not yet, we'll go there later – but to that wedding at Cana. It is highly significant (literally a *sign*) that we are not told the names of the bridegroom and bride. This was a real event, a real wedding. But its significance is deeper. We are meant to learn that Christ is the Bridegroom. At the behest of Mary, whom he addresses as “Woman”, signifying a link with the very first woman, mentioned in Genesis, Christ turns water into wine. And he does so in superabundance: there are gallons and gallons of the finest wine, and it all points to the great and final fulfilment of things, as this best wine has been left to the end of the feast.

When Mary first addresses Christ at Cana, he tells her: “My time has not yet come.” His “time”, his hour, is the hour of his Passion and death on the Cross. At that time, on the night before his death, he will take wine, and consecrate it, giving us the Eucharist.

The Wedding at Cana points us to the Last Supper, to the Mass, to Calvary. And the whole message is nuptial – man and woman, a link back to Genesis, a look ahead to Christ as the Bridegroom and his Church, the Bride.

The famous hymn honouring the Church says it all:

“From Heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy Bride
With his own blood he bought her
And for her life he died.”⁴

And Mary's role in all of this is crucial. This is something that was made very clear at the Second Vatican Council. It was decided – after a very narrow vote and a quite passionate debate – that there should be a special section on Mary in the document on the Church, rather than dedicating a document to her alone. Some saw in this an attempt to downplay Mary's role. But in fact what emerged was a new and deeper understanding of Mary, which became clearer and clearer through the reign of Blessed John Paul. This is something important, so we should not just think: “Oh, here we are on easy territory – JPII's devotion to Mary, and that great big M on his coat-of-arms, and all that...” It is essential to grasp the theology involved.

John Paul spoke of the “Marian” dimension of the Church. This is something that was much explored by Hans Urs von Balthasar, and also by another theologian who deeply influenced both John Paul II and Benedict XVI: Henri de Lubac. Mary's “yes” at the Annunciation is the fundamental moment on which all history rests. She is the Maid of Israel,

the Daughter of Sion, who stands at the pivotal point where the Old Covenant meets the New. As a daughter of Israel, she knows about God's Covenant promise to his people, and how this was expressed and taught down the centuries. Now she willingly consents to the message sent by God through an angel. The New Covenant is established in her womb. This is the beginning of the Church. Her “fiat” is the beginning of the Church's ministry.

The Church is not essentially a structure of hierarchy, dispensing the sacraments according to certain regulations. It's not a “perfect society” which seeks to impose its rule on the world by an alliance with governments to form Catholic states so that everything can be ordered according to a common teaching. It's something much richer than that: it's Christ's Mystical Body, as Pius XII explained and taught in an encyclical named precisely that, *Mystici Corporis* (1943), written in wartime and with a profound message to an anguished humanity seeking some sort of meaning and hope in a chaotic era. That encyclical developed a teaching that would be taken forward to the Second Vatican Council, and emphasised again and again during John Paul's pontificate, with this added Marian dimension.

Certainly this “Marian Church” is a very important topic for today. It is not enough – it never has been, but it certainly is inadequate in the internet era of informal get-togethers and unstructured communication – to talk about rules and hierarchy as if they were the centre of things. There is a structure to the Church: a body collapses without a skeleton (von Balthasar's imagery again).⁵ But the Marian Church, the Church of “Yes”, of service and celebration of God's plan, of pondering in the heart and suffering with Christ at the foot of the Cross – this Marian Church is very much a Church that people can understand and recognise, and can come to know and love.

Brendan Leahy, professor of theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, and a Balthasar scholar, writes: “Referring to Mary, John Paul pointed out that love is the essential value for everyone: ‘to serve is to reign’. He viewed women as the guardians of primary values and, above all, of the value of love which must be foremost in the Church. Everything else will pass away. Only love remains. Pope John Paul considered women as linked particularly to the Church's Marian profile, which he defined as perhaps ‘its most fundamental dimension’ – a profile that is emerging gradually.”⁶

“All this the Church knows,” says de Lubac, “and that is why, instinctively, she makes all things come by way of Our Lady. She ‘flies to her protection’, shelters under her mantle, and utters her own praise under the lead of Mary's.”⁷

Now all this may seem a longish way from debates about modern feminism. But is it? It's time now to go back to the beginning of things, to Genesis. No, this doesn't mean a

Developing our Understanding of Male and Female continued

debate about whether the world was created six thousand years ago. The Book of Genesis is explaining who we are in God's plan: it's not a geology textbook. And in God's plan we are created male and female. "Here we find the heart of God's original plan and the deepest truth about man and woman as willed and created by him. Although God's original plan for man and woman will later be upset and darkened by sin, it can never be abrogated." (*Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2004).

Marriage between a man and a woman is God's original plan, and as the beautiful statement in the Nuptial Mass reminds us it is "the one blessing not destroyed by Original Sin, or washed away in the flood". Pope John Paul expanded on all of this in his *Theology of the Body*. The Church celebrates every wedding with great enthusiasm and joy. "The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator...their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes..." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).⁸

In the coming years, as today's young men and women take up their responsibilities and seek to make sense of the world, it will not be adequate if Catholics who are worried – as we all ought to be – about the sexual mayhem that has been created in recent years simply denounce the evils of extreme feminism or even of the ghastly contraceptive, anti-life culture with which it has been associated. What is needed is a coherent and attractive vision for the co-operation of man and woman in the always exciting task of building a life together and fostering a civilisation. This is, at heart, a theological matter: it concerns our understanding of God and his loving care of us all.

In this second decade of the new Millennium, a vital topic of pastoral concern in the Church is going to be focusing on the specific needs of young men. It will be important for pastors, and catechists, and teachers in Catholic schools, to teach about the heroes of the Church: missionaries and martyrs, statesmen, explorers, writers, musicians. The Jesuit North American martyrs who mapped out the river highways of Canada, and who faced hideous tortures and martyrdom with exemplary courage... the martyrs of the English reformation, such as Thomas More, Ralph Sherwin and Edmund Campion... missionary heroes like Damien of Molokai... modern heroes like Poland's Jerzy Popieluszko and the monks of Tibhirine... these are men to inspire new generations and to be genuine, real-life role models fostering the heroic values needed for this century.

And it will also be crucial to emphasise the fundamental unity that should exist between man and woman, male and female, the centrality of marriage not as a mere socially

useful arrangement that might finally one day come into its own again, but as part of God's original plan "from the beginning", the great fact that the whole story of our redemption is a marriage story centred on Christ the Bridegroom and his Church, the Bride.

God loved us so much that he came, conceived as a human male under the beating heart of a human mother, right into our world. In his life, death and resurrection, in his Church, he has given us all sorts of rich and coherent teachings with which we can be guided in our own life journeys. Being a man or a woman is "very good" and life is meant to be a joyful adventure, finally celebrated in the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb which we all seek to witness and in which all our earthly explorations and ponderings of these profound issues will reach their utter fulfilment.

Notes

¹Literature from the Equal Opportunities Commission, 1981.

²De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*.

³Catechism of the Catholic Church, section 369.

⁴Samuel Stone, 1866. Stone was an Anglican clergyman: the sentiments are entirely correct and Catholic.

⁵Von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, Ignatius USA 1986.

⁶Leahy, Brendan. *Believe in Love: The Life, Ministry and Teachings of John Paul II*, Veritas, Dublin, page 138.

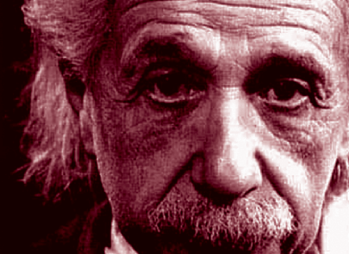
⁷De Lubac, Henri *The Splendour of the Church*, Sheed and Ward 1958, current edition Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999, page 345.

⁸*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 1603-1604.



Cutting Edge

Science and Religion News



Free Will

By Dr Gregory Farrelly

1. In an experiment in the early 1980s, Benjamin Libet used electroencephalography (EEG) to record the brain activity of volunteers who had been told to make a spontaneous movement. They were asked to note the time they became aware of the urge to act. The EEG recordings revealed a signal, the “readiness potential”, occurring about 550 milliseconds before the movement and the awareness of the urge to move.

This seemed to contradict the traditional view of free will and mental causation as it indicated that our awareness of the will to act (in this case to move a finger, etc) occurs after the brain has decided to act – suggesting that our self-consciousness regarding free will is, in fact, mistaken. The brain acts *before* the mind decides!

In August *New Scientist* reported that Aaron Schurger, leading a research team in France, had tested the assumption that the readiness potential is the signature of the brain preparing to act. Previous studies indicated that when a decision is based on visual input, for example, assemblies of neurons start accumulating visual evidence in favour of the possible outcomes, a decision being triggered when the evidence favouring one outcome crosses a threshold. Schurger’s team hypothesised that something similar happened in the brain during the Libet experiment. However, Libet’s volunteers were asked to ignore any external information before moving, so any trigger to act must have been internal.

Neural activity fluctuates randomly in the brain as “noise”, and Schurger reasoned that movement is triggered when this “noise” reaches a threshold. In a computer model, a decision to move was signified whenever the noise crossed a threshold. When the model was run repeatedly, the pattern of neural noise before the decision appeared as a readiness potential. Next, the team repeated Libet’s experiment, but this time if the volunteers heard a click, they

had to act immediately. The researchers predicted that the fastest response to the click would be seen in those in whom the accumulation of neural noise had neared the threshold *before the click*, showing as a readiness potential in their EEG graphs. This is precisely what they found. As Schurger says: “...what looks like a pre-conscious decision process may not reflect a decision at all. It only looks that way because of the nature of spontaneous brain activity.”

2. It is important that as informed Catholics we take note of scientific discoveries, yet as Catholics we believe that the truths of science can never be in contradiction to the author of those truths, namely God. There is certainly a strongly held view, exemplified by popular scientists such as Steven Pinker, professor of psychology at Harvard and an avowed atheist, that there is no such thing as free will in the sense of an independent personal entity. In his view, and that of the predominant “physicalist” philosophy of mind school, our physical behaviour is the product, in the natural way of things, of purely physical processes in the brain rather than of some mysterious soul.

As so often in issues discussed in this column, there is a problem here as regards metaphysics, or the lack of it. Modern philosophy, in abandoning metaphysics, has seen the construction of differing views of the contrast between free will and determinism. Dualists believe there are two separate but interacting dimensions within the human person: soul (or mind) and brain. Monists deny a separate soul, saying that everything is matter. Those who think free will is compatible with a deterministic, monist view are called compatibilists. Dominant among neurobiologists and philosophers, they make a distinction between constraints that are external and those that are internal (ie determined by the material brain). In their view, free will simply means being able to follow one’s own desires and preferences.

At the heart of the matter is causality. Is free will nothing more than a human

feeling of freedom when a neurological analysis would show this to be illusory? Or is there a real faculty of personal choice? Certainly, the legal system, building upon the universal human experience of responsibility, assumes the latter.

Invoking a neurological instance of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, that a system is never self-explanatory but requires some causal explanation from outside, we need to state that the physical causal closure of the human being is an unjustified physicalist assumption. We regard free will as involving a *personal* judgement rather than one determined by physical nature, however complex the nexus of stimuli and neurological impulses in the brain. If not, what is it that enables us to push beyond any specific environmental niche, to act beyond what is materially determined, for example to fast despite being hungry? What material law of being could result in such behaviour, unknown in other animals which, like all materials things, are defined within the limits of specific ecosystems?

There is a growing school of thought in the philosophy of mind which denies that physical closure has been proved (cf Thomas Pink’s *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP). The compatibilist view of free will is insufficient since it assumes that the human mind is completely determined by the material environment. As Edward Holloway described, the material development of free will in an animal is impossible since all matter is subject to the law of control and direction, ie determined, and thus environmentally circumscribed.

If free will is metaphysically real, the human mind must be an exception to the law of *material* control and direction. In this view, matter in the brain is substantially relative to spirit as its co-principle of determination. The soul (spirit) is the principle of self-consciousness, of personhood. In the words of the *Catechism*: “Endowed with a spiritual soul, with intellect and with free will, the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude” (n.1711).



Continuity and Development

The Study of Theology and the Year of Faith

Dr Dudley Plunkett brings out how the Church expects theology to done in the context of the virtue of faith. He gives some living examples which have borne fruit. One is reminded of an editorial of ours exactly 25 years ago, "The Theologian: Must he be a Saint?", reprinted in "Perspectives in Theology" (Family Publications), which is available from our subscriptions address or downloadable from our website for free. Dr Plunkett is senior academic tutor at the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham.

The Church opens the Year of Faith¹ with a Synod on the New Evangelisation at a time when, in England, there are a number of issues about the adequacy of theology programmes in preparing their students for the task of evangelising. There was clearly a call from Vatican II for the development of doctrine in response to the needs and signs of the times, but the varying interpretations of these which have ensued must first be recognised without becoming involved in polemics. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) calls for openness, yet the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) strongly affirms traditionally held beliefs concerning the Church's structure and authority. Progress needs to be made towards an evolving synthesis of Catholic teaching which is both open to current concerns in theology and faithful to the tradition.

What then should be the main purpose of Catholic theology programmes? They must surely transmit Christian revelation and the evolving tradition of

Church teaching such that theology students have the opportunity to appropriate this teaching and the capacity to transmit it in their own ministries, ordained or otherwise, in effective evangelisation, catechesis and adult formation.

Some Issues for Reflection by the Theological Institutes

This has a number of implications for Catholic institutions that teach theology. First, can it be acknowledged that the proper goal of Catholic theology is to serve the missionary mandate of the Church (cf. *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, CDF 1990)? If so, proposals concerning curriculum content, division of labour among institutions, or rationalisations of human and financial resources, are only relevant insofar as they are aimed at, and coherent with, a reasoned plan to fulfil the Church's evangelising mission so clearly stated by Paul VI (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelisation in the Modern World*, 1975).

If a Catholic educational institution accepts this mission for its theology programmes it will naturally function with a respect for magisterial authority and teaching, a love for the Church's tradition and a desire to transmit it without modification. It will also value fidelity to the revealed and transcendent nature of Scripture and its central role in the faith and life of believers. If an institution is not in accord with this understanding it will pursue a different path or strategy, which cannot properly be called Catholic. Can there not therefore be a genuinely fraternal place to discuss openness to the development of doctrine (taking into account contributions of modern sciences, philosophy and humanities) which is both faithful to the hierarchy of dogmatic truths and sympathetic to new methodology and content, without crossing over into an aggressively political or "conciliarist" view of progress?

Secondly, there is the discernment to be made between critical reason-

based methods tending towards secular reasoning that marginalises faith and an approach based on "faith seeking understanding".² This implies a hermeneutic of continuity and renewal, and thus a foundation of doctrinal orthodoxy, but also a genuine engagement with the modern world and culture (*Gaudium et Spes*). Such an approach empowers believing theologians, rather than pressures generated by secular thought, to set the theological agenda, and naturally inclines to maintaining the coherence of the Faith, with its hierarchy of truths and its four pillars (as evident in the four parts of the Catechism), as well as according appropriate status to pluralist or relativist concerns and emphases.

Examples

Thirdly, are there some existing models of good practice with regard to these first two issues that theological institutes might consider? For instance, the theological and catechetical programmes of the Franciscan University of Steubenville in the United States are credited with many vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In light of this, can it be agreed that a study of theology that takes place, as at Steubenville, alongside a firm spiritual practice (Mass, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, traditional Marian and other devotions) and a clear moral stance (students living celibate lives supported by households and communities) is a necessary part of a strategy for Catholic theology?

Another, quite different, model might be the Faculté Notre Dame³ of the Ecole Cathédrale in Paris, established by Cardinal Lustiger. His initiatives included sending two diocesan priests annually on doctoral studies mostly to the Jesuit Faculty of Theology in Brussels; reorganising the seminary in households linked to large city parishes where 10 to 12 seminarians live and undertake pastoral work while attending theological studies at the Faculté; and, perhaps above all, linking theological studies firmly to knowledge of the living Word of God in Scripture.

"If an institution is not in accord with this teaching it is pursuing a different path, which cannot properly be called Catholic"

This latter practice followed the teaching of the Vatican II constitution *Dei Verbum* that the Word of God is the "soul of Sacred Theology" (DV, 24), and includes familiarising seminarians with the "four senses" method of scriptural interpretation proposed by Henri de Lubac and developed in Brussels.

A fourth question concerns guiding students on theology programmes to link their intellectual studies to more general human, spiritual and pastoral formation.⁴ In particular, if students for religious life or priesthood are expected to follow programmes in institutions offering "theology", what ensures that they receive the strength of Catholic theology that equips them for the practicalities of ministry? How are they nourished by their studies to see the relationship between prayer and theology? How are they helped to follow the demanding vocation to celibacy? How can they be assisted in exploring the tension between being in the world (relating compassionately to modern society) but not of the world (defending a "counter-cultural" supernatural stance in an increasingly materialist culture)?⁵

Do these concerns not point to the need for a more holistic theology, one that takes account of precisely those elements requisite in any strategy for a new evangelisation? A related aspect of theological teaching and studies arises from the fact that theology in practice means in large part relating to young students, which suggests the need to consider the apostolic fruitfulness of new orders, communities and movements including World Youth Days. What can be learnt pedagogically and pastorally from the Church's experience of these developments that can amplify theology programmes?

If tempted to think that the new evangelisation can only be aspired to in the longer term, one might consider the achievements of one diocese, that of Fréjus-Toulon in France.⁶ Bishop Dominique Rey, a member of the Emmanuel Community, has sought out new orders and communities, many of

them from other countries, and currently has some 60 groups in his diocese involved in ministries to the unchurched, including meeting holiday-makers on the beaches, a café dedicated to spiritual contact and discussion, publishing, broadcasting and other forms of outreach. It is also significant that the diocesan seminary has some 50 students for the diocese alone, many of them coming from these communities.

While this may be an exceptional case, it cannot be doubted that the creativity and spiritual energy of many such communities have brought new life to the Church. It is thus no coincidence that Pope Benedict plans to meet representative communities on the Vigil of Pentecost 2013, as part of the Year of Faith and commemorating the example of his predecessor on the same day, in 1999, when Pope John Paul spoke of these communities as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Since then the situation has greatly evolved, and the new orders and communities springing up throughout the Catholic world are now not only vital to the new evangelisation but an essential area of study for pastoral theology.

Catechetics is a further area of theological reflection that has developed in recent years following the publication of the *Catechism* and the *General Catechetical Directory*. New forms of catechesis place a strong emphasis on revelation, doctrinal truth and Church teaching. They seek to offer a holistic understanding of the Faith. They respect the learner's experience, but not to the point of compromising the truths of the Faith or allowing personal opinion to marginalise elements of it. They make use of a variety of resources, many of them inspired by the use of art and the "way of beauty" so emphasised by the last two popes and the Pontifical Council for Culture.

There are now many such catechetical programmes in use, such as the RCIA programme of the Association for

Catechumenal Ministry, which is closely associated with Steubenville, and the English Anchor and Evangelium courses. But these all need the back-up of theological study if they are to be well adapted and developed in practice.⁷

Finally, I would wish to highlight the topic of ecumenism. In a society marked by a diversity of values even among the various Christian bodies, it is a demanding task for Catholic theologians to balance a positive ecumenical perspective with the commitment to identifying and nurturing a faithful Catholic identity. Moreover, achieving this may well challenge the churches of the Reformation, and particularly the Church of England, to seek a renewal of their own faith and practice in parallel with the Catholic Church's Year of Faith.

The establishing of the Ordinariate could be seen as evidence of such renewal, and Catholic theologians can feel encouraged in seeking to further clarify issues impeding Christian unity that were noted in the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and that are now freshly underlined in the preparatory documents for the Year of Faith and the 2012 Synod of Bishops (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 125).

Notes

¹See www.annusfidei.va, the website of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation which updates information on the Year of Faith.

²Secular reason is understood here in the sense used by J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

³<http://www.collegedesbernardins.fr/index.php/formation/faculte-notre-dame/faculte-notre-dame.html>

⁴While it is common for institutions forming students for the priesthood to cite the four elements of formation – human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral – proposed by Pope John Paul in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Apostolic Exhortation, 1992), the methods of quality assurance practised in formal degree courses would need to be rigorously applied to all these aspects of seminary formation.

⁵The internet, while a major resource for evangelisation, poses a number of formation issues, most obviously concerning obsessional use of social media, ethics of anonymous postings and easy access to immoral material.

⁶<http://www.diocese-frejus-toulon.com>

⁷*The Sower*, the house magazine of the Maryvale Institute, regularly reviews the aims, contents and methods of such programmes.



The Truth Will Set You Free

Catholic Doctrine in the Pastoral Context

APOLOGETICS IN THE ATOMIC AGE

By Mgr Ronald Knox

More extracts from a 1945 Sheed and Ward book “God and the Atom” written shortly after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. For the previous instalment see our September 2006 issue, online at www.faith.org.uk/Publications/MagOldIssues.htm. We start with one paragraph from the previous instalment, which sets the scene.

I suspect that the atom will be the totem of irreligion tomorrow, as the amoeba was yesterday. Meanwhile we have to reckon not only with the attacks of our enemies, but with the inadequate apologies of faint-hearted friends. There will be an intensified demand for the kind of apologetic which gives up the notion of religious certainty, and attempt to rally the sporting spirit of our compatriots in favour of a balance of probabilities. There will be fresh attempts to dissociate natural theology altogether from our experience of the natural world around us, to concentrate more and more on precarious arguments derived from the exigencies and the instincts of human nature itself. Meanwhile the seminary-trained theologians, with all the wisdom of centuries at his finger-tips, will more than ever find himself talking a strange language, more than ever at cross-purposes with the shibboleths of an Atomic Age. So it will go on, I suppose, till we find someone with enough courage, enough learning, enough public standing to undertake the synthesis; there is a battle royal, long overdue, which still has to be fought out at the level of academic debate (p13).

Entities, the schoolmen said – and in that at least they were surely right – should not be unnecessarily multiplied. And we are tempted to feel that there is something uneconomic about having three separate interpretations of the external world and juggling with all three simultaneously; the solid world of common sense, the world of the metaphysician, all docketed and labelled like an album with pressed flowers in it, and the world of the physicist, rotating, coruscating, ebullient with paradox. How (we are tempted to wonder) does an angelic intelligence see our lump of coal? Not lump-wise, we may be sure of that; such a view could only present itself to our terrestrial slowness of wit. But does the angel see a bunch of accidents inhering in a substance, or a stream of whirling electrons, or both, or something yet other, beyond all these? The profane reader must not be impatient with me for bringing angels upon the scene, as if I were trying to beg the question of theology. We are simply concerned to answer the age-long riddle, what is real reality really like? And the new guess of the physicists, far from settling the problem once for all, proves a fresh source of bewilderment. We cannot believe it is the whole explanation; it is too full of dots and dashes for that. Yet it cannot be a pure chimera of the intellect; there is, Hiroshima knows, a dreadful reality about it. How are we to integrate our world-view, with this double astigmatism obscuring it?

Meanwhile, none of us likes to be old-fashioned. It is the newest song – Homer assured us of it, centuries ago, that ever sounds most gratefully in men’s ears. There is something dated, surely, about this talk of natures, and forms, and essences; our minds misgive us lest they should be a mere ornament, not a weapon of our thought, comparable to those brightly polished warming pans that hang, unused, on the walls of an old inn that has been “done up” – at best, like an old stoup now used for an ash tray. After all, if we had been living in the thirteenth century, we should have found the philosopher in his cell and the alchemist in his hideout talking the same language, using the same terms, “nature”, “form” and “essence”, with the same meaning. St Albert, pegging away at his botany, and St Thomas, discussing whether or not the angels could be divided into species, were fast allies, and lived by a common culture; their modern representatives move in different orbits. In an age that has an itch for modernity, difficult not to feel that our *philosophia perennis*, however much wear may be left in it, has had the nap rubbed off it by time.

... And this, even when we are imparting to one another the immemorial objections, the immemorial come-backs, in the privacy of our own lecture rooms. Worse still, when we must go out into the open and discuss the fallacy of the infinite regress before the shifting crowd that eddies round Marble Arch. For, after all, a man may not unreasonably want to be assured that God exists before he will consult Church or Bible to find out more about Him. And the main proofs of His existence given in our text-books are still the proofs which St Thomas gave us; a few more defensive earth-works have been thrown up, but the position is still the same.

We are expected to prove God’s existence by pointing to the natural world and inferring from it, without the possibility of error, the presence in the background of a supernatural Coefficient; or rather, Efficient. (pp37-39).

To argue by inference from effect to Cause, from the passive object to the active Subject of change, from transitory, contingent being to a Being who is necessary and eternal, from nature’s striving after perfection to a Perfection which is ultimate, from the order observable in creation to a creative Mind-all that (I shall be told) is to approach the great Riddle from one side, and that the most difficult. Meanwhile, as we all know, other proofs have been offered, and seem to many minds, in our day at least, more cogent.

There is the ontological proof, in its various forms, in its various forms. As stated by St Anselm, it is content to ask how God, who is *ex hypothesi* perfect, could lack so important a perfection as that of existence. With Descartes and his followers, it asked rather how we are to trust any of our own mental processes, if our infinite intelligences are not underwritten by an Intelligence which is infinite. Kant brought us back to the argument from conscience; we had the inner assurance of being at issue with the dictates of a Will, surely

“Our age is in need of a great philosopher who can thread his way through the intricate labyrinth of [science] ... and put the whole corpus of our knowledge together in one grand synthesis”

not less personal than our own. For the Hegelians, there must be an Absolute, to transcend the complete gulf that lies between subject and object in our experience. Today, the argument from the “numinous” is in fashion; the very fact that we have an instinct of worship, that we feel a sense of awe (rightly or wrongly) about such and such a place, or name, or department of life, is our best guarantee that a supernatural world exists; this sense of awe is not to be confused with any other sensation.

I should be the last to find fault with these other methods of approach. To many, they will appeal as more direct, more intimate, perhaps more profound. But they are, it must be confessed, the afterthoughts of the introvert. For the generality of men the world of the outer experience is the real world. I remember, long ago, the late Archbishop of Canterbury describing to me his attempts to argue a working-man out of his materialism on Hegelian principles; all he got was “Ow, don’t talk like that; you make me feel quite funny.” What is most familiar to us is not what is nearest to us, but what we can hold at arm’s length. And, although the five classical proofs may seem abstract and arid in these days, when we have grown unaccustomed to the language of metaphysics, they are nevertheless a reasoned statement of the conviction most men either hold, or wish they could hold; namely that things seen are the work of an invisible Creator. That is, after all, the faith on which their childhood’s confidence was grounded. “I will consider the heaven, the work of thy fingers Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow” – it was these elementary considerations that were proposed to us when, in the first dawn of doubt, we asked why we could not see God up in the air. Alternative arguments, however valid, always produce the vague suspicion that they are by-passing a difficulty. If God did not create heaven and earth, the fact of his existence is not particularly impressive. If he did, why could he not write his *pinxit* at the corner of the canvas, instead of leaving the attribution of the work to be a matter of inference? (pp99-101).

Of such things, the layman writes with difficulty. It gives him a sense of irreverence, to be treating of such high matters with uncircumcised lips; he would fain be a scientist, so as to gain a juster appreciation, even according to our human measure, of the splendid craftsmanship in which God revealed himself. He must take off the shoes from his feet; he stands on holy ground. Our age is in need of a great philosopher; one who can thread his way, step by step, through the intricate labyrinth of reasoning into which scientists have been led, eyes riveted to earth, by the desire to improve our human lot, the desire to destroy life, or mere common curiosity; one who can keep his mind, at the same time, open to the metaphysical implications of all he learns, and at last put the whole corpus of our knowledge together in one grand synthesis. He must be able to gaze through the telescope, to peer through the microscope, with a mind unaverted from that great Source of all being who is our Beginning and our

last End. He must be at once Thomist and Atomist; until that reconciliation is attempted, the pulpit and the laboratory will be forever at cross-purposes.

... Be that as it may, the Atomic Age will have, no less than ourselves, windows that open on eternity. The true lesson of the five proofs, as of all other proofs devised to establish the fact of God’s existence, is that we see his face looking down at us from the end of every avenue of our thought; there is no escaping from it.

All our metaphysics, play with word-counters and reshuffle our concepts as we will, must necessarily take us back to God. The doubts, the hesitations, come only when human knowledge is suffering from growing pains, when we have not yet sorted out our ideas and integrated, for the hundredth time, our world picture. Of that inevitability our own heartsickness is the best proof. “Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest me” [*The Hound of Heaven*, Francis Thompson] (pp110-14).

... The world’s debate, after all, is bound up with the contrast between mind and matter; the notion of a Creative Mind is not so difficult for the scientist to come by, when he feels that he, if he puts his mind to it, could destroy matter – or at least introduce into the material of our planet an element of incalculable confusion. ...

Let them destroy or devastate the planet ... It is doubtful if a world that has forgotten God, as ours has, can deserve or even desire a better fate. We always told them that their dream of a wiser and happier age was doomed to disappointment; now perhaps they will see that we were right. That (I say) is a possible attitude ... The partisans of Utopia have long been dinning it into our ears that Science is the beacon-light which points the way to universal happiness, that we should be scarcely human if we were not tempted, for once to get our own back.

But it may be doubted whether this type of Christian *schadenfreude* is the best we can do. When you have lost your way and are asking for directions, few things are more annoying than to be given, by some local Good Samaritan, an exact account of where you went wrong. Our contemporaries, and posterity if there is any, will be more grateful to a Christianity which can offer them some message of encouragement (pp115-118).



Letters to the Editor

The Editor, The Parish House, Moorhouse Road,
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THE MOMENT OF MAN

Dear Father Editor,

I read the recent correspondence and features about the question of evolution, original sin and the soul with interest. There are unfocused areas, it seems to me, in contemporary theology that need exploration. An evolutionary view of the world requires mortality and suffering as part of nature. A superficial reading of the Genesis story suggests that all was aglow and perfect before we lost it with the Fall. This fuels much popular theology and more conservative, fundamentalist thinking both in Evangelicalism and some types of Catholic piety. Clearly, we need a solid exposition of how such imperfection might all fit together with orthodox teaching and biological evolution. Some correspondents and the editor himself have begun to do this in the pages of this journal.

The issue of the Fall impinges upon the question of monogenism or polygenism. As Pius XII stated in *Humani Generis*, it is difficult to see how original sin can be transmitted without an original, soul-bearing couple. We need creative ideas to suggest how polygenism might appropriate this. C S Lewis began to do so in a very original and thoughtful meditation in a chapter of his book *The Problem of Pain*, written in 1940. He imagines one group of early hominids, in one zone, who had been elevated to soul and had a direct experience of God which resulted in the subjugation of nature and matter to the spirit. However, this was in one location. How do we conceive of the Fall across continents?

The other question, regarding the soul, is which hominids and when? This is

probably unanswerable right now. Do we deal with the species “*homo*”, archaic *homo sapiens* in their many varieties (including Neanderthals), or just with *homo sapiens sapiens*? An article in *New Scientist* (12 May 2012) explored the fact that a double mutation of a single gene seems to have taken place about 2.5 million years ago, beginning the separation of *homo* from *Australopithecus*. This led to the development of neurones, larger brains and the ability of speech. Infant skulls started to appear more flexible, fusing together later as with ourselves. This allowed larger brains to develop. The writer comments that this amazing randomness could have been the trigger for the eventual emergence of our species. The concept of divine guidance did not enter into his imagination, regrettably.

This leads on to the question of whether the soul is a completely new intervention or a more gradual emergence. It would be good for us to look at “from below” and “from above” language in this regard, rather as in Christology. I recall Professor John MacQuarrie writing that we need the two languages of encountering immanence and active incarnation to capture the whole truth. Philosophically, an emergence is a new state of being or play. It cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts or what went just before. Things come together that allow something new to be.

An immanent view of divine presence and guidance would allow this as an exciting possibility without denying the uniqueness of the soul and its special faculties. Perhaps we need to re-read Teilhard de Chardin with this in view. Though some of his ideas were slightly bizarre and his pan-en-theism could easily become a form of pantheism, the idea that the spiritual was bound up in the weave of creation, and that God was active in the organic growth of nature, might be very constructive.

To be so, though, and remain orthodox, we would need a lofty and hefty idea of emergence. The soul, as it came to be,

was something new, a pinnacle, allowing new possibilities of relationship with God. I offer this to you for further reflection. We need to think these issues through to present the faith to a searching, but unbelieving, world.

Yours faithfully,

Fr Kevin O'Donnell

Horsham Ave, Peacehaven

EDITORIAL COMMENT: We thank Fr O'Donnell for engaging with these issues, which we believe are very important. We would think that the introduction of man “over continents” is ruled out by Catholic tradition (cf. our pamphlet *Evolution and Original Sin* purchasable from the subscriptions address or downloadable free from www.faith.org.uk/Shop/SciencePamphlets.htm).

For the Catholic tradition, spirit is intellect and will. God the Creator is absolute Spirit. Also, in their very nature, angels are pure spirit made in His image, and the human soul is spiritual. For us the relationship of God to the deterministic matter of the whole cosmos, *as well as of the created human soul* to the deterministic matter of his body, is that of providing intrinsically complementary and founding control and direction. God the Creator controls and directs the whole physical cosmos, to which He is transcendent. The whole thus mediates this to the parts, as the defining environment of those parts. The human soul controls and directs the human body, with which it is unified as one person, in its characteristically human, top-level, personal actions.

So while we would certainly see matter as ontologically non-reducible to its parts, and thus support a certain emergence, when we come to man this involves the direct creation of the new principle of the spiritual soul, as taught in Catholic tradition.

The moment within the progress of the evolution of the human body that this happens would indeed, we think, be related to brain size. Once this cerebral

“A superficial reading of the Genesis story suggests that all was aglow and perfect before we lost it with the Fall”

organic “supercomputer” evolves to become too big for the surrounding environment to mediate naturally the control and direction which it needs, we would think it makes perfect sense for God to infuse a free principle of control and direction, the spiritual soul, which is directly in the image of the creative spiritual Mind of God. This would, we think, be in accord with the one wisdom, plan and unique logos or idea of God for the whole cosmos.

ANIMAL DEATH

Dear Father Editor,

In your courteous and thoughtful reply to my letter, in your July-August issue, you clearly state the *Faith* movement's view on animal death, namely that it is one inherent aspect of evolution. This view overlooks four items of biblical evidence which bear adversely on your thesis about animal suffering and death.

The first is from the well-known passage in Isaiah 11: 6-9: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them... the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp: and the weaned child shall put his hand into the den of the basilisk.” If this is God's *ideal* plan for the animal kingdom, it doesn't make sense for the Book of Genesis to allow for the existence of carnivorous beasts, violence and death *before* the Fall.

Secondly, the creation narrative in Genesis 1 ends: “And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good.” Has the *Faith* movement solid reasons for implicitly asserting that Isaiah's prophecy does not depict the conditions which existed on earth before the Fall? The original food of man and animals alike was vegetarian. Only after the Fall was the eating of flesh permitted to man.

Thirdly, your exegesis of Saint Paul (Romans 8, 19-22) is too narrow. In his note on verse 19, Bishop Challoner,

echoing traditional Catholic exegesis, says: “He [Saint Paul] speaks of the corporeal creation, made for the use and service of man; and, by the occasion of his sin, made subject to vanity, that is, to a perpetual instability, tending to corruption and other defects.”

Fourthly, the adoption by *Faith* movement of uniformitarianism and evolutionism as controlling principles in historical geology has led to results that contradict biblical – in particular Genesis – inferences. The universal Flood of Noah surely provides the true explanation for fossil formations in the earth's crust. The assumption of uniformitarian palaeontology that countless animals had experienced natural or violent deaths before Adam's Fall is just that: a mere assumption with no corroborative evidence.

Yours faithfully,

Tim Williams

Madison Terrace, Hayle, Cornwall

A LACK OF PENANCE

Dear Father Editor,

From time to time we have a Decade of Evangelisation, a Year of Faith etc, but nothing very much seems to come of these grand designs. Numerous well-meaning conferences, workshops, learned theological articles in your magazine, beautifully written documents by the Pope are devoted to the cause but apparently to no avail, or to very little avail.

Something is clearly lacking and I am pretty sure what it is. If we step out of the glorious sunshine of the post-Vatican II church and into the dark ages that preceded it, we find some highly relevant advice coming down from heaven by someone who knows our situation exactly and whose authority is to be respected and obeyed absolutely.

Our Lady uses very few words in her apparitions; in fact only two stand out – prayer and penance, the only coinage that is able to attract God's grace! Without these two indispensable things

no years of this or that will ever have the spiritual power to achieve anything so big as evangelisation of modern society/culture. The Pope can start things but he has no power to ensure their success.

Why have I not heard the two “p” words coming out at any level of the hierarchy? Surely we need an official period of prayer and penance with special emphasis on the Sacrament of Penance, now so terribly neglected. Then something might happen!

I remember in the early Sixties in my large London parish on Saturday evenings the marvellous “holy hush” and spiritual intensity as penitents queued up outside two confessionals and kept the priests busy for up to two hours. Now, sadly, a parish priest is lucky if he absolves four or five.

Since the Council there has been a tendency to regard it as a more important reference point for policy than Fatima. Amazingly Vatican II did not produce a document on Our Lady, presumably to gain some dubious ecumenical advantage. No wonder we have reports of statues of Mary weeping.

I know you don't “do” “p and p” in *Faith* magazine, but since it is the basis of the enabling power to convert, surely it should regularly receive an honourable mention or you may begin to think that academic theology is the most important factor in the Church! “For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power” (1 Cor 4: 20).

Yours faithfully,

Jim Allen

Seymour Drive, Torquay

EDITORIAL COMMENT: We are always grateful to receive salutary reminders of important themes in the tradition. We would, though, think an Ecumenical Council is the Church's supreme teaching authority (see our current editorial), and would refer Mr Allen to our well-received March editorial “Restoring Frequent Confession”.



Comment on the Comments

by William Oddie

Spinning away from Sanity

In the January issue of *Faith* magazine, I asked this question: “Are ‘gay rights’ now the most prominent defining issue delineating – at least in Europe and the US – the gulf between the Catholic Church and the modern world?” This was a rhetorical question inviting the answer yes: and in the months that followed I have, it seems to me, been proved right. Related issue after related issue has arisen in public life, in Parliament and in the courts of law, both national and international: here in the United Kingdom, both north and south of the border, the debate has centred on the issue of gay marriage.

It is one of those questions that seems more and more to be proving, a secularist would say, how out of touch Catholics are with the modern world. To which we would reply: well, not out of touch at all but certainly, in many ways and not for the first time, diametrically opposed to contemporary “values” – though this time we are hardly alone. As I write, the Coalition for Marriage petition against gay marriage has reached a total of 600,783 signatures and by the time this is in print, that total will be considerably higher – you can check its current level at <http://c4m.org.uk/>, and sign the petition while you are about it if you haven’t already done so. I am not sure, but I think that this is the highest ever total for an online petition.

That didn’t stop Nick Clegg using – now notoriously – the word “bigot” to describe anyone who opposed gay marriage. His view emerged, by mistake, in the draft version of a speech in which he originally intended to describe as “bigots” all those who oppose the proposed legislation to redefine the nature of marriage.

But the wording of initial extracts released to the media was suddenly changed, and Mr Clegg later insisted he never intended to use such language since it was “not the kind of word” he would ever use. Well, not in public.

Those the BBC report describes as “sources close to Mr Clegg” (ie Mr Clegg himself) said the use of the word “bigot” was “a mistake”, and that the “early draft” of his speech should not have been released to the press. While he “stridently disagreed” with those opposing the legalisation of gay marriage, Mr Clegg said he would “never seek to engage in debate in insulting terms”. The real point, of course, is that though he wouldn’t use that particular B word (which has become politically taboo since it got Gordon Brown into such trouble) it is pretty clear that, whether or not he physically uttered the word in public, it’s what he thinks, and probably says, in private.

“Bigots” didn’t get into his first draft by not reflecting what he actually believes. One difference between a first draft and a second draft is that what you finally say has ironed out anything that might get you into trouble. But what he did say is worth repeating: “I stridently disagree,” he said in his actual speech, with those opposing the legalisation of gay marriage. That means he thinks they are bigots. He would “never seek to engage in debate in insulting terms” because he knows it’s politically risky. But the legislation that he and Mr Cameron are cooking up will be constructed on the assumption that those opposed are indeed bigots, and that once the legislation is on the statute book, they will have no more right meaningfully to oppose it than they would have to stir up racial hatred.

That, or something very like it, is certainly the conclusion that Aidan O’Neill QC – described in a *Telegraph* report as an expert on religious freedom and human rights – appears to have come to. He thinks, for instance, that schools will be within their statutory rights to dismiss staff who “wilfully fail” (presumably that means “refuse”) to use stories or textbooks promoting same-sex marriage. He also concludes that parents who object to gay marriage being taught to

their children will have no right to withdraw their child from lessons.

In a report commissioned by the Coalition for Marriage, which asked him to assess the likely knock-on legal consequences of any proposed gay marriage legislation, he writes that any decision to redefine marriage will have far-reaching consequences for schools, hospitals, foster carers and public buildings. The most serious impact is likely to be felt, he thinks, in the churches, where vicars and priests conducting religious marriage ceremonies could be taken to court for refusing to carry out a gay wedding.

They will, he says, be powerless to stop same-sex couples demanding the same weddings as heterosexuals under the European Convention on Human Rights. Churches would be in a stronger legal position if they were to stop conducting weddings altogether: “Churches might indeed better protect themselves against the possibility of any such litigation by deciding not to provide marriage services at all, since there could be no complaint then of discrimination in their provision of services as between same-sex and opposite-sex couples.”

They obviously can’t do that. But how valid are these alarming conclusions? Isn’t he just telling the Coalition for Marriage what it wants to hear? Well, Mr Cameron, despite what he is telling Parliament has, it seems, been telling his constituents in Witney that “religious marriage” will inevitably be affected by his proposed legislation. Inevitably?

Probably. According to Neil Addison, a specialist in discrimination law, “once same-sex marriage has been legalised then the partners to such a marriage are entitled to exactly the same rights as partners in a heterosexual marriage. This means that if same-sex marriage is legalised in the UK it will be illegal for the Government to prevent such marriages happening in religious premises.”

“Once the legislation is on the statute book, those against gay marriage will have no more right meaningfully to oppose it than they would have to stir up racial hatred”

“Inevitably” – that’s the word the Prime Minister has been using to his constituents – “inevitably” religious marriage will be affected: in other words, whatever he tells Parliament about his proposed legislation affecting only civil marriage, he knows it isn’t true.

As for the conclusion of Aidan O’Neill QC, that schools will be within their statutory rights to dismiss staff who refuse to use stories or textbooks promoting same-sex marriage and that parents who object to gay marriage being taught to their children will have no right to withdraw their children from lessons, does that sound at all unlikely, given the cases of the Strasbourg four, which were considered by the European Court of Justice in September?

Not at all, surely. After all, our political masters think such people are bigots. Why should they have any rights to exercise their bigotry? That’s why the legislation will, in effect, remove those rights. Catholics will be proved right, in the end, as we were over eugenics in the last century.

Hitler dramatically proved us right then, and eugenics went underground. But for most of the first half of the century, only Catholics opposed it: Chesterton was the only leading writer who wrote against it; all the rest were enthusiastic supporters. But the trouble with waiting for history to prove us right is that there have to be so many walking wounded, and worse, first.

As I wrote in *The Catholic Herald* in 2010 about the enforced closure of our adoption agencies: “We are currently passing through a kind of cultural blip, in which these things go unchallenged (except, as usual, by the Catholic Church). Our descendants will look back and marvel at our gullibility. But in the meantime, in the name of human rights, of liberation from ‘outworn shibboleths’ (remember them?) there will be many human casualties. ‘Oh Liberty,’ in the famous words of Madame Roland as she mounted the scaffold, ‘what crimes are committed in thy name.’”

Why is the Church against not only gay marriage but all gay unions? It is worth

reminding ourselves. It was spelled out by the CDF, in a document (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html) entitled “Consideration regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons”: the title indicates that the document was published (2003) before most countries had actually done it. “Legal recognition of homosexual unions”, it said, “would obscure certain basic moral values and cause a devaluation of the institution of marriage.” And one of the main effects of this devaluation would be in its effects on the children adopted by those contracting such unions. The reasons for this, says the CDF, are simple enough:

“As experience has shown, the absence of sexual complementarity in these unions creates obstacles in the normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons. They would be deprived of the experience of either fatherhood or motherhood. Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in such unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that their condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development. This is gravely immoral and in open contradiction to the principle, recognised also in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child, as the weaker and more vulnerable party, are to be the paramount consideration in every case.”

Pretty bigoted stuff, Nick Clegg would undoubtedly say: but what, Mr Clegg, if the CDF has got it right? The trouble, as I have already suggested, with waiting for history to prove us right is that there have to be so many casualties first. But already, the evidence that the CDF has indeed got it right is beginning to come in, from the United States, with the first batch of casualties: though those registering the evidence are of course going through the fires of calumny from gay activists, including accusations of academic dishonesty (why is it we can’t

call *them* bigots?). As *The Baptist Press* reported in September:

“The University of Texas at Austin has cleared sociology professor Mark Regnerus of academic misconduct after he was excoriated by some in the media over a study showing that parents’ homosexual relationships can have negative effects on children.

“Regnerus made headlines in June when his study was published in the widely respected journal *Social Science Research*. According to his findings, children raised by homosexual parents are more likely than those raised by married heterosexual parents to suffer from poor impulse control, depression and suicidal thoughts.

“They also are more likely to require more mental health therapy; identify themselves as homosexual; choose cohabitation; be unfaithful to partners; contract sexually transmitted diseases; be sexually molested; have lower income levels; drink to get drunk; and smoke tobacco and marijuana.”

How long will it be before such findings are acted on? I fear that it will take some years before public opinion supporting gay marriage (currently, in the US this is a majority; here there is conflicting evidence) goes into reverse, and even longer before gay couples are no longer allowed to adopt children. This is not the beginning of the end – but, as Churchill famously said after El Alamein, it may be the end of the beginning.

In the end, the Catholic Church, not for the first time when it has defied the Spirit of the Age, will be proved right. But what a lot of suffering is caused before finally the penny drops, when the human race gets it wrong as spectacularly as it has this time.



Book Reviews

Sex Education; A Parents' Guide

By John Timpson, *Catholic Truth Society*, £1.95.

Being a Parent Today; Children, Faith and Family Life

Edited by Father Stephen Wang, published jointly by Ten Ten Theatre and the Catholic Truth Society. £2.50

It is not easy to be a parent these days. That is the main lesson of these two new booklets from the Catholic Truth Society (one published jointly with Ten Ten Theatre, an educational theatre charity). All parents, whatever their religious beliefs and desires, have a daunting agenda: balance careers with childcare, find time for family meals, deal with demanding schools, isolate the young from the easily available violence and pornography on the internet and establish and enforce codes of conduct. Grandparents are often not much help, since many of the problems are unprecedented.

Catholic parents face even harder challenges. The fundamental belief that the life of grace (sacraments, prayer, supernatural virtue) cannot be separated from the life of nature (school, play, work) is deeply countercultural.

Even more countercultural is the Catholic belief that reason and grace both point to a transcendental meaning and responsibility in everything concerned with both love and sexuality; from teen romance to lifelong marriage and from masturbation to abortion. It's not impossible to raise Catholic children well in the secular world, but it's not easy.

At the beginning of *Being a Parent* the editor, Father Stephen Wang, warns against reading the booklet through "from start to finish". He is right, as the text sometimes seems more like a collection of aphorisms than a coherent guide. Still, the advice is generally good and Fr Wang has nicely woven the secular with the religious. Prayer is emphasised, and the book includes a brief collection of prayers suitable for children. The text is effortlessly theological, so a paragraph on God's love ("God loves you and your children even more than you do, and he never ceases to help you") is slotted between one on putting love "at the very centre of your family life" and one on showing children that you love them with, among other things, "hugs, affection, sitting close together, etc".

Being a Parent has a great deal of competition. Many new and some experienced but discouraged parents feel so lost that they read several guides. Catholics would do well to add this little booklet to their collection. The parents who receive it at Ten Ten Theatre school performances should find it useful.

Sex Education, A Parents' Guide is a valiant effort to present the controversial Catholic teaching in a friendly way. John Timpson talks about how this sensitive topic is best approached (by parents, and in a way that makes sense to the child in question), and about what should be taught (the Church's clear and traditional teaching). Timpson avoids the condemnatory tone that older Catholics will forever associate with sexuality.

His advice on how to present sex is sensible, although I would have liked more practical advice on how parents should respond to the many aggressively awful school programmes on "sex and relationships". His presentation of the teaching is, at least to this reviewer, less successful. Timpson follows Pope John Paul II in using the story of Tobit as a biblical base for his argument, but does not

discuss the Pope's theology of the body with its rich idea of sexuality as a gift. I found the discussions of neuroscience and sexually transmitted diseases more distracting than helpful and missed a clear statement that sex can be an expression of true love – the gift of the whole self – in the midst of a sinful world.

As far as matters of faith and morals are concerned, both booklets are aimed primarily at nudging vaguely practising parents in an orthodox direction. That editorial choice is sensible, but it means almost ignoring committed Catholics' greatest child-rearing challenge: to give their offspring the courage to be considered strange. In our resolutely secular culture, any seriously Catholic child should seem a bit otherworldly. In our hyper-sexualised culture, the demand to refuse "normal" sexual behaviour almost invites mockery. How can parents help their children resist the temptation to conform?

Being a Parent does note the problem and briefly discusses the increasingly common American response of home schooling. It is much easier to raise children well if they are rarely forced to interact with the hostile outside world. The widespread willingness to contemplate it is a sign of just how difficult Catholic parenting has become.

Edward Hadas
Bethnal Green

The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History

By John Vidmar OP. Paulist Press 2005. Paperback, viii+358 pages

To attempt an account of the growth and development of the Church in a single volume is a task that should be undertaken only by one who has mastered the highways and byways of ecclesiastical history so thoroughly that he is able to take the reader along its paths without either losing him en route or cutting the journey time unduly. In recent years one may think of Bickers

“One finishes reading the book with a sense of thanksgiving that, despite the frailties of her individual members, the Church as the Body of Christ has remained faithful to her mission”

and Holmes of Ushaw College who, in 1984, did so in slightly fewer pages than the present author, Father John Vidmar.

A Dominican from Rhode Island who has written and lectured extensively, Fr Vidmar has used as his *modus operandi* the six “ages” into which the historian Christopher Dawson famously divided the story of the Church. This structure, beginning with Christ and concluding with the election of Pope Benedict XVI, is a useful tool. The six ages, each spanning 350 to 400 years, are The Early Church (30-330), The Age of the Fathers (330-650), The Dark Ages (650-1000), The Middle Ages (1000-1450), The Protestant and Catholic Reformations (1450-1789), and The Modern Age (1789 onwards).

Each chapter has a time-line, maps, illustrations, footnotes and suggested reading and audio-visual materials, and is clearly the fruit of the experience of having taught undergraduates and other adults – including, perhaps, those with a limited knowledge of European or Middle Eastern history (or indeed history in general).

For those who have a limited acquaintance with the broad sweep of the history of the Church, Fr Vidmar has provided a highly readable introduction which leaves surprisingly few stones unturned. Moreover, within the self-imposed limitations of the Dawsonian schema – that, generally speaking, each age began with great gusto and ended with something short of a resounding success – the book works well and is to be recommended. For example, students for the priesthood who could be expected in due course to engage in a more profound analysis of many, if not all, of the “ages” would find Fr Vidmar to be a helpful guide at little more than a few sittings.

I would also offer the book as a resource to those undergoing instruction in the Catholic Faith, since it may be argued that one of the weaknesses of most RCIA programmes (let alone catechesis *per se*) is a failure to engage with the *story* of the Church.

One of the accusations to which Catholic historians have sometimes been vulnerable is that their presentations of the Church’s progress are one-sided or partisan. This charge cannot be laid at Fr Vidmar’s door.

He does not shy away from the less happy episodes in the history of Catholicism, such as the widespread (but by no means overwhelming) institutional malaise at the end of the 15th century, nor does he ignore difficulties imposed by the colonialism associated with the Catholic powers in his own native continent. Fairness, however, is always maintained and one finishes reading the book with a sense of thanksgiving that, despite the frailties of her individual members, the Church as the Body of Christ has remained faithful to her mission.

If I have one criticism it would be that in the section on the modern period there is insufficient mention of the influence of the Oxford Movement and Newman in the 19th century, and of the internal renewal of the Church through such phenomena as the Liturgical Movement of the early 20th century. That said, 2,000 years in less than 400 pages is a tall order and Fr Vidmar’s skills as a historical summariser are to be admired.

Fr Stewart Foster
Brentwood Diocesan Archives

The Sisters Who Would be Queen: The Tragedy of Mary, Katherine and Lady Jane Grey

By Leander de Lisle, 2009, Harper-Collins, Paperback, 388 pages, £9.99

Henry VIII’s grand and ultimately futile project to have an adult son on the throne, and to prevent the Stuart line ever inheriting it, is known to have caused much instability to our nation. Leanda de Lisle has added more detail to this dynamic. Her book chronicles, across several generations, the ensuing battles between the Catholic and Protestant influences upon actual and potential successors.

This has never been achieved with such accuracy before. For de Lisle has unearthed key new facts, from ambassador reports home and love letters between key protagonists, and has corrected common falsehoods, such as significant details of the ceremonial accession of the “nine day” Queen Jane, and that she was not born in the same month as her predecessor on the throne, the boy-king Edward. De Lisle shows, for instance, that the determined, well-educated Jane was not an Edward-like victim nearly as much as has been proposed.

These new insights in turn enable de Lisle to revise the standard text books concerning the 16th-century roots of our monarchical democracy. The role of Tudor misogyny and Queen Elizabeth’s long-term, and ultimately cruel, paranoia over allowing a clear successor to emerge are prominent in de Lisle’s account. She shows that the emergence of liberal Protestantism was not as important to the formation of our unwritten constitution as many historians have suggested. The civilising effect of the pre-Reformation parliamentary tradition would seem to have taken on even greater importance – as would the questionable papal excommunication of Elizabeth.

The painful and poignant results of all this for the three Grey sisters, their parents and their husbands (most especially of the younger two sisters) are described with great skill. For instance, the last moments of the 15-year-old Jane are delicately depicted in a manner that is at once moving and illustrative of the wider political themes being explored.

Some well reproduced portraits bring the text even more alive. Four double-page family trees (which apparently are not so easy to flip back to on Kindle) go some way to untangling what at times can be a dense forest of names. Yet, for all that, this revisionist history book is a real page-turner.

Fr Hugh MacKenzie
Bayswater



Book Reviews continued

A Tour of the Catechism. Volume One. The Creed

By Fr John Flader, *Gracewing*, 2011,
246 pages, £12.99

Fr John Flader is the Director of the Catholic Adult Education Centre for the Archdiocese of Sydney. His first volume of *A Tour of the Catechism* comes with a foreword by his Ordinary, Cardinal Pell, and plaudits on the back cover from Cardinals Schönborn and George as well as other prominent ecclesiastics. So before opening the first page of the text we have a strong indication that we're dealing with a good book.

The author loosely follows the articles of the Apostles' Creed, itself of course the structure of the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The book was drawn from notes distributed at a series of talks on the first part of the *Catechism* given at the diocesan education centre to groups mostly of young people in their 20s and 30s. This explains one great strength of the work – its brevity. For a priest or catechist wishing to prepare a presentation on the articles of the Apostles' Creed, this work provides a useful summary.

Throughout there are helpful quotations from the Fathers and other great spiritual writers. Many are drawn from the *Catechism*; others, for example St Theresa of Avila on being judged at the end by "One whom we have loved above all things", are welcome and enriching additions.

Occasionally the discussion goes further than the explicit content of the *Catechism*. For example, in discussing the virginity of Mary in the act of giving birth, Fr Flader cites additional texts explaining the more specific point of how "Jesus could pass through the virginal body of his mother without rupturing it" (p114). There is also a helpful elaboration of Church teaching on evolution and creation with references to papal teaching, from Pius XII's *Humani Generis* to Benedict XVI's conversation with Italian priests in

2007. Similarly, in an early section entitled "Ways of coming to know God" there are helpful quotations from Sir Frederick Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe (both acknowledged atheists) employed against an explanation of the universe through random chance.

If there is a risk arising from a summary it is, of course, in the unintentional changing of perspective. For example, in discussing the Church's position on ways of knowing God, Fr Flader adverts to the very real consequences of original sin on the human mind (quoting from the *Catechism* and *Humani Generis*), and then goes on to state: "It is because of the many difficulties in coming to know God by reason alone that God chose to reveal himself as man", quoting from Vatican I's *Dei Filius* and citing the *Catechism* paragraph 38. This emphasis could imply that divine revelation and the Incarnation itself were solely contingent on human sin and its consequences. The text from the *Catechism* does not mention the Incarnation and focuses on created human nature, stating more carefully and simply that, given divine transcendence as well as human sin, "man stands in need of being enlightened by God's revelation..."

The Apostles' Creed is now printed within the 2010 edition of the Roman Missal and is recommended for use during the seasons of Lent and Easter. In his highly influential *Introduction to Christianity* Joseph Ratzinger found great value in this creed, which he called "at all decisive points an accurate echo of the ancient Church's faith... in its kernel, the true echo of the New Testament message" (Ignatius Press, 1990 edition, p54). During the *Year of Faith* much use will be made of this creed and its authoritative elaboration in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Fr Flader's scholarly guide is therefore timely and worthy of its high recommendations.

Fr William Massie

St Peter's Rectory,
Scarborough

The Pope and the CEO: John Paul II's Leadership Lessons to a Young Swiss Guard

By Andreas Widmer. *Emmaus Road
Publishing USA*, 2011, 155 pages,
available from Amazon £7.20

I was attracted by the subtitle of this book, as others must have been. I wanted to know more about the life of a Swiss Guard, and to discover something of the "inside story" of this traditional regiment tasked with protecting the Holy Father. And the book certainly does offer some fascinating insights – what it is like to be on duty at the Vatican over Christmas, to be guarding the Pope when he is at his prayers, to be in attendance at one of the great events that are televised worldwide. There are some charming vignettes of encounters with the Pope, and of acts of kindness on the latter's part to various Guards and other members of staff.

But does this sort of thing add up to a useful book on leadership? At first I thought not. After leaving the Swiss guards, Widmer became an executive with a big company and relished the thrill of a rapidly expanding business – targets, high-pressure meetings, international travel, lots of competition. Then it began to go sour: the targets came increasingly to dominate everything else, corners had to be cut, any spirit of service gave way to pressure to get profits: the human side of things seemed to vanish. He had a re-think and now runs a company he helped to found with different priorities and a different perspective. Was it really John Paul who provided the inspiration for this?

As I read on, I realised that the honest answer was actually "Yes". Of course, the Pope wasn't running a company, and it's daft to see him as any sort of "chief executive". But he certainly gave lessons in leadership to a generation of young Catholics – and to anyone who had the privilege of living and working close to him, he really was something of an inspiration.

“Widmer is touching in his descriptions of the Pope at prayer, the latter radiating ‘a sense of peacefulness and calm unlike anything I had ever encountered’”

The Swiss Guards found much of their work extraordinarily tiring, but the Pope never seemed to show any exhaustion at all: “When he would return to the Vatican from weeks on the road, he didn’t head straight for his rooms and collapse in exhaustion like most would. Instead, he would stop and greet all the staff who had gathered to welcome him home. Like a general reviewing his troops he would ‘inspect’ us, the guards lined up in honour formation, talking to us and shaking our hands as he moved down the row. He had every right and reason to walk right past us to the calm and quiet of his apartments, but he knew it was his sacred duty to make a gift of himself to us as much as to the crowds that greeted him in foreign lands...”

Widmer believes that the secret of the Pope’s strength, good humour, and serenity was simply his prayer-life. He is quite touching in his descriptions of the Pope at prayer, the latter radiating “a sense of peacefulness and calm unlike anything I had ever encountered...I’d never seen anyone pray like that before.”

Widmer’s own story is an intriguing one. He has absorbed an authentic understanding of the Church’s social teachings, and of the true meaning and value of human work. He has sought, with some success, to apply all this to a company which offers enterprising answers to some of the problems of poor communities. He is finding a sense of purpose and joy in this, and wants to offer a message to people who are stuck in a mindless pursuit of work, consumerism or an ideal life-style that always seems just out of reach.

In the end this is a book about the Catholic attitude to work, money, community and family. But it’s written from an unusual angle – and if the title helps to catch people’s attention and get them opening the book and tasting its message, then that’s a good thing.

Joanna Bogle
New Malden,
Surrey

Mystics in the Making – Lay Women in Today’s Church

*By Carolyn Humphreys, Gracewing,
204 pages, £9.99*

This is a cheerful, readable book which aims to encourage ordinary Catholic women with busy lives, with homes to run and children to raise, with responsibilities and with jobs and worries, to live in the presence of God and to make prayer part of their daily lives. I think it succeeds.

Criticisms first: sometimes the book overstates the obvious, and makes too much – far too much – use of well-known quotations. Sometimes it degenerates into clichés. Do we really need yet another reminder that “being a mother is the most difficult job there is on this planet”? Or that good deeds are like the pebble that is dropped in a pond and sends out ripples? Or that children really often prefer simple pleasures to expensive toys? There are too many lengthy quotations from popular hymns, and an irritating misquotation of a rather good little verse beginning “Lord of all pots and pans and needs...” which in its original form rhymes and scans and is quite clever but here is muddled and loses all its charm.

But where the book succeeds is in its genuine connection with women’s lives, with stories about family problems that can be turned into opportunities for love and sacrifice, about holiness achieved through the willing acceptance of duties and responsibilities, and about trusting in God and seeking to serve him with courage. I like the down-to-earth approach which recognises that we can all too easily turn into members of the “Plum Club” (“Poor Little Unfortunate Me”) and that the call to the Christian life is a call to fidelity and faithfulness which often requires things that are tough and difficult.

The author has deliberately included stories and anecdotes that reflect modern life: single mums, people

undergoing treatments for cancer, parish volunteers visiting the sick and housebound. There is a thoughtful anecdote about St Edith Stein and some useful quotations from her writings. There is wise advice about fashion, luxuries and clothes, and some nice tips about enjoying the outdoors and the beauty of nature, and about the value of home cooking and hospitality and celebrating the Church’s feasts and seasons.

It’s a book that would be useful to share and discuss in a Catholic young mums group, especially for those who need a good general introduction to the idea of daily prayer and friendship with Christ. It would also be a helpful tool in the hands of a priest or a parish catechist talking to parents of First Communion children. In the bleak spiritual void which is modern Britain, Catholics needs straightforward and commonsense materials that help to keep Christ at the centre of life. Our homes need to be places of love and prayer, and this won’t be achieved on the diet fed to us by TV, supermarkets, and the general clutter of our lives. We need help, and this is a modest and useful contribution.

Joanna Bogle
New Malden,
Surrey

Notes From Across the Atlantic

by David Mills, executive editor of *First Things*

THE ECONOMIST

The Economist presents itself as a definitive source for news and interpretation, so it would help if it wasn't quite so tendentious when writing about the Catholic Church and was a little more careful to get its facts right. Sister Mary Ann Walsh, writing on the weblog of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, is a little vexed by a recent story titled "Earthly Concerns". The writers (the story carries no byline) claim "donations from the faithful are thought to have declined by as much as 20%" and that "the scandals probably played a part in this". We like that "are thought" bit coming from professional reporters. Walsh, the USCCB's director of media relations, responds with "real data" (we told you she was vexed) taken from Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Its director, Mark Gray, notes that giving has actually "increased significantly" in the last few years and that "there is no evidence I know of that Catholic parish weekly collections have declined."

The magazine also claims that "local and federal government bankroll the Medicare and Medicaid of patients in Catholic hospitals, the cost of educating pupils in Catholic schools and loans to students attending Catholic universities". The good sister counters this one too, noting that in educating about two million students, the Church saves the government about \$23 billion a year. That's a lot of money, \$23 billion, even today. Walsh observes that "you could argue it's the Church subsidising the government (or 'bankrolling' it, if you wish to use *The Economist's* hyperbole), not vice versa."

We're as vexed as Sr Walsh. In paying for Medicare and Medicaid, the government is simply paying money it

is obligated to pay for the care of individuals to the people who care for them. It's no more "bankrolling" Catholic hospitals than you bankroll the mechanic for "fixing your car" or the plumber for "fixing your pipes". If the government weren't paying Catholic hospitals, it would have to pay other hospitals.

Or maybe it wouldn't, or even couldn't. As *The Economist* itself reports, the 630 Catholic hospitals make up 11 percent of the nation's total, and the Church owns "a similar number of smaller health facilities". The Church doesn't have to provide these services, services needed by many people who are not Catholic. The implication behind that word "bankrolling" is that the government is doing the Church a favour (and violating the separation of church and state) when the reality is rather the other way round.

FAITH AND REASON IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE

A reader writes suggesting we review a book arguing that the earth is the centre of the universe. We said no, because we don't see any point in denying well-established scientific findings that in no way deny anything the Church teaches. As Pope Benedict XV noted in 1921 in his encyclical on Dante, *In Praeclara Summorum*. If, he wrote, "the progress of science showed later that that conception of the world [that of Dante's age] rested on no sure foundation", still the fundamental principle remained that the universe, whatever be the order that sustains it in its parts, is the work of the creating and preserving sign of Omnipotent God, who moves and governs all, and whose glory *risplende in una parte piu e meno altrove*.

And, continues the pope, "though this earth on which we live may not be

the centre of the universe as at one time was thought, it was the scene of the original happiness of our first ancestors, witness of their unhappy fall, as too of the Redemption of mankind through the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ". So the centre of the universe in another way.

We had never understood why such theories appeal to some people, but our reader suggests a reason. He explains (quoting someone else) that geocentrism "would destroy, in one mortal blow, the theories of evolution, paleontology, cosmology, cosmogony, relativity, and many other modern disciplines, placing them all on the dust heap of history. ... Copernicanism is the foundation for modern man's independence from God." Geocentrism is a kind of apologetical one-stop shopping. Win this one battle and you win the war against ideas you perceive to be un-Christian. To put it another way, it's an argumentative nuclear weapon. Why wage a long, tiring war you might not win when you can take out the enemy with one blow? The Church doesn't take the easy way out. She grants science its authority and undertakes the long, tiring work of understanding how revelation and science relate, to the glory of God and the betterment of man.

Admittedly, some people have tried to use the earth's place in the universe as evidence against God. Carl Sagan claimed that "we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe". But insignificant to whom? Forgotten by whom? Maybe, the religious believer will want to note, it's significant to and remembered by someone, or rather Someone.

With thanks to First Things for this syndicated column

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

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

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