

faith

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The Primacy of Christ and the Islamic Invitation
Editorial

The Primacy of Christ and Modern Dilemmas
Stephen Dingley

Incarnation, Priesthood and Communion with God
John Gavin

The Primacy of Christ in Duns Scotus
Phillippe Yates

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The Primacy of Christ and Honouring the Islamic Invitation

"Let each man take care how he builds ... For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."
(1 Cor. 3:10-11)

"We need to be in a position to propose the plan of the truly transcendent God as fulfilling our capacity for and need of true love."

Honouring the Letter and the Transcendence of God

Last October, on the first anniversary of their robust reply to the Pope's Regensburg lecture, Islamic leaders issued another "Open letter". As an attempt to reach out to the Pope and other Christian leaders in order to find common ground, made on behalf of all the main Islamic schools, this latest open letter is unique in the history of Islam.

In the letter, *A Common Word Between Us and You*, 138 Muslim scholars invite Christian leaders;

"to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also most essential to our faith and practice: the Two Commandments of love ... Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us".

A direct Christian theological response to this proposal concerning our love for God and neighbour would involve the idea of the Son of God becoming Man, which is a stumbling block for Islam. As we will suggest below, this is such a big block mainly because of Islam's approach to the transcendence of God, as well as its rejection of the Holy Trinity. For this and related reasons a certain Catholic preference has emerged for responding in a manner intellectually more straightforward and culturally more urgent, that is, for dialogue concerning the dignity of the human person and its ethical implications.

Without losing this latter emphasis we would urge that our dialogue is actually likely to bear more fruit if it is based on the (theological) agenda generously offered by Muslim leaders rather than the (anthropological) one suggested by us. But so that such theological discussion does not fall at the first hurdle we need to have the confidence that we can present the redemption in a way which clearly supports the transcendent nature of God. This, we will argue, means seeing the human nature of Christ, body and soul, as the cornerstone, source and summit of Creation. Such an approach is present in all three of the main articles in this issue.

A Papal Reply

The Pope himself has replied to *A Common Word* through a succinct and graceful letter signed by his Secretary of State, Cardinal Bertone. It acknowledges some of the Open Letter's key themes in stating that:

"...we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the one God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions. We are all called to commit ourselves totally to him and to obey his sacred will."

The Cardinal suggests that actual dialogue should be based upon the “common ground” of:

“...effective respect for the dignity of every human person, on objective knowledge of the religion of the other, on the sharing of religious experience and, finally, on common commitment to promoting mutual respect and acceptance among the younger generation.”

He says that the Pope believes that such dialogue could lead to us cooperating “in a productive way in the areas of culture and society, and for the promotion of justice and peace in society and throughout the world.”

Such anthropological discussion and hoped for actions are somewhat more specific than, though overlapping with, the more theological dialogue proposed by the Islamic scholars who suggest the call to “total devotion” to the one God as our starting point.

For the Vatican to attempt to steer the debate in such a specific direction offers a clear route towards active cooperation against secularism. At the same time, it takes on board the important task of directly challenging some of the thinking which lies behind the violence and coercion associated with Islamist groups and Islamic states. Sandro Magister, the prominent Vatican commentator, has said that the Vatican letter “is asking Islam to make the same journey that the Catholic Church made under pressure from the Enlightenment. Love of God and neighbour must be realised in the full acceptance of religious freedom.”

He has also suggested on his website that the theological gap concerning the doctrine of God may be unrealistically wide at this juncture. Furthermore, Magister reminds us that the Pope had already made a proposal concerning the dignity and rights of every human being on December 22nd, 2006, which Muslim leaders seem to have ignored. Cardinal Bertone’s letter implicitly makes a similar point in quoting the Pope’s “Address to some Muslim Communities” at Cologne, on 20th August 2005, concerning shared “fundamental moral values.”

Is love the same thing in both religions?

Perhaps this cautious and challenging Catholic response is also spurred on by the recognition that what we mean by love is somewhat different from the Muslim understanding. Although *A Common Word* acknowledges that love is “generosity and self-sacrifice” it maintains the Islamic lack of emphasis upon the fulfilment of love in friendship and, ultimately, communion with and in God. God’s love for us is not mentioned in the Letter, and only twice in the Qur’an.

A Common Word states that the Commandment to love is “part of the very foundational principles of both faiths.” Whilst it is

foundational to living out the Christian faith it is not quite so foundational to the gift of faith itself. Rather God’s love for us is. His Self-giving is the foundation of His commands.

As the First Letter of John has it:

“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us...” (1 John 4:9-10)

Caution about caution

The Cardinal’s honest letter presents a much needed and fairly gentle challenge to the Muslim understanding of the nature and rights of Man. However, we would suggest that the Church should also be clearly open to dialogue on the theological level requested by *A Common Word*. If, as Magister suggests, we can discern a lack of willingness on the part of Muslim leaders to play to the Vatican’s agenda, why force their hand at this seminal stage by refusing to enter into dialogue on the terms they suggest? They might quite sincerely say no – or take part with greater reservations – and an unprecedented opportunity for dialogue might be compromised, if not lost.

Indeed, in support of the thesis that the Open Letter’s “elusive and silent” character concerning the Vatican’s anthropological and ethical challenge is intentional, Magister quotes Aref Ali Nayed, one of the main authors of the Letter stating, in an interview with the Catholic News Service:

“Mere ethical/social dialogue is useful, and is very much needed. However... if religious revelation-based communities are to truly contribute to humanity, their dialogue must be ultimately theologically and spiritually grounded. Many Muslim theologians are not just interested in mere ethical dialogue of ‘cultures’ or ‘civilisations’.”

There might well be an avoidance of earlier Papal suggestions here, as well as the perennial downplaying of the role and relevance of natural reason. But the point of dialogue carried out in a charitable spirit is surely to create the conditions which enable such possible disagreements to be faced fruitfully, when the time is right. The Cardinal’s letter expresses the Pope’s “deep appreciation ...for the positive spirit which inspired the text”. It may take effort, time, sacrifice, but fruit will come from our own generosity in meeting our interlocutors ‘where they are at’. In tune with their Letter let’s do our level best to find things upon which we genuinely agree *before* we dispute or challenge. If we are confident concerning the overall coherence of our Catholic Faith we need not approach with demands for safeguards etc., just complete faithfulness to our own doctrine –

and a desire to listen. Then we should trust that such dialogue will move in the right direction. The truth will out, and hopefully that's what we're all striving for.

The 138 Islamic leaders have made a constructive offer which should surely be responded to by Christians, with human openness as well as theological care. It may even make more sense to discuss with theists who believe in objective truth and universal moral norms rather than with the dictators of relativism. Our *Road from Regensburg* column later in this issue reports a prominent British Imam pointing out that the issue of infallibility, crucial for understanding Catholicism but anathema to the secular outlook outside and inside the Church, is an example of a good subject for discussion. It is in this spirit that we offer the below theological reflections, the accompanying articles on the Primacy of Christ, and a Muslim Professor's intelligent and forthright Qur'anic exegesis on the theme of love, which includes a call to objective theological dialogue.

Starting with an aspect of love

In terms of Cardinal Bertone's helpful summary of the Open Letter, the theological ground upon which we are being invited to build includes: "belief in the one God, the provident Creator... (and that) we are all called to commit ourselves totally to him..." From the point of view of the Catholic faith the latter is an aspect of love for God, an aspect even of communion.

To be offered this as "the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us" is, in some ways, a particularly generous offer. It is actually offering to play more on our ground than theirs. For love, as we have mentioned above, is actually at the heart of what we believe the nature of God is. Our tradition offers us much deep wisdom on the subject. Of course, our Islamic correspondents may not see their offer as quite so generous. It is undoubtedly true that the "complete and total devotion to God", of which their letter speaks as being at the heart of Islam, is, on its own terms, an impressive feature of their faith and practice, from which we can learn.

But in the final analysis what we are being invited to consider is the *rational and revelatory foundation and fulfilment* of this call to devotion. The challenge for us Christians, particularly those in the Catholic Church, is to present that key stumbling block for Muslims, the Incarnation, as that very same foundation and fulfilment. What an invitation!

Meeting the Open Letter on its own ground

There are three related beliefs which are profoundly relevant both to the Open Letter's presentation of the call to love God and to Christian orthodoxy: God's transcendence of creation, a certain reaching out on the part of God to us and the existence of the human soul.

The Open Letter states:

"The central creed of Islam consists of the two testimonies of faith or *Shahadahs*, which state that: *There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God*. These Two Testimonies are the sine qua non of Islam... Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad said: *The best remembrance is: 'There is no god but God'.*"

The first tautologous *Shahadah* has been a key source of the Islamic emphasis upon God's inherently inaccessible transcendence. This is a strong and influential tradition, with some input from late first Millennium neo-Platonism. Such a vision excludes Man's love being potentially fulfilled in intimate communion with the love of God. As the Pope put it at Regensburg, in this Islamic emphasis God's "will is not bound up with any of our categories". This approach to transcendence is indeed one of the biggest theological gulfs between Islam and a religion which speaks of divine self-revelation and of a creaturely destiny in the life of the Creator.

But as our *Road from Regensburg* column has charted, the Pope has effectively challenged this doctrine and produced much helpful debate. Muslim contributions to the debate, such as the first Open Letter, have qualified this doctrine of transcendence, not least affirming God's basic rationality in terms of basic categories intelligible to us.

Later in this issue, Professor Zilio-Grandi argues that the primacy of God's love is not an idea completely alien to Muslim theology. This is notwithstanding Stephen Dingley's point, also later in this issue, that Islam does not see God's decrees, or revelation, as anything approaching *self-revelation*.

A certain qualification of the Islamic doctrine of absolute transcendence is also present in the Open Letter. The first *Shahadah* is emphasised as the source of an important commonality between our religions, namely the *aptness* of the command to devote ourselves totally to Him.

The Letter suggests that in both faiths "God orders us" follow specific Commandments, in the light of the specific nature of Man. In neither faith does God command what is beyond the capacity of Man. For, according to *A Common Word*,

"...(human) souls are depicted in the Holy Qur'an as having three main faculties: the mind or the intelligence, which is made for comprehending the truth; the will which is made for freedom of choice, and sentiment which is made for loving the good and the beautiful... God orders people to fear him as much as possible, to listen (and thus understand the truth); to obey (and thus to will the good) and to spend (and thus to exercise love and virtue)."

All such partial qualifications of the unbridgeable distance between God and man depict a certain tentative reaching out of God to us. Through the call to understand his words and the command to love, God invites us to deep fulfilment.

A more beautiful vision

To found inter-faith dialogue upon a human nature which is profoundly fulfilled by obeying commands of God, which, moreover, are universal norms, is (again) to play more on the ground of traditional Christianity. We have some beautiful theology and anthropology filling out the traditional Catholic maxim "Grace builds upon nature". In terms of the intellectual foundation of the dialogue to which we are being invited this is, it turns out, a central theme. Our generously created human nature is fulfilled by the generously offered grace of God. God's self-sacrifice founds and communes with the "self-sacrifice" of Man which the Open Letter places centre stage.

Fruitful dialogue must surely involve us filling out this Christian insight. We need to be in a position to propose the plan of God as fulfilling our capacity for and need of true love through the incarnational, ecclesial and sacramental economy. The Catechism captures the vision thus:

"Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. (50) ...By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity." (52)

"In the creation of the world and of man, God gave the first and universal witness to his almighty love and his wisdom, the first proclamation of the 'plan of his loving goodness,' which finds its goal in the new creation in Christ." (315)

We could do worse than show that this "plan" of Creation and Communion is a garment woven without seam – completing our capacity to give full devotion, and maintaining the transcendence of God.

The Incarnation and Divine Transcendence

Why is it then that Islam, even when its traditional doctrine of transcendence is a little qualified as above, finds the core Christian claim that "God loved the world so much that He sent his only Son" so difficult? We know that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is firmly rejected in the Qur'an, and said to undermine the unity of God. This great gulf must certainly be faced, but to quite a degree one's attitude to the truth of this foundational Christian doctrine rests upon the respective veracities of Muslim and Christian revelation. In our rational dialogue, where we have agreed upon the unity of God, the Creator, our first hurdle will be that understanding of God's

inaccessible transcendence, which is just not qualified enough to fit with Christian understanding.

We have seen how the doctrine excludes the possibility of the creature sharing divine communion. Similarly it depicts the divine unity as so incapable of sharing our limitation that He can act, forgive, reveal and even love *without* needing to fit into laws of created being, even those of created reason. Certainly He does not subject himself to these laws and limits in any way whatsoever, let alone through the human death of a Divine Person. The literal Incarnation of God presents the biggest stumbling block to the progression of our theological discussion.

The Primacy of Christ

In our participation in an open, charitable dialogue which responds integrally to *A Common Word* we need to be prepared to invite the sort of qualification of divine transcendence which the Letter makes to be taken to the ultimate degree. At the same time we must assure our Muslim friends that, even in the light of the Cross, this radical reaching out does not actually compromise the clear distinction of God from His creation. Developing a theology of salvation which coherently rejects any reduction of God's natural transcendence is crucial to this discussion. We need to show that God's nature is such that He does not need to come into our world, whilst at the same time the purpose and nature of his creation is such that it does need Him to come into it, not as a natural 'potential' of it, but as its actual destiny and fulfilment. Creation and Salvation must be seen as a unity in the simple thought, or *logos*, of God. And the humanity of Christ needs to be convincingly presented as primarily the ground, not the subject, of created laws.

We just need to show that the Open Letter's noble picture of God commanding us to love in ways that use our natural capacities to their full potential is beautifully completed by the fact that He loves us in ways that enable us, body and soul, to return it. He communes with us. Fr John Gavin's piece in this issue paints such a picture for us.

Such an approach should never take away from the amazing nature of this ultimate work of God for us, of which Muslim disbelief reminds us. Indeed this seems to be one of those cases which, as C.S. Lewis points out, involves the person who finds the Incarnation too incredible being much closer to the truth than the person who finds it too boring and predictable.

The Redemption and 'Risks' to God's transcendence

In the light of the impressive Islamic reverence towards absolute, transcendent divinity we can empathise somewhat with their exasperation at some theologies of Incarnation and Redemption when these latter do indeed seem to compromise the dignity of the divine nature. Most obviously, such inadequate approaches include those whereby creation is seen as in a

dialectical tension with the Creator, such as forms of Process Theology and Panentheism. Also inadequate to this theological dialogue will be some Protestant suggestions that the angry Father could not and would not have his anger satiated without a lot of justifying pain.

Furthermore, those approaches, sometimes found in Catholicism, which tend to depict God's coming as Man and his agonised death on the Cross as more than was strictly necessary or as under the primary control of evil are insufficient for meeting the modern challenge of allowing God to be God. The former is the case with some poetic approaches which suggest that God could have saved us by a pin-prick in the hand of Christ and so in fact did something more than rationally required. The latter seems to be the case with theologies which insist that God would not have sent His Son had there not been sin. This seems to involve the divine dropping of his original plan in favour of a radically new rescue plan. It seems to suggest that the identity of the transcendent Divine Person, which is truly one with His human nature, is determined by the prior created order in its prior fallenness. For the person who has become physical, Whose Body we physically touch, is Divine, yet sin is not.

What, then, is happening when the effects of sin impact upon Him?

Redemption and the identity of Christ

Answering that question is not trivial. We need a renewed understanding of the concept of 'natures' which enables us to see the dual nature of Christ as a harmonious phenomenon, especially in the light of modern knowledge of matter. We need a vision whereby the very identity of Christ, in his human and divine natures, as the physical and spiritual centre and fulfilment of creation, is the basis of his active redemption of us since sin.

The Pope at Regensburg offered a way to develop this vision. He pointed out that all God's actions are according to His eternal *Logos* – which “means both reason and word – a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason.” To some extent this wisdom, which is written into creation, is discovered by our human mind or *logos*, our spiritual soul, which is in God's image. Union and communion of the minds of creature and Creator is possible.

To be a personal union it must be effected through human nature, body and soul, according to human laws of growth and encounter. Indeed the purpose of all this is that Man may be fulfilled by the Self-Gift of God Himself, in the Incarnation. The Incarnation is *ontologically* necessary for us, not for Him.

With the help of St Paul and St John we can apply this to the Redemption. As we have emphasised Christ is “the first-born

of all creation; ...He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col. 1:15-16). He is the “*Logos* made flesh”. He is the person who makes sense of the universe, including matter and the body-soul nature of Man. He is the original self-gift of God, destined from the beginning as the fulfilment of creation. Because of this and in the face of the tragic sinfulness of Man, his faithfulness to his original mission heals and redeems. “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.” (John 1:10-11). As the “first born of creation” he can become “the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. ...reconciling to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (1 Col.18).

It is because of Jesus's ontological identity as God and Man, body and soul, that his faithfulness to death can heal us and raise us up. His acceptance of suffering and sin is an acceptance of the wounds upon the creation of which he is the Cornerstone. The creation is not what it might have been, but He actually becomes more than he might have been. His redemptive faithfulness, even to death on a Cross, is an act of greater love than we could possibly have imagined and yet a beautiful part of the *Logos* of love.

The depth and coherence of such divine love revealed to us through the Cross is perhaps most beautifully captured by that ancient hymn the Letter to the Philippians:

“...Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8)

We can also show that such a *logos* of love is a wonderful gift of the truly transcendent God. Again we emphasise that it means seeing the whole of the Plan of God from Creation to Salvation as a Unity, as the result of the one Thought or *Logos* of God, the Word who is made flesh as the centre of this work, and the high point of the Gift. Ultimately it means articulating the spiritual nature of Man and the physical nature of matter as that which is part of the coherent whole, according to the one “Unity Law”, as well as an aspect of the wonderful gift. It will mean for instance depicting science and metaphysics not as explaining away things, but as uncovering the amazing, generous Thought of God as it plays out in the history of the cosmos.

Such a development of Catholic theology and philosophy would need work, prayer and guidance from the Spirit. It is not just required to meet and surpass genuine Islamic yearnings for peace, but also to help salve the restless heart of modern man.

OTHER ANGLES

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

By John Navone S.J.

The story of Jesus is what the eternal trinitarian life of God looks like when it is projected upon the screen of history, and this means not only on the screen of human history but of *sinful* human history. The obedience of Jesus to the Father, his obedience to his mission, is just what the eternal procession of the Son from the Father appears as in history. His obedience consists in nothing else but *his being in history*. Jesus did nothing but be the Son as man. His crucifixion was the dramatic manifestation of the sort of world we have made, the showing up of the world, the unmasking of what we traditionally call original sin. There is no need for theories about the Father putting his Son to death once we know that he was human in our world. Jesus died in obedience to his Father's will simply in the sense that he was *human* in his obedience to his Father's will.

Just as the crucifixion/resurrection is what the eternal procession of the Son from the Father looks like when projected upon sinful human history, so the sending of the Holy Spirit (so that we share in the life of God, so that the mystery of the church exists) is what the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit looks like when projected on to that sinful human world. And the Holy Spirit appears in our world as the transforming force making the world new, or the church new, the individual new, by reducing all the obstacles to its new creation.

The Holy Spirit of the Father and Son is our given capacity for God in our divinisation. It is a given equality/communion with God. To lose sight of that would be to make ourselves God, to divinise ourselves. It is the mystery we encounter when we try to speak of the relationship of Jesus and the Father. There is an equality between them, yet evidently there can be no such thing as two individual Gods. Jesus is indeed from the Father, owes his being to the Father, but is nonetheless not a creature but wholly equal with the Father. The traditional word for this is "procession": Jesus proceeds from the Father but not by being created.

What we mean by the Incarnation is that the divine Son took on humanity; what we mean by our grace is that we human beings are given divinity. And it is in living the divine-life-we-are-given that we have what we call faith in the fundamental truth that the Father loves Jesus. That God is creator and loves Jesus as equal is revealed to us in the story of Israel and the church, centering and pivoting on Jesus of Nazareth. The

revelation is not given to us as a piece of *information about* God; it is communicated to us in the act of taking us up into his love. In other words, that the Father loves Jesus is revealed to us precisely in our being brought to share in that love between them: and this is the Incarnation. Jesus in fact actually reveals the Father's love for him not in talking about it but in embracing us within it – he does talk about it too, but you could listen to the talk without receiving the revelation for *that* lies in responding in faith to the offer of love.

What is offered in the church and scriptures is a share in his life. What is unique about Jesus is the encounter with God that he represented. If we are to enter into the mystery of God we need to be taken up by God himself, to share in his knowledge of himself, a share that makes us acutely aware of our inadequacy before the mystery as we are brought closer to it.

So it is God's initiative that is needed. Not that we should speak more about him, but that he should speak to us. No one, however sinless, could know God except God. No one knows the Father except the Son, no one knows the Son except the Father. Unless we are taken up to share in God's self-knowledge there is just no way a creature can answer his/her own radical question about God. It is not sin that gets in the way; it is the fact that we are creatures. The gap between ourselves and God is not simply a moral one, that he is good and we are not. It is the metaphysical one: God is creator and we are his creatures.

Of course, our being sinners does not help. It means that we do not of ourselves share in knowledge of God (true of creatures anyway) but that when it is offered to us we reject it. There is for us no such state as absence of divinity: we are either divinised or we have rejected divinity.

For this is what is involved in the gift of Jesus. God loves Jesus and loves him from eternity as his co-equal Son, owing his existence indeed to God though not created. It is into this eternal exchange of love between Jesus and the Father that we are taken up, this exchange of love that is called the Holy Spirit. And this means, of course, that we are taken up into equality/communion. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit of love poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5) we are given equality, the divine life, love itself, the Holy Spirit.





The Primacy of Christ in the Light of Modern Dilemmas

Fr Stephen Dingley

PART ONE: THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY

Introduction

We human beings are created by God and for God. We are created with a spiritual soul as well as a body, and so material things alone are not enough to satisfy us: we yearn for what is truly spiritual. As human beings we have a natural desire for God: we are naturally religious. We yearn for God to reveal himself to us. We yearn for communion with him, to share our deepest existence with him, and for him to share himself with us. And if that is the way God has made us, it is because he wants to fulfil us by the gift of himself.

As human beings, the way that we get to know people best is by meeting them. Communication at a distance, by email, telephone and so forth, is valuable, but it is no substitute for meeting someone in person. We need to be in the same place with them, to spend our time with them, to share our life with them. God wants us to have that same level of intimacy with him as well: not just to know about him by hearsay, but to meet him (cf. Job 42:5). Thus he chose to become one of us, so that we could get to know him to the fullest extent possible for a human being. Thus we are totally fulfilled, body and soul, in God, who has become true man whilst remaining true God. In other words, we are only fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

If it were not for sin then all of humanity would have been Christians. However, we have turned our back on God. We have damaged ourselves. Because of sin our minds are darkened and our wills are distorted: we no longer see God clearly and we no longer yearn for him with all our heart.

However, although we are damaged by sin, our nature is not totally destroyed. There still remains in us a basic, natural desire for God. As a result, even though most people have lost sight of the one true God, they still yearn for something more than worldly things. They reach outwards, desiring God, without knowing him. And so various religions have arisen in the world. These religions are human creations. They are not revealed by God. But God is not snobbish, and he will not refuse his grace to people who are open to receive it. So in other religions we expect to find much that is good and much that is true, although mixed with error and corruption. All of these religions are in fact implicitly looking for Jesus Christ. Adherents of these religions do not know it, but Jesus Christ is in truth the fulfilment of that longing for God which is present in every religion.

Sadly, the destructive impact of sin on humanity is not only seen at our beginnings. It is only too clear in our own times and in our own society. Only a few hundred years ago our European culture was gloriously Christian. How has it come about that our society in the last few centuries has lost that faith, lost sight of our true fulfilment in Jesus Christ? How come our world is now so secular? How did it go so horribly wrong?

In what was initially an engaging talk at the 2006 Faith Winter Conference Fr Stephen Dingley surveys modern beliefs systems, including that of Islam. With the help of the Pope's Regensburg lecture, and the thought of Edward Holloway, he sweeps to his persuasive conclusion concerning what modern men and women are looking for. Fr Dingley is a theology lecturer at Womersley seminary in Surrey, and is a doctor of Astronomy.

"Science yearns for and reaches out for a meaning, but that meaning is fully provided only by God's revelation, by God's incarnation."

Pope Benedict on the Decline of Christianity

This was the question at the heart of Pope Benedict's famous (or even infamous) 2006 address at Regensburg University.¹ His analysis is insightful. His thesis is that Christ, the Word or *Logos* of God, is at the heart of the truth about faith and reason, for *logos* means 'reason' as well as 'word'. We are created in the image and likeness of God, and specifically in the image and likeness of Christ the *Logos*, therefore our access to God must be characterised by reason. Our worship of God too must be intelligent, rational worship, as St Paul teaches in his letter to the Romans (Rom 12:2; St Paul's original Greek phrase is *logiken latreian*).

If we let go of our use of reason in our relationship with God we find ourselves on the path to disaster. In the first place it is no longer necessary to teach other people the faith, to explain it to them and convince them; it becomes acceptable to make people believe with the sword. And, of course, it was pointing out this attitude in some parts of the history of Islam that caused the controversy. However, this was not at all the main focus of the Pope's address; his critique was much more devastatingly directed towards the Christian West – our own culture. He sees the breakdown of the right relationship between reason and religion in the West occurring in three stages.

The first stage was the Protestant Reformation. Amongst the Reformers' criticisms of Catholicism was its dependence on scholastic theology and philosophy. In their opinion the Church needed to return to a 'pure' religion based on scripture alone, *sola scriptura*. In effect they were saying that human reason has nothing to say to faith. Some 200 years later Immanuel Kant would express this idea with astonishing radicalism, saying that he must lay aside thinking in order to make room for faith.

The second stage was essentially a response to the first: if reason must be set aside to make room for faith, then faith had better be set aside to make room for reason. If reason cannot talk about God or faith or miracles or the supernatural, then all these things must be banished from rational discourse. The result was an attempt to "demythologise" religion, to prune away all references to the supernatural: events like miracles and the resurrection of the dead, and doctrines like the Holy Trinity and the divinity of Christ. What was left was the 'pure' Christianity of the merely human Jesus and his ethical teachings – in other words, liberal modernism.

Finally, the third stage reduces the scope of human reason even further. Now religion and even ethics are deemed to be purely subjective and matters of individual feeling, so they cannot be meaningfully discussed. The only possible ground of rational discourse is the natural sciences, mathematics and empiricism. The resulting worldview is materialistic secularism, which we see all too obviously around us.

The Challenge of Relativism

According to the prevailing secularist mindset, you clearly have to get rid of any idea of absolute religious truth. Really you ought to be an atheist, or at best an agnostic. But if you must hang on to religion, you have to admit that it is only about personal experiences and feelings, and so is totally subjective. My experiences are no more valid or no less valid than yours, they are just different. Therefore my religion is just as good or bad as yours, and just as subjective. Jesus Christ and the Church and the sacraments and dogma are all mythical and relative. You can have them if you want them and you can junk them if you don't. And, of course, Allah and the Qur'an and Buddha and the Greek gods and whoever else you care to mention are in exactly the same boat. If you want them, that's fantastic, and if you don't, you can ditch them. In the end, the same is true for all moral norms too. It is all up to your feelings. There are no absolute truth claims involved at all... except, of course, the absolute dogma that there are no truth claims in matters of religion and morals!

The Challenge of Materialism and Secularism

All of this relativism contrasts so sharply with the approach of modern science. No one says, "If you think that gravity is true for you, that's fine; but it doesn't happen to be true for me." It is part of the standard scientific worldview that the laws of science are universally valid. We may not know everything about the universe yet there is more to discover, but we know that when we do the science we will discover the truth about the world. And the proof of the universal validity of science is technology: it works, quite independently of whether "it feels right for me".

However, science is not just a useful source of technology; it explains the world around us. It explains rainbows and lightning and volcanoes and earthquakes and why the grass is green and why the sky is blue and why sprouts are good for you (whether you like them or not) and why butter is bad for you (even if you do like it). And it explains more than this. It explains where babies come from. It explains how the human race has evolved. It explains how the organic chemicals that formed the beginnings of life were produced on the early earth through the laws of chemistry. It explains how the earth formed four billion years ago out of a vast cloud of gas and dust. It explains how the atoms that made up that dust and gas were synthesised inside stars billions of years before that, and how the stars exploded and blew the atoms out into space. Science even explains how the whole universe emerged from a Big Bang fourteen billion years ago. We know these things – they are not just ideas that you can buy into if it feels nice for you. We know they are true.

If we know that science is true, and if religion and morality are simply subjective feelings, surely atheism is the only credible option, surely we are only jumped-up apes. The whole idea of spiritual beings needs to be abandoned as a quirk of history. Religion should be abandoned too; but if it is tolerated in society it should be definitively relegated to the private sphere. Materialistic secularism is surely the only credible worldview. It is certainly the prevalent worldview in our Western culture.

PART TWO: THE RESPONSE OF THE RELIGIONS

How can religion respond to this situation? What has religion got to say to a world that is fundamentally convinced of the value of science but totally unconvinced of the value of religion or morals? There are various possible answers.

Irrationalism

One possible answer is to give in, to abandon any pretence to rationality in religion, and simply seek personal experience. This is the underlying attitude behind superstitions such as astrology or wearing lucky underpants to make your football team win. It is also the fundamental mentality of the New Age movement and neo-paganism. While they do sometimes engage rationally with such issues as ecology and feminism, at heart they are irrational and anti-rational. Ultimately their focus is on the purely experiential, seeking for intoxication and ecstasy.

Clearly such anti-rational religious ideas have no answer to give to our modern world. They merely capitulate to its secular materialism in all practical matters. In the end this is just running away from the questions.

Hinduism and Buddhism

If superstition and neo-paganism cannot offer any answer to the modern world, can traditional religions do any better? Let us start by looking at Hinduism.

Hinduism is a great mixture of ideas, some of which go back thousands of years while others are more recent. Not all of these ideas are totally consistent with each another, but this is not considered to be a major problem: Hinduism is pluralistic and relativistic. It is also polytheistic, at the surface level at least: Hindus believe in many gods. But whilst some Hindus accept this at face value, others see the gods really as manifestations of a single God. This God may be thought of as some sort of impersonal force in the universe or God may be personal. God may be identified with the universe, pantheism, or may somehow just be present in the universe panentheism.

Hindus believe in reincarnation. However, this is seen as a bad thing, and the aim of the Hindu religion is to escape from the cycle of reincarnation in order to escape from the universe to become merged with God. Given that God is often seen

as an impersonal force associated with the universe, this really means disappearing into unconsciousness, disappearing almost into nothingness. This process is often likened to a raindrop falling into the ocean and merging into it.

How far can Hinduism give an answer to the modern world? First of all, it can give no account of why the world is rational or why science works; in fact, quite the opposite would seem to be the case. If Hinduism is pluralistic and holds together various contradictory ideas, then it cannot sustain an idea of absolute truth. If it is polytheistic, if there are many gods influencing the world in different ways, then we cannot expect the world to be coherent, we should not expect the world to show coherent and consistent behaviour. Rather, we would expect there to be a jumble of different dynamics. We would expect the universe to be a chaos, not a cosmos. If we accept pantheism, if the world is divine, then it must be intrinsically mysterious; in which case it is beyond rational investigation and science should be impossible, or at least blasphemous. Finally, if the aim of life is to escape from the cycle of reincarnation, to escape from the world, then the world is implicitly a bad place. In summary, Hinduism suggests a world that is irrational, chaotic, beyond reason and evil. This hardly constitutes an answer to the challenge of secular materialism.

Buddhism surely fares no better in offering a constructive response to the challenge of our modern culture. It adopts much the same outlook on the world as Hinduism does, but without any clear idea of God or gods, thus adding nihilism into the bargain.

Monotheism

Monotheism, perhaps, is more likely to be able to respond positively to the modern world. Within classical monotheism the emphasis is placed more on divine revelation in history than on personal religious experience. Thus there is a greater emphasis on the objective and the historical rather than the subjective and the mythical. Monotheism also tends to emphasise the difference between God and the world.

Islam

In Islam, God is thought of as utterly and uncompromisingly transcendent. He is totally above the world and beyond our knowledge and understanding. This remains true despite the reality of divine revelation, since, according to Islam, God does not reveal himself, but only the decrees of his will. The purpose of revelation is not that we should come to know God personally or enter into personal communion with him (although this idea is found in certain strains of Islamic thought, for example Sufism), but that we should just learn what he tells us to do. Thus the aim of human life in Islam is to obey God, to submit to him. The word Islam itself means 'submission'.

Islam sees its scriptures as correspondingly utterly transcendent. The Qur'an is eternal and unchangeable, a heavenly text in Arabic. The majority opinion within Islam is that the Qur'an is uncreated. (Incidentally, that idea provides a very interesting link with the Christian concept of the uncreated Word of God, namely Jesus Christ.) This text was literally dictated word for word to Mohammed by the archangel Gabriel. Such a radical concept of the eternal word of God and its dictation demands a correspondingly radical and straightforward theory of interpretation. If the Qur'an is literally the words of God, existing from all eternity, and transmitted word for word to Mohammed, then it is in no way conditioned by the limitations of human authors. It would therefore be inappropriate to try to distinguish the message being communicated from its literary form or any other culturally determined conventions and patterns of speech it may utilise.² The direct word of God must surely be interpreted directly and literally. If the text of the Qur'an is the eternal and uncreated word of God, then the only logical option for interpreting it is fundamentalism.

What concept of the relationship between faith and reason does this give us? An early, minority view in Islam was that reason and revelation are complementary sources of guidance. The influential view, the view that eventually became dominant, is really that reason is suspect. Non-rational aspects of belief are to be defended because God transcends every possible human understanding. Reason can be used to explain and defend belief, but revelation itself is ultimately above the requirements of reason. In particular, we cannot necessarily understand why God says some things are good and other things are evil; he simply determines good and evil by sheer omnipotence. The task of humanity is not to question God's decisions, nor even to understand them, but to obey them – to submit. Ultimately, then, all philosophy and all human reason is suspect.

As a result it would seem that Islam can offer no satisfactory answer to the modern world. The underlying mentality is that faith and reason are in conflict. In the end, reason must be marginalised, since any attempt to understand God's word is in danger of questioning his omnipotence.

This inability of Islamic thought to respond to modern scientific culture seems to stem from two fundamental problems. The first is that of seeing the Qur'an as eternal and uncreated. As a result revelation does not have a human aspect. If you cannot distinguish the truth being communicated from its culturally and historically conditioned manner of expression, then it seems impossible to cope with advances in human knowledge which show up the limitations and inaccuracies of the earlier ideas. In other words, a fundamentalist approach to the scriptures is unable to respond positively to developments in modern science and other areas of learning.

The deeper difficulty is that of giving priority to the will of God and the decree of God, rather than to the truth of God and the reason of God. If Islam is suspicious of reason, then it has nothing ultimately to say to the modern scientific culture, because our scientific culture places its basic trust in human reason – and not without justification, given the great technological advances which science has led to. Faced with a choice between faith and reason, our society will choose reason. And in the end Islam seems to demand such a choice. If this is true, then the only response of Islam to the challenge of the modern secular world is retreat and defence.

Christian Fundamentalism and Liberalism

In truth, Christian fundamentalism stands in much the same position as Islam. It clings not only to the divine revelation expressed in the scriptures but also to the exclusively literal truth of the scriptures. As a result it has to let go of reason; it has to reject many of the findings of modern mainstream science, thinking that this is the only way to remain faithful to God's revelation.

Liberalism, on the other hand, takes a diametrically opposite position. It is very happy to embrace modern knowledge and opinion, but underestimates the reality of the supernatural. Thus the divine inspiration of the scriptures is downplayed and they are treated largely as merely historical documents, thus letting divine revelation slip through its fingers. The result is that whilst it attempts to be acceptable to modern society, it can fail to have any significant response to offer.

PART THREE: CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH, THE ONLY ADEQUATE RESPONSE

Having considered so many unfruitful ways for religion to respond to the modern world, we must now examine the elements required for a more successful approach. In the opinion of the author, they are in fact the elements of Catholicism.

The True Place of Reason in Religion

The first thing that must be established is the right relationship between reason and religion. From the very beginning the Church has known and taught that human reason has a central place in authentic religion. It is what St Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

What can be known about God is plain to them [men], because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. (Rom 1:19-20)

In fact the same ideas can be seen even in the Old Testament:

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists... For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. ...If [people] had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things? (Wisdom 13:1-9)

However, it is in St John's theology that the importance of reason is most majestically expressed: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." For the Greek *Logos* means not only 'word' but also 'reason'. One might translate, In the beginning was the Reason, and the Reason was with God, and the Reason was God. If this is true, then this verse is a hugely important text for the present investigation. Finally, the idea that reason has a crucial place in our relationship to God is found in many of the Fathers and great theologians of the Church: it is there in Justin, in Augustine, and in Aquinas.

All of this stands in stark contrast with the setting aside of reason which we saw in some Reformation theology and in Immanuel Kant. Karl Barth, as another and very influential example, sees faith as sheer paradox, independent of and contrary to reason. The ideas being advocated in such statements come perilously close to the deadly idea of blind faith. No wonder, then, when one of the great prophets of atheism in our time, Richard Dawkins, says, "faith... means blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence",³ or again:

Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence... Faith is not allowed to justify itself by argument.⁴

This sort of definition of faith is surely a caricature of any Christian position, but it is totally opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church:

The assent of faith is by no means a blind impulse of the mind. ...Not only can there be no conflict between faith and reason, they also support each other since right reason demonstrates the foundations of the faith and, illumined by its light, pursues the science of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold insights.⁵

There can be no conflict between faith and reason because both come from one and the same God. The God who created the world and who created our minds is also the God who has revealed himself, and God is not divided against himself.

The Truth about God and the World

Having granted the legitimate, indeed essential, place of human reason within religion, we need to identify the truth about God and the world, and the relationship between them.

First of all, God exists, he is not a myth. Next, God is not the world. Therefore we can investigate the world scientifically: it is not blasphemy, and it is not a foolish attempt to understand what is intrinsically mystery above human understanding. God created the world, so it is good. Thus, when we do science we will be exploring something positive; it will be interesting, it will be fruitful, it will be good for us. Of course we can abuse science, as we can abuse every good thing, but essentially science is a good thing to do because God has made the world good. God is one, therefore the world that he made will be coherent: it will be a cosmos, not a chaos. We expect science to work, we expect science to uncover a beautiful unity in the world made by God. And all of this is what we discover.

The result is that God can be known by our reason, even without the help of supernatural revelation. When we look at the world we can see reliable evidence for God. Again, this is the doctrinal position of the Catholic Church: "If anyone says that the One true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty with the natural light of human reason through the things that are created *anathema sit*."⁶

God created the world through his Word, through his *Logos* or Reason, not just by the sheer decree of his will. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:1-3) Thus the order of the world, which we discover in science, reveals the very Mind of God. Furthermore, the development of the world reveals the purpose of God. When God made the world, he had a purpose in mind; and we can begin to discern that purpose when we use our mind. And that purpose is ultimately Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15-17)

He [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight [not just by his sheer decree] the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1:4-10)

In conclusion, God the Creator is one and good and mind, therefore we see a world that is unified, harmonious, rational, true and good, a world that we can successfully investigate with science. In turn, the authentic application of science points us back to the truth of God.

The Truth about Revelation

We now need the truth about revelation. God is transcendent, he is in no way equal to the world, he is supremely above it. Yet he has genuinely revealed not only the decrees of his will but also his very self. He has communicated himself to us.⁷ And he does this in human ways, because we are human, and if we are to get to know God, we need to get to know him in a human way. Thus God uses human words and human language, human culture and human imagery, human existence and human nature. The apex of divine revelation is his coming into the world in Person: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Here at last we find the meaning of the world, the meaning of the cosmos: it is all for Christ. Science can know that the world has meaning, it can even discover the beginning of this meaning. But on its own it cannot find the full meaning of the world, for science only investigates matter, and the meaning of the world lies not just in matter, but also, and more fully, in spirit. Science yearns for and reaches out for a meaning, but that meaning is fully provided only by God's revelation, by God's Incarnation.

Finally we have a real answer for the modern secular world. So many other religions cannot do this, because for them the universe is mysterious or irrational or chaotic or evil, and so ultimately meaningless. But in a Christian understanding, the world is full of meaning and that meaning is Christ. So we should do science, we should investigate the world with our minds, openly and joyfully. It will lead us closer to God, to the true meaning of the world.

The Truth about Scripture and Doctrine

Finally we need the truth about scripture and doctrine. In Catholic theology scripture is certainly the inspired word of God: God is the author of every word in the Bible. But it is also a human word: the human beings who wrote it were also true authors.⁸ The scriptures therefore share to some extent in the

nature of the incarnation: they use human things as the means for God to communicate with us humanly. Thus we do not simply interpret the Bible in a fundamentalist or literalist way. Rather we must carefully discern and distinguish the human and divine elements in it. We must recognise the historical and cultural limitations of the human aspects, and also the absolute and unchangeable nature of the divine aspects.

This is no easy task. It requires the use of human reason and human learning. But even that is not enough. It also requires the authentic and authoritative tradition and teaching of the Church, for if the word of God was inspired by the Holy Spirit, then it can only be authentically interpreted by the same Holy Spirit. Thus we need the living Magisterium of the Church. Without the Magisterium any attempt to interpret the scriptures inevitably falls into fundamentalism or liberalism.

And because the Holy Spirit is active in the Church, we also find authentic development of doctrine. The Church will respond to heresies, to developing theological reflections, and to new scientific discoveries. Theology will continually look for new syntheses to incorporate the truth that we discover in the sciences and in other human studies into our understanding of all things, our understanding of God and his world and his purposes fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In Jesus Christ, the Word, the *Logos*, the Reason of God made flesh, and in his Church, and in that alone, we have an answer for our secular world. In this alone we expect the universe to be rational, created good and true by God, created with meaning – and that meaning of all creation looks to God himself. True religion, Roman Catholicism, is reasonable, it is rational and in fact it is the only reasonable position to take. Nothing else makes sense of us as human beings, as spiritual, rational and bodily beings. Only Roman Catholicism, only Jesus Christ and his Church, can explain that, can show the meaning of who we are.

Our world urgently needs to hear this truth, for only this truth can set it free from the slavery and self-absorption of secular materialism. So, let us believe it with confidence, and let us preach it with joy.

NOTES

¹Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections", Lecture of the Holy Father at the University of Regensburg, 12/09/2006. The text can be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html

²Cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 12 on the interpretation of the Christian scriptures.

³Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (new edition, Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 198.

⁴Richard Dawkins, unnamed lecture, quoted in Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 84.

⁵Vatican I, *Dei Filius*: DS 3010, 3019.

⁶Vatican I, *Dei Filius*: DS 3026; cf. DS 3004 and Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 6.

Fr John Gavin draws out a Patristic perspective upon the Incarnation and Divinisation. This throws a profound, if somewhat neglected, light upon the life and challenges of the ministerial priesthood. Fr Gavin lectures in Patristics and Greek at the Biblicum and Orientale Universities in Rome. He is a Jesuit of the New England province.

The Incarnation, the Priesthood and Communion with God

John Gavin S.J.

We Shall Become Like Him

One of the “hot topics” in Patristic studies these days is *theosis* or *deificatio*. Dionysius the Areopogite defines theosis as “the attaining of likeness to God and union with him in so far as it is possible”¹. Long considered to be primarily an Eastern doctrine, overlooked by the West in its emphasis upon redemption in Christ, *deificatio* has become the focus of many contemporary readings of such Western Fathers as Augustine of Hippo, Hilary of Poitiers, and Ambrose of Milan. Thus we find these remarkable words in Augustine’s homily on *Psalms 49*, regarding the elevation of the human to the divine in Jesus Christ:

It is clear that he called men gods, who have been deified by His (Christ’s) grace and not born of His substance. For He justifies, who is just of himself and not from another, and He deifies, who is God through himself and not by participation in another. But He who justifies, He himself deifies, because by justifying He makes sons of God. ‘For to them gave he power to become sons of God’ (John 1:12). If we have been made sons of God, we have been made gods; but this is from the grace of adoption and not from the nature of the one begetting.²

Despite such passages in the works of Augustine and other Fathers of the Church, the doctrine of deification has always inspired a certain degree of wariness within the Christian tradition. On the one hand, an overemphasis upon the identification of the divine nature with the creature could lead to a form of pantheism and an elimination of the absolute transcendence of the Creator. On the other hand, the teaching also threatens to transgress the integrity of human nature, leading to a complete absorption of the person in the infinite sea of divine spirit. Indeed, we can witness the results of these tendencies in certain Neoplatonic doctrines of emanation and return, as well as in such contemporary theological movements as “process theology”. An authentic doctrine of deification must therefore maintain the absolute transcendence of the creator, while also assuring the integrity of the human person.

Union and Communion, the Purpose of The Incarnation

For Christianity, however, the dangers inherent to *deificatio* are obviated by the doctrine of the Incarnation. If we consider the centuries of debate surrounding the Christological controversies, we can see that the issues revolved precisely around the problem of the union of divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ. Docetism, which reduced Jesus’ humanity to mere appearance; Nestorianism, which threatened to split the unity of Jesus’ person; monophysitism, monoenergism and monothelitism, which eliminated the sphere of Christ’s human action at the expense of the divine: all of these heresies represent extreme positions in the attempt to explain the mystery of the God-Man. Only the balanced expression of the Chalcedonian formula – one person in two natures,

“From the beginning of time, Christ’s perfect union of divinity and humanity has been the goal towards which all created humans hasten, and such union demanded a unique creature capable of receiving God in a special and friendly way,”

“without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” – and subsequent centuries of reflection and debate could begin to unfold the overwhelming truths inherent to this mystery “hidden for the ages”. In the Incarnation we witness both the achievement and the source of *deificatio*, the paradox of the infinite and the finite united, without mixture or confusion, in the person of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of *theosis* also puts into startling relief the “goal” or “end” of the Incarnation: The elevation of the creature to divine union, that “all might be one in God” and glorify Him. In the words of Fr. David Meconi, S.J.: “From the beginning of time, Christ’s perfect union of divinity and humanity has been the goal toward which all created humans hasten, and such union demanded a unique creature capable of receiving God in a special and friendly way, God’s own icons who have no more important vocation than to enter into loving union with him.”³ In this presentation I would like to reflect upon the doctrine of *theosis* or *deificatio* and the vocation to the priesthood. Our guide will be the great bishop and theologian, St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390), who describes the priest as the “diviniser”, who must also be “divinised.”

Gregory Nazianzus on The Priest as Diviniser

In the year 361, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, happily ensconced in monastic seclusion in Pontus on the Black Sea, received a summons from his Father, the elderly Bishop of Nazianzus, in south-western Cappadocia. The obedient son returned to discover the real motivations behind his recall to the family’s diocese: The congregation called out for Gregory’s ordination to the priesthood in order to make him the potential successor to the ailing bishop. He was reluctantly ordained on Christmas day, 361 A.D.

He didn’t stay long. Shortly after, Gregory fled the diocese and returned to the isolated mountain tranquility of his friend Basil. In Gregory’s own words:

Like an ox stricken by the gadfly, I made for Pontus, anxious to have the most godly of my friends as medicine for my agitation. For there, hidden in that cloud, like one of the sages of old, practising union with God, was Basil, who is now with the angels. With him I soothed my agony of spirit.⁴

This time of prayerful retreat, however, opened Gregory’s eyes to the importance of his new duties, and he returned to the diocese sometime before Easter 362. Needless to say, the people were rather angry about being abandoned by the famous orator and ascetic. In order to reconcile himself with the diocese, Gregory composed a defense for his actions, now known as the *Second Oration* or *Defence for the Flight*.

In this work, Gregory declares that he wished to explain not only the reasons for his flight, but also for his return. He had fled before the overwhelming responsibilities and the awesome dignity of the priesthood; he returned out of a sense of duty, humility, and obedience. While the basic structure of the argument appears simple, the Oration in fact offers a rich meditation upon the nature and duties of the priesthood, as well as an inspiring call to fidelity in vocation. Furthermore, I believe that Gregory’s presentation unfolds within the theme of the priest as “diviniser and divinised”, the mediator of *theosis* who is himself transformed in Christ.

The Priest as “Soul in the Body of Christ”

The first part of Gregory’s defense involves a demonstration of the overwhelming responsibilities and the awesome dignity of the priesthood. He develops a comparison between the governing and divinising role of the soul in the body, and the governing and divinising role of the priest in the body of Christ. Early in the discourse he establishes this theme:

Now, just as in the body there is one member (i.e., the soul) which rules and, so to say, presides, while another is ruled over and subject; so too in the churches, God has ordained, according either to a law of equality, which admits of an order of merit, or to one of providence, by which he has knit all together, that those for whom such treatment is beneficial, we should be subject to pastoral care and rule, and be guided by word and deed in the path of duty...⁵

This comparison becomes even more striking when Gregory takes up a common patristic theme, the sanctifying or divinising role of the soul in relation to the body. Christians sought to eschew any form of Platonic dualism that would portray the human soul/body composite as a prison for the authentic spiritual essence of man. Yet, they also recognised the higher nature of the soul and the importance of its purity and dominance over the often rebellious corporeal senses. The soul, through exercise and cooperation with the power of grace, grows in sanctity and holiness and, in turn, imparts this holiness upon the body through its governance. Thus, God divinises the soul growing in virtue, and the soul divinises the body – as far as possible in this life, but perfectly when the soul is reunited with the resurrected body for eternity. In the words of Gregory:

...(the soul) is divine, and partakes of the heavenly nobility, and presses on to it, even if it be bound to an inferior nature. Perhaps indeed there are other reasons also for this, which only God, who bound them together, and those who are instructed by God in such mysteries, can know, but as far as I and men like myself can perceive, there are two: one, that it may inherit the glory above by means of a struggle and wrestling with things below,

being tried as gold in the fire by things here, and gain the objects of our hope as a prize of virtue, and not merely as the gift of God. This, indeed, was the will of Supreme Goodness, to make the good even our own, not only because sown in our nature, but because cultivated by our own choice, and by the motions of our will, free to act in either direction. The second reason is, that it may draw to itself and raise to heaven the lower nature (the body), by gradually freeing it from its grossness, in order that the soul may be to the body what God is to the soul, itself leading on the matter which ministers to it, and uniting it, as its fellow servant, to God.⁶

The priest, as the “soul” in the body of Christ, has a similar task in sanctifying and divinising the people of the flock. The priest is a healer, a physician who applies his craft to the souls wounded by sin, and in turn elevates those souls to the divine. In Gregory’s words:

But the scope of our art is to provide the soul (i.e., of the people) with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in his image, if it abides, to take it by the hand if it is in danger, or restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and, in short, to *deify*, and bestow heavenly bliss upon one who belongs to the heavenly host.⁷

This, according to Gregory, is the most overwhelming and humbling aspect of the “priestly art”: that a mere man, wrapped in his own spiritual struggle and working out his own salvation “in fear and trembling”, is called to lead and sanctify the people for union with God. Unlike Jesus, the priest is a “diviniser” who himself must be “deified”. The priest receives the vocation to act as the soul in the body of Christ, and “deifies” his flock that it might be one with God; but he himself constantly requires the mediation of the incarnate Word, who is the fulfilment and source of all deification.

The Divinising Activity of the Priesthood

How does the priest carry out this task of healing and transforming his flock in Christ? Gregory goes on to describe four main responsibilities of the priest, which, I believe, can be considered under two headings. The first three involve growth in virtue, or, the expression of “the image of God” in the people. The fourth, however, is of a different order entirely, since it involves the granting of divinisation, or “the likeness” of God to the people.

First, the priest *preaches* the Word of God. This involves both spiritual and intellectual preparation, always with the intention to impart the truth to the people.

To me indeed it seems no slight task, and one requiring no little spiritual power, to give in due season to each his portion of the

word, and to regulate with judgment the truth of our opinions, which are concerned with subjects as the world or worlds, matter, soul, mind, intelligent natures, better or worse, providence, which holds together and guides the universe...⁸

Closely tied with this task, the priest is also *the teacher of right doctrine*. Gregory emphasises the need for fidelity to the Church and an adherence to her tradition. A priest as teacher does not indulge in conveying his own personal opinions to the congregation, but rather he passes on the truths of the tradition safeguarded in the Church. Gregory has no tolerance for the so-called “open-minded” priest who considers the Church’s tradition to be just one product in the “market place of ideas”:

What again of those who come with no private idea, or form of words, better or worse, in regard to God, but listen to all kinds of doctrines and teachers, with the intention of selecting from all what is best and safest, in reliance upon no better judges of the truth than themselves? They are, in consequence, borne and turned about hither and thither by one plausible idea after another, and, after being deluged and trodden down by all kinds of doctrine, and having rung the changes on a long succession of teachers and formulae, which they throw to the winds as readily as dust, their ears and minds at last are wearied out, and, O what folly! They become equally disgusted with all forms of doctrine, and assume the wretched character of deriding and despising our faith as unstable and unsound...⁹

Finally, the priest must become *a living example of the Christian life* for his flock. He seeks holiness not only to acquire his own salvation, but also to illustrate the Gospel in his comportment and actions. Gregory acknowledges, however, the extreme difficulties of this task:

I am alarmed by the reproaches of the Pharisees, the conviction of the Scribes. For it is disgraceful for us, who ought greatly to surpass them, as we are bidden, if we desire the kingdom of heaven, to be found more deeply sunk in vice. ...A man must himself be cleansed, before cleansing others; himself become wise, that he may make others wise; become light, and then give light; draw near to God, and so bring others near; be hallowed, then hallow them; be possessed of hands to lead others by the hand, of wisdom to give advice.¹⁰

At this point, one may remark that these three tasks are not necessarily distinct to the priestly vocation and belong to some degree to every Christian calling. Yet, the priest, as the “soul in the body of Christ” and public witness to the Gospel, receives a greater responsibility to embody the truths and values of the Faith. He must engage in ascetic struggle, prepare himself intellectually to the best of his ability, and, above all, open

himself to the transforming grace of the sacraments in order to become preacher, teacher, and living example of the follower of Christ.

The fourth activity, as noted above, belongs to an entirely different order: The priest has been ordained to celebrate the sacraments – above all the Eucharist – from which the divinising grace of Christ flows. No man, in fact, is worthy to become the celebrant of these rites; no man, through his own powers, can raise the creature to the likeness of God. Yet, the priest, while celebrating the liturgy, becomes divinised by the grace of the sacrament and, in turn, offers the grace which divinises the people. Gregory portrays the priest at the altar in awe-inspiring terms:

Who (speaking of the priest) can mould, as clay-figures are modelled in a single day, the defender of the truth, who is to take his stand with Angels, and give glory with Archangels, and cause the sacrifice to ascend to the altar on high, and share the priesthood of Christ, and renew the creature, and set forth the image, and create inhabitants for the world above, aye and, greatest of all, be God, and make others to be God (theopoiesonta)?¹¹

The priest as celebrant of the liturgy does not act of himself, as he does to a certain extent in the first three tasks. Rather, he assumes his place at the altar “in persona Christi” – in Gregory’s expression, “to be God” – and, through consecrating the bread and wine, and distributing the body of Christ, he “makes others to be God.” Here he fulfils perfectly his role as priest – “the soul in the body of Christ” – in receiving and offering divinising grace to the community.

The “active submission” of the Priest

After considering these tasks of the priest, Gregory concludes his defense for the flight to Pontus. Who would not be terrified before duties of the priesthood and the call to become “diviniser and divinised” in the name of Christ? Gregory trembled and ran to the solace of his spiritual retreat, convinced of his wretchedness and weakness in contrast with the lofty virtues required by the call. In Gregory’s words:

Since then I knew these things, and that no one is worthy of the mightiness of God, and the sacrifice, and priesthood, who has not first presented himself to God, a living, holy sacrifice, and set forth the reasonable, well-pleasing service, and sacrificed to God the sacrifice of praise and the contrite spirit which is the only sacrifice required of us by the Giver of all; how could I dare to offer to Him the external sacrifice, the antitype of the great mysteries, or clothe myself with the garb and name of priest, before my hands had been consecrated by holy works...¹²

Yet, while he may have explained the reasons behind his flight, Gregory must still explain why he chose to return. He notes that certain prophets also trembled and hesitated before their call from God: Moses resisted at first, and Jeremiah sought to excuse himself because of his youth. In the end, however, these prophets *obeyed* and submitted to the mission set upon them. They found their strength in humility and abandonment to God, recognising that God’s strength would make up for their own weaknesses. Only a complete concession through obedience to divine grace and to God’s call empowered these men to become instruments of God’s glory.

Gregory chose to imitate these examples, and above all, the example of his Saviour, through a humble acceptance of suffering and the knowledge of God’s support:

Therefore I was not rebellious, neither turned away back, saith my Lord, when, instead of being called to rule, He was led, as sheep to the slaughter; but I fell down and humbled myself under the mighty hand of God, and asked pardon for my former idleness and disobedience, if this is at all laid to my charge. I held my peace, but I will not hold my peace for ever: I withdrew for a little while, till I had considered myself and consoled my grief: but now I am commissioned to exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders.¹³

Gregory found the courage to return through an imitation of Christ’s active suffering as the “lamb led to the slaughter.” The priest finds the strength to fulfil his mission not through his own force, but rather through a constantly renewed submission to God’s grace: He must, in his vocation, abandon his self-determination to the Lord, above all at the sacrifice of the altar. On the one hand, this submission involves daily struggle in order to die to self; on the other hand, the more the priest offers himself to Christ, the more he opens himself to the divinising power of Christ’s grace. In this spiritual stance, he is deified; in this concession to love, he divinises others.

Conclusions

Perhaps we priests have often felt a little bit like Gregory when confronted with the exigencies of our vocation. Our work as teachers and preachers – not to mention as administrators, accountants, plumbers, electrical repairmen and many other unexpected jobs – robs us of the longed-for spiritual retreat with the Lord; or, worse, turns our vocations into a perpetual series of mundane tasks that seem to have little to do with our original calling. Furthermore, at times we find ourselves trembling before our spiritual weaknesses, saddened by our failure to convey sufficiently the Gospel message in word and example. We want to flee, and we imagine what life could have been – or could be – if we were in a mountain retreat or in another state of life.

The doctrine of divinisation, however, puts our vocation into a new perspective. First, we come to realise that our vocation, our mission in the body of Christ, is also our way of expressing God's image and acquiring God's likeness. The grace which we received in the bishop's laying on of hands and the constant renewal of grace in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession deify us: through that grace we grow in virtue, through that grace we shine as "other Christs" in this world and for all eternity. Seen in human terms, the priesthood inspires a flight to a form of transient human peace and false hope; seen through the perspective of divinisation, the priesthood calls us to flee to the solace of Jesus himself, who raises us beyond our human natures to a union with the divine nature.

Second, deification allows us to see the suffering entailed in the priesthood as, in fact, the manner in which we acquire that "active submission" before the power of divine grace. Jesus modelled the human will in his own suffering, accepting the cup as God-man in obedience to the Father's will. The daily trials that we willingly accept in union with Christ become our way of accepting "the cup", that is, our daily offering and self-surrender before God.

This submission to grace also takes place in our dedication to the spiritual life. Like Gregory, we cease to see our vocation in human terms – for who could possibly live up to this calling! – and we turn ourselves entirely over to Jesus' support. In our daily prayer and struggle for holiness we grow in friendship with him, and the more we "concede" to his will in love, the more strength and solace we shall receive. This occurs above all in our daily celebration of the Mass, when we live out our priestly vocation in the perfect manner of "diviniser and divinised" in Christ. The joy and peace we find in the moment of consecration comes from the intimate meeting with the One who called us, the Lord who continues to sustain us and to make us "gods".

Finally, the doctrine of divinisation reminds us that, despite our personal inadequacies, it is not we, but Jesus who divinises his flock. We all bring our personal gifts to our vocation: some of us are preachers, others scholars; some of us have great organisational skills, others work better in a classroom setting; some of us are hospital chaplains, others youth group leaders. Yet, what unites us all is that we are servants of Christ's grace through the celebration of the sacraments. In the sacraments, Jesus acts and transforms fallen man into his likeness. Like John the Baptist, in the sacraments we point away from ourselves and toward Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God." When we remember who the real actor is, we feel humbled; but we also experience, like Gregory, a sense of relief: it is Jesus, not we, who leads his flock, heals the wounds of sin, and raises up the people to divine union. Our gift is to share in this divinising activity and to witness the wonder of wonders – man transformed by the love of Jesus and united to God.

In our daily prayer for ourselves and for our people, let us repeat the words of Gregory and grow in hunger for this perfect union with God:

May Jesus give strength and power unto his people and Himself present to Himself His flock resplendent and spotless and worthy of the fold on high, in the habitation of them that rejoice in the splendour of the saints, so that in His temple everyone, both flock and shepherds together may say, Glory, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be all glory for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁴

NOTES

¹DIONYSIUS THE AREOPOGITE, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* I, 3, PG 3, 376A.

²AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 49, 1, CCL 38, p. 575-576, 8- 15. Manifestum est ergo, quia homines dixit deos, ex gratia sua deificatos, non de substantia sua natos. Ille enim iustificat, qui per semetipsum non ex alio iustus est; et ille deificat, qui per seipsum non alterius participatione Deus est. Qui autem iustificat, ipse deificat, quia iustificando, filios Dei facit. *Dedit enim eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*. Si filii Dei facti sumus, et dii facti sumus: sed hoc gratiae est adoptantis, non naturae generantis.

³D. MECONI, S.J., *Union with God: Living the Christ Life*, London 2006, pp. 15-16.

⁴GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *On his own life*, 350-356, in B. DALEY, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, London 2006, p. 9.

⁵GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oration 2*, 3, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. VII. S. Cyril of Jerusalem and S. Gregory Nazianzan*, trans. P. Schaff and H. Wace, Grand Rapids, Mich, 1983, p. 205. (Subsequent references to Or. 2 will be from Schaff-Wace.)

⁶Or. 2, 17, p. 208

⁷Or. 2, 22, p. 209.

⁸Or. 2, 35, p. 212.

⁹Or. 2, 42, p. 213.

¹⁰Or. 2, 70-71, p. 219.

¹¹Or. 2, 73, p. 220.

¹²Or. 2, 95, p. 223.

¹³Or. 2, 115, p. 227.

¹⁴Or. 2, 117, p. 227.

LOVE FOR ALLAH: AN EXERCISE IN HONEST DIALOGUE

Ida Zilio-Grandi

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She gives us a helpful insight into Islam's emphasis upon the radical priority of our duty to love God, and to love others into that state. She shows the link between this emphasis and the brotherhood of all who attempt to follow this command, Muslims. She goes on to make a helpful call for honest, non-relativistic, dialogue.

"A common word between us and you" is the title of a long, learned and beautiful letter which 138 Sunni and Shiite Islamic leaders have recently sent to the major representatives of Christian churches. Whether committed Muslim or committed Christian, the reader is presented with central themes common to our monotheistic creeds- in particular that sentiment of love which such a religious person fosters for God, and which is also orientated towards one's neighbour.

To re-discover and reaffirm a fundamental agreement between these monotheistic "ways" is important and urgent because, as the letter affirms, "without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world."

Love of Neighbour

From amongst the richness of this letter, I would want to highlight the commandment to "love for *the benefit* of your brother what you love *for the benefit* of yourself", the golden rule of love according to the Muslim tradition, which is explored in Part II. As the letter points out, the rule itself does not figure in the Qur'an but rather in the *sunna*. This is the record of sayings and actions of the Prophet of Islam remembered by the most reliable of witnesses and in a somewhat general manner put to paper two centuries after

the Qur'anic preaching. It provides an example of faith and behaviour which the Muslim hopes to imitate. In particular the golden rule appears at the head of two canonical recollections – in both cases inside the *Book of the Faith*¹ – those of Bukhari (d. 256 of the hegira/870 AD) and of Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj (d. 261/875). This gives the rule a position of preeminence in authoritative Islamic literature.

The parallelism most probably witnesses to something which had been a cultural norm. The respected expert on Islam Ignaz Goldziher said, more than a century ago, that the main elements of the traditional Islamic literature offer us numerous examples of the straightforward reception of Christian insight on the part of the founders of Islam: "Islam considered Christianity a religion from which it was able to borrow something", particularly in the field of wise sayings.²

Love of God more fundamental

As has been said this commandment does not appear in the Qur'an. The Book of Islam, in a manner which is similar to Old and New Testament literature, prefers to insist upon a love which is logically prior to the love which is between human beings, that is the love of God and for God. And when the Sacred Book of Islam considers love between human creatures, it presents this phenomenon in a particular manner. In the Surah of the Family of Imran, for example, God puts believers on guard against those who do not return their love, that is unbelievers amongst the People of the Book, Jews and Christians. In the same Surah, man's love towards sons and women is seen as possessive and compared with love towards pleasure and riches (cf. Qur'an, respectively 3,119 and 14). And in the Surah of Joseph, the love which the wife of the Egyptian fosters for Joseph is the source of derision and scandal, it is a love which goes astray, is lustful and false (12,23-32).

In general according to the Qur'an to love, and not to love, is one of the great prerogatives of God. The man who loves is often described negatively. Such a man loves ephemeral earthly riches, idols, blindness of the heart or evil; or he loves to be praised for that which he has not himself achieved.

Man's love makes himself good, notwithstanding the merits of reciprocity, only if it is orientated to God and to Islam: "O you who believe!", it is said in the Surah of the Mensa, "if any from among you turn back from his Faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom he will love, as they will love him."

Turning to the Tradition of the Prophet, the Sunna, it also confers ultimate value on the love towards God and towards the Book of the Faith. It is true that this literature, when compared to the Qur'an is more attentive to the love which creatures offer one for another. It is also true that such love is orientated first of all towards Mohammed, and must be "in God". For example, Bukhari writes,

"there are three things in which man finds the sweetness of the faith; that God and his prophet may be for him more loved than anyone else; that in loving the human being one does not love him unless in God".³

The same author cites, as part of the faith, love for anyone who may be loved by God and thus by Gabriel and all those in paradise.⁴ It is evident that in this literature to love the prophet or him who is loved by God and the angels and the blessed equates, in the ultimate analysis, to love for God.

Articulated in numerous manners, the call is always the same; to love God, and, it needs to be emphasised, to love God according to Islam. Instead to love man, man in general, is a resultant phenomenon, a second instance permitted only in the context of love for God and "in God". The message of the Sunna does not then contradict the Qur'anic message. Instead it confirms many verses of the Book which ultimately refer to God all the types of love.

Love for neighbour is love for the benefit of your neighbour

One more observation; whilst Christian doctrine prescribes loving our *neighbour* as we love ourselves, Muslim doctrine prescribes loving *for the benefit of one's brother (an yuhibba li-akhi-hi)* that which one loves *for the benefit of oneself*. The Islamic formulation of the golden rule is not motivated by linguistic exigencies or the syntax of the Arabic language, its emphasis is intentional: Love not the other but "for the benefit of the other that which...". The object of love is beyond the man because, in a unique manner, it rests in God.

As the eminent medieval theologian Ghazali (d. 505/1111) wrote, God alone is He who merits love; and the love of man

for himself is orientated directly to God from the moment that the existence of each man comes from God.⁵

Loving Neighbour and Loving God

But who is it *for the benefit of whom* one must love *that which one loves* for the benefit of oneself?

Tirmidhi (d.278/899), another great collector of prophetic sayings and actions which are understood as canonical, records at once that "if you love for the benefit of people that which you love for the benefit of yourself you are a Muslim". And the brother for the benefit of whom you love is a Muslim. According to the literature of Tradition – not that different from New Testament literature – fraternity is first of all linked to confessionality; many sayings record that the brother of a Muslim is a Muslim, that the brother of the believer is a believer; they are brothers in the religion of God and in his Book, or else in the covenant of the Prophet Muhammad, and that, when they pray, even slaves are one's brothers.⁶

The Qur'an itself declares that "believers are all brothers" (49,10), that "He put harmony in your hearts, and through His grace you have become brothers" (3,102-103).

In the vast majority of texts the call of fraternal love is understood in this confessional sense. Ghazali, exploring the sins of the heart and of envy, writes:

"the creature does not arrive at true faith as long as he does not love for the benefit of *other Muslims* that which he loves for the benefit of himself; moreover, it is necessary that it be a sharing in good and bad fortunes. Muslims are like a unified building where each part is connected to another. They are like a unified body in which, if one member suffers, the rest of the body also suffers."⁷

The golden rule according to Islam can then be re-stated in this manner; love the Lord and love His Word according to the Qur'an, and your love towards God, in other words your faith, will be of benefit to yourself and equally of benefit to all Muslims.

Does it not awaken wonder that such a rule, very clearly marked by themes of confessionality, may become in turn, on the part of Islam, an invitation to conversion. The prominent Baghdadian Ahmad Ibn Al-Munajjin (9th-10th century AD) wrote to the Christian Qusta Ibn Luqa, at the conclusion of a letter on the truth of Islam,

"I brought to fulfilment some good advice for you: I loved for your benefit that which I have loved for mine. Fear Allah, to whom you are going and return to the truth which is the most worthy thing for you to return to."

As I hope is evident, none of the above meant to reduce or dispute the cultural significance, much less the real orientation towards peace of "A Common Word". Rather we want to counter the modern tendency to make grand utterances which, whilst often a valid part of dialogue, use scriptural texts uprooted willy-nilly from their cultural context. A key example would be concerning the "*la ikrah fi al-din*", the celebrated "let there be no compulsion in religion" contained in the Surah of the Heifer (2,256). It is cited amongst other places in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Islam* issued in 1981 on the initiative of the Islamic Council of Europe, by Pope Benedict XVI in his lecture at the University

of Regensburg, and then in the following Open Letter to him from authoritative Muslim theologians and jurists. The Qur'anic word was appearing everywhere without appropriate contextualisation whether semantic, historical or concerning authoritative Qur'anic exegesis across a long history. Cultural specificity is relevant even concerning the teachings of revealed religions.

What can one conclude for the dialogue? Louis Massignon wrote that success does not reside in searching for a common measure and common denominators: "in order to find convergence we must search for that which is most authentic concerning the originality of each religion." Whatever else, achieving the re-reading of scripture, word for word, without cultural prejudice, is now very important.

Translated from the original Italian by the Editor.

NOTES

¹"Book of the Faith" is the title of one of the first chapters in the two *Sunna* collections.

²Cfr. *The Hadith and the New Testament*, in *Muslim Studies*, vol. II, London 1967 (= *Muhammedanische Studien*, Halle 1890), pp. 346-362, above all 346-350; *Neutestamentliche Elemente in der Traditionsliteratur des Islām* (in "Oriens Christianus", 1902, pp. 330-337; *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV, Hildesheim 1968).

³For this saying and others cf. A.J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la Tradition musulmane*, Leiden 1936, vol. I, p. 110 (s.v. *imān*); see also M. Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, Leiden – New-York – Köln 1994, p. 24; A. Benabdellah, *L'Islām et la morale universelle*, Rabat 1996, p. 44.

⁴Cf. again Wensinck, *Concordance*, cit., vol. I, p. 408 (s.v. *hubb*).

⁵*Il ravvivamento delle scienze religiose*, trad. it. in *Scritti scelti*, a cura di L. Vecchia Vaglieri e R. Rubinacci, Torino 1970, pp. 525-540.

⁶*L'inizio della Retta Guida*, trad. it. di G. Celentano, 2a ed. Trieste 1989, p. 94.

⁷Cf. S. Kh. Samir, I. Zilio-Grandi, *Una corrispondenza islamo-cristiana sull'origine divina dell'Islam*, Torino 2003, coll. PCAC, 8).



POPE BENEDICT: BE UNFASHIONABLE AND LOVE JESUS

To University Students; Vatican City, Nov. 9, 2007

"...people who wish to be Christ's disciples are called to go against the tide... (of) arrogance and the achievement of success at all costs..."

(Today) there exists a race, sometimes a desperate race, toward appearance and possession at all costs, at the expense, unfortunately, of being. The Church, teacher of humanity, never tires of exhorting people, especially the young of whom you are a part, to remain watchful and not to fear choosing 'alternative' paths which only Christ can indicate...

Jesus calls all his friends to live in sobriety and solidarity, to create sincere and disinterested emotional relationships with others... From you, dear young students, he asks for honest commitment to study, cultivating a mature sense of responsibility and a shared interest in the common good.

May your years at university be, then, training for a convinced and courageous evangelical witness. And to realise your mission, seek to cultivate an intimate friendship with the divine Master, enrolling yourselves in the school of Mary, Seat of Learning."



The Primacy of Christ in John Duns Scotus: An Assessment

Br. Philippe Yates

The theology of John Duns Scotus places Christ at the centre of a universe ordered by love. Christ is presented as the basis of all nature, grace and glory – the most perfect model of humanity. He is at the beginning, the centre and the end of the universe.

Lack of Appreciation

In this writer's opinion Scotus has been greatly misjudged and misunderstood. The learned Jesuit, Father Bernard Jansen, once wrote that "rarely has the real figure of an eminent personage of the past been defaced as has that of the Franciscan John Duns Scotus."¹ The philosopher Etienne Gilson, wrote "Of a hundred writers who have held Duns Scotus up to ridicule, not two of them have ever read him and not one of them has understood him."²

Brother Philippe Yates, OFM, gives us a fascinating introduction to the potent thought of the medieval theologian, Blessed Duns Scotus, concerning the relationship of the Incarnation to the Creation. Brother Yates is Formation Secretary for the English Franciscan Province and lectures at the Franciscan International Study Centre in Canterbury.

"We find ourselves in a universe united around its purpose – which is to reflect in love the loving God who created it. The highest expression of this purpose is the one who loves most perfectly, Christ who is the goal of creation and to whom all of creation tends."

There are several reasons why Duns Scotus has been so misunderstood and maligned. One of them is his own self-effacement that led him to shy from the limelight and work modestly and humbly in the background. Another is the subtlety of his thought, which sends teachers into despair as they try to mediate his ideas to their students and leads many to abandon the attempt as too difficult. This very subtlety which is the strength of his theology and philosophy fights against the diffusion of his ideas. A third reason is his passion for the truth that led him to oppose error wherever he found it and approach each question with an intense objectivity – an attitude that gained him enemies in his own day and has continued to gain him opponents down the ages whose pet theories are attacked by his penetrating intellect. But perhaps the chief reason why he has been so attacked, and the saddest to recount, is because he is not St. Thomas Aquinas and indeed his system of thought disagrees with that of St. Thomas on some key points. Among those who refuse to admit of the possibility of a number of orthodox ways of expressing the mysteries of our faith, to affirm the greatness of Aquinas has all too often seemed to require denigrating the thought of Scotus.

The Rise of St. Thomas

At the end of the 19th century the Church was beginning to recover from the persecutions and suppressions of the Enlightenment, the French revolution, the Napoleonic era, and the liberal revolutions throughout Europe. Not one country had been spared these ravages in one manner or another and it was only when a relative peace between the Church and the world was established towards the end of the 19th century that the Church could begin once more to reconstruct its intellectual and physical structures. Pope Leo XIII surveyed the intellectual landscape and sought a Catholic system of thought upon which this renewal could be based. He found the system of St. Thomas to be eminently rational, defensible and proclaimable. In the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* Leo XIII wrote that "a fruitful cause of the evils which now afflict, as well as of those which threaten us, lies in this: that false conclusions concerning divine and human things, which originated in the schools of philosophy, have crept into all the orders of the State, and have been accepted by the common consent of the masses."³ He went on in detail to describe the way that Christian philosophers, with reason guided by faith, have down the ages opposed

the errors of their time. As a remedy for the errors of the nineteenth century Pope Leo recommended above all St. Thomas, saying “among the scholastic doctors, the chief and master of all towers Thomas Aquinas, who, as Cajetan observes, because ‘he most venerated the ancient doctors of the Church, in a certain way seems to have inherited the intellect of them all.’ The doctrines of those illustrious men, like the scattered members of a body, Thomas collected together and cemented, distributed in wonderful order, and so increased with important additions that he is rightly and deservedly esteemed the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith.”⁴

Leo supported his recommendation of the teaching of St. Thomas with an impressive list of sponsors of the Angelic Doctor. Corporate sponsors included the Dominicans, of course, but also the Benedictines, Carmelites, Augustinians, the Society of Jesus and many others who bound their members in their statutes to follow the teaching of St. Thomas. To these endorsements he added a list of Popes who have recommended St. Thomas: Clement VI, Nicholas V, Benedict XIII, Pius V, Clement XII, Urban V, Innocent XII and Benedict XIV are all quoted as supporting the teaching of St. Thomas. Leo finally quotes the testimony of Innocent VI who says “His teaching above that of others, the canons alone excepted, enjoys such an elegance of phraseology, a method of statement, a truth of proposition, that those who hold to it are never found swerving from the path of truth, and he who dare assail it will always be suspected of error.”⁵

Not only Popes but councils have held St. Thomas in singular honour, with the Council of Trent even keeping a copy of the *Summa* on the altar along with the scriptures and the decrees of the Popes, to consult for enlightenment.

Buttressed by such a phalanx of support Leo XIII ended his encyclical with a ringing exhortation, “We exhort you, Venerable Brethren, in all earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defence and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences”⁶

It was an exhortation that was welcomed and followed by many in the Church so that it has been written “We are accustomed to consider Saint Thomas, Thomism, and Aristotelianism as the predominant points of orientation and the most favourable to the Church.”⁷

Given such a series of endorsements it is not surprising that many who naturally look for certainty in their faith and seek a rock on which to build that certainty, look to St. Thomas and see in him not only a guarantee of orthodoxy, but almost the only guarantee of orthodoxy, raising Innocent IV’s suspicion of those who disagree with St. Thomas, almost to a declaration that they are outside the bounds of faith.

A Different Emphasis

Now it is well known that within the Church there has been for centuries a series of disputes between the school of St. Thomas and that of Blessed John Duns Scotus. At a certain point the disputes became so acrimonious that the Pope had to impose silence on the two schools, forbidding them to speak of each other. At the root of the dispute lies the philosophy of the two masters. For while Aquinas embraced the philosophy of Aristotle and rendered it Christian, Scotus sought a synthesis of Aristotelianism with the traditional Augustinian philosophy of the Church Fathers. Scotus calls St. Paul the Christian philosopher and seeks in his philosophy to find a balance between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism in such a way that he often agrees with Aquinas but sometimes disagrees where the rigour of his thinking leads him in other directions.

Perhaps one could sum up the differences in this way. Where the genius of Aquinas was to distinguish and make divisions, the genius of Scotus was to unite and order. Where Aquinas has each angel a separate species, Scotus has the angels united in several species but distinguished numerically. Where Aquinas made a distinction between the soul and its faculties, Scotus refused to admit such a division. Where Aquinas taught that in every human conception there are three souls, the vegetative, the sensitive and the rational, Scotus would have but one rational soul with virtual distinctions. Where for Aquinas justification is explained by two distinctive forms in the soul, grace and charity, Scotus would have the form consist only of charity. So while in Aquinas we find clear distinctions, in Scotus we find a luminous unity. You will find in Scotus a consistency throughout his doctrine that gives witness to that sense of unity in all things.

Blessed John Duns Scotus is famous in medieval thought for the ruthless application of the principle that entities are not to be multiplied without necessity. For him it was better to have a minimum of realities that ennoble the nature of a thing than to multiply realities when they are not necessary and do not ennoble nature – or as we might say today “keep it simple” and elegant! So even the universe has one universal order and one first cause. Scientists today are still following his intuition as they seek the grand unifying principle that will unify quantum theory with the theory of relativity to give one overarching explanation of the nature of the universe.

In this article I want to try to express why it is that I feel Scotus’ theology and philosophy are attractive, but, in the light of the some who find its unfamiliarity suspicious, I also want to allay those doubts.

Synthetic Theology

In his theology Scotus seeks to build everything on his Christology – a Christology that is at the same time Pauline, Johannine and Franciscan. Pauline, because it develops the insight that Christ is the “image of the invisible God, the first-

born of every creature. For in him were created all things... through and unto him" (Col. 1: 15-17). It is Johannine since it sees love at the root of God and of creation. "I say therefore that God first loves himself", Scotus says in the Paris commentary. Finally it is Franciscan in that it seeks to harmonise all things in Christ according to the divine plan so that the bond between all creatures is recognised with each being assigned its own place in God's loving creation.

Scotus' theology, like his character, is that of the *via media*, treating all opinions with respect and then seeking a synthesis that draws out the best from each one examined. Often does his summation of an outline of different doctrines begin with the words "I hold the middle course."

His theology was not merely theoretical. He lived what he believed. In 1303 the King of France forced the University of Paris to accept his convocation of a Council to judge the Pope and declare the King's right to administer church property. Scotus' signature was tenth on the list of those opposed – earning for himself exile from Paris and the foremost university of the day. So he was willing to risk life and reputation to defend the primacy of the Pope. For his defence of papal supremacy Scotus later was given the epithet "*Hercules Papistarum*" (Hercules of the Papists).⁸ In this defence of papal authority he followed and contributed to a Franciscan tradition espoused by Bonaventure and Olivi. Scotus' teachings in turn helped inspire the Franciscans who outlined a theology of papal infallibility in the decades that followed.⁹ Once the Pope and King had been reconciled Scotus was permitted to return to Paris and resume his teaching.

The Immaculate Conception

During his time at Paris Scotus took his well known stand on the Immaculate Conception of Mary. It was a risky doctrine to defend, especially for a young theologian early in his career. For in defending the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception Scotus was defending a doctrine that the most eminent theologians of the age from St. Bernard of Clairvaux to St. Thomas Aquinas had declared to be suspect. Even the Franciscan St. Bonaventure, while recognising that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was not contrary to Scripture, had opposed it as being less safe, reasonable and common than the maculist position. There were some 200 objections to the doctrine raised by theologians. However, while the learned objected, the people of God, with their inspired sense of right doctrine, continued to promote the doctrine of Mary's singular privilege. This was especially true of the Church and the faithful in England. There were theologians who defended the immaculist position, St. Anselm was thought at the time to have done so, although now we know that the defence was written by his biographer Eadmer and not by Anselm. William of Ware, Scotus' teacher at Oxford, devised the argument "it was possible, it was fitting and therefore God did it" in order to defend the Immaculate Conception (an argument sometimes erroneously attributed to Scotus himself) but it is not certain

whether this was before or after his pupil had so brilliantly defended the doctrine in public disputation in Paris. In John Duns Scotus, the faithful masses found a theologian who could articulate their faith and show to sceptical intellectuals the truth of their intuition.

John Duns Scotus dealt with the objections of the theologians in a masterful manner. In essence the objections were based on concern to defend the redemptive nature of Christ's passion and resurrection. For it was felt that to accept that a human being had been conceived without sin was to deny that all redemption came through Christ. Thus, argued opponents of this Marian privilege, to affirm Mary's Immaculate Conception was to belittle the redemption won by Christ. So Scotus set out to prove before the Masters of Paris that this objection had no foundation. He began by affirming "If it is not contrary to the authority of the Church or of the Scriptures, it seems that what is more excellent is to be attributed to Mary." The objection was raised that scripture did indeed oppose this Marian privilege for in the letter to the Romans St. Paul says "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned." (Rom. 5: 12). This apparently irrefutable text, Scotus argued, proves nothing against the Marian privilege. All agree in universal redemption in Christ, but why should this universal redemption necessarily rule out the Immaculate Conception of Mary? In fact it follows from Christ's universal redemption that Mary did not have original sin. The most perfect mediator ought to have the most perfect act of mediation in regard to the person in whose favour he intervenes. Mary, his mother, is the person in whose favour Christ intervenes the most as mediator of grace. This wholly perfect act of mediation requires in the one redeemed preservation from every defect, even from the original defect. Therefore the Blessed Virgin was exempted from every stain of sin. Instead of belittling Christ and circumscribing his power, Scotus argues, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception exalts him, attributing to Jesus the most perfect and sublime redemption. This redemption is most perfectly won for Mary, because of her role as the Mother of God, the one through whom the Incarnation would occur. So Mary, far from being outside the realm of redemption, is more indebted than the rest of us to our Saviour Jesus Christ for she has received a more radical redemption.

By this argument Scotus won over the University of Paris, which decreed that from thence forward the 8th December would be a feast day in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and every student at the university would have to swear to uphold the Immaculist thesis before taking their decree.

The Primacy of Christ

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which the Church definitively approved and declared infallible in 1854, was predicated upon the primacy of Christ. For it is precisely because Christ is the summit of creation and the first-born among creation

that it is fitting that his mother should be preserved from all stain of sin. It is only fitting that the one for whom creation was made should be born of the holiest of the saints, indeed anything less is scarcely conceivable.

But to understand the primacy of Christ and the novelty of what it means, we should first contrast with it the doctrine that is more familiar. The doctrine that the deacon proclaims in the Exultet on Easter night is what we might call the anthropocentric doctrine of the Incarnation. Adam and Eve were created good, but sinned and fell into the grip of the devil. Their sin cut them off irrevocably from God and so God decided to repair the damage done by sending his Son to take that sin upon himself and so restore human beings to righteousness. But the redemption won by Christ's death was greater than the original state of innocence for it brought humanity to an intimacy with God that they had not known in Eden, for in the person of Christ humanity was brought into union with God. This is the doctrine that Anselm proclaimed and Aquinas followed. It is a doctrine that is perfectly orthodox.

But there is another manner of looking at the Incarnation, that is also permitted by the Church, although you will find it less widespread. It is a Christocentric thesis, which includes creation and Incarnation in one great theory of the love of God that underlies all existence. This is the theory proposed by Blessed John Duns Scotus in which everything that is is viewed through the lens of the primacy of Christ, the freedom of God and the contingency of the world.

The Purpose of Creation

God is absolutely free and therefore if he creates it is because he wants to create. He wants to create in order to reveal and communicate his goodness and love to another. So creation is a freely willed act of our God who loves and who, St. John tells us, is love. Only a Christian can say that God is love, none of the other religions, monotheistic or other, could possibly make such a claim. But a Christian can, and in order to be true to revelation, must affirm this about God. For God to be love he must be more than one person, for love requires a lover and a beloved. In Scotus' theology God is the Trinity in a communion of love – an eternal movement of the lover (the Father), the beloved (the Son) and the sharing of love (the Spirit). This Trinity who creates is the model of all reality and especially of human relationships.

God's love is the cause of creation and it is also at the root of all creation. Because God loves, he wills that the creation he makes should also be infused by love. Since love must go out to another, it is only right and good that the highest object of creation's love should be God himself, for nothing within creation could be a more fitting object of love than the God who lovingly created.

So God made creation in such a way that it should love, and above all love the divine nature that is the object of love of all the persons in the Trinity. Now for creation to be able to love to the

highest extent, there must be at least one created thing capable of the highest love. That created thing is the human nature of Christ. The human nature of Christ was predestined by God to that highest glory of the beatific sharing in the inner life of the divine persons. Once God had decided upon this predestination of Christ's human nature, then he willed the union of Christ's divine nature with his human nature in the person of Christ since only a human nature united to the divine nature in one person could love to the highest extent, the extent to which God loves. St. Paul tells us that Christ was the first-born of all creation, and Scotus' theology makes sense of this affirmation. Scotus did not believe that the acts of creation and Incarnation were separate, but part of one divine plan. So rather than the Incarnation being a sort of "Plan B" to rescue humanity after the fall, in Scotus' theology it is the whole purpose of creation. Christ is the masterpiece of love in the midst of a creation designed for love, rather than a divine plumber come to fix the mess of original sin. Thus the Incarnation is placed by Scotus in the context of creation and not of human sin.

Since all of creation is made for Christ, then for the coming of Christ there had to be within creation a nature capable of understanding and freely responding to God's love. Humanity is free to love and has the capacity to understand God, precisely because such a nature is desired by God to be united in Christ to the divine nature of the Son. Creation is a preparation for the Incarnation which is the outcome that God willed from the very outset. St. Paul puts it like this "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now" (Rom 8:22)

Christ and Creation

Aquinas emphasised the material and formal causes in creation, but Scotus placed his emphasis on the final cause as determining the work of the artist. In other words it is the purpose of creation that determines its form. Since creation is created to love, it is ordered to allow it to fulfil the role for which it was created. So we find ourselves in a universe united around its purpose – which is to reflect in love the loving God who created it.

The highest expression of this purpose is the one who loves most perfectly, Christ who is the goal of creation and to whom all of creation tends. For Christ is the meaning and model of all that is created and every creature is made in the image of Christ. Every leaf, stone, fruit, animal and person is an expression of the Word of God, spoken in love. Christ's entry into creation is not then an entry into an alien environment, but the culmination of all that creation is and means. The Incarnation completes creation rather than supplementing it, as the anthropocentric view of creation would have us believe. Scotus' theology is an expression of the insight that St. Francis of Assisi expressed in his poem the "Canticle of the Creatures": God is praised through creatures, precisely because all creatures have life through Christ, in Christ and with Christ. For Christ is the Word through whom all things were made.

This Christoform theology of creation presents Christ as the blueprint for creation. In Christ the divine-human communion reaches its culmination and so in Christ the meaning and purpose of creation reaches its highest point. In Christ, what all of creation is ordered towards, that is the praise and glory of God in a communion of love, finds its centre and its highest meaning. With the Incarnation at its centre, creation becomes a cosmic hymn to the Trinity, in which the universe, bound together in and through the cosmic Christ, offers praise and glory to God.

One Order of Being

So we know God through the created world, but we have not yet looked at *how* we know God through the created world. Scotus teaches that the path to knowledge of God runs through our being. For our being and God's being are of the same order. That is to say that there is a common meeting ground between the Creator and his creatures since all possess being. This doctrine is called that of the univocity of being. For Aquinas God's being and created being are of a different order and so while we can in some way participate in God's being we will always be separate from it. Thus, for Aquinas, created reality can teach us what God's being is like but can never show us what God's being is. Scotus teaches, by contrast, that there is only one order of being. The first principle of being is one, true and good and all beings are related to it in a way that brings out the unity of all that is. So it is not that there is God on one side in His state of being and creatures on the other in a separate order of being. Instead all being is related in the order of being of which God is the first principle but is not inherently separated from created being.

Scotus does not teach that God's being and created being are one and the same thing but God's being and created being are two different modes of being. God's being is infinite and created being is finite. We can see the sense of this intuitively – for the most surprising thing about existence is that there is anything. What is striking about all that is is that it exists at all, that it “has being”. The only alternative would be for there not to be anything. So it seems reasonable to say that being is one concept.

Because things are, because there is being, we seek to know. What we get to know when we know being, is not just being as created but, because there is but one concept of being, we get to know the first principle of being, God Himself.

Thus our seeking to know creation is not something separated from our seeking to know God. All created things have a dignity in that they all share being not only with one another but with God. So the ineffable being of God is made known through the known existence of creation. In this way, through our contemplation of creation we can apprehend the divine mystery – it is no longer beyond reason. Although of course, since God's being is infinite and created being finite, the fullness of the mystery still lies beyond reason. Thus in Scotus' theology creation is endowed with a light that is of the same order as the

light that shines in God. Just as looking at a fire we understand what light is so that when we see the sun we can know that it is light that we see – so by looking at creation we can see a spark of life that radiates something of God's life. Or as Ilia Delio puts it “Creation is not a window but a lamp, and each unique created being radiates the light of God.”¹⁰

It follows from the essential univocity of being that the divine mystery can be perceived from within the created order. In the Incarnation what is true in the basic created order of things (that God is at the root of all that is and all that shines forth with the light of God) becomes even more explicitly expressed when a created nature becomes united in one person to the divine nature of the Word. In this way creation reaches its fulfilment.

The Specificity of Being

But if Christ is the pattern of everything in creation, does this not make creation too uniform, too bland, too samey? In Scotus' philosophy each particular being has its own intrinsic, unique and proper being. Thus everything has an inherent dignity, an essential “thisness”¹¹ that makes it itself and not something else. So while univocity of being provides a philosophical basis for the unity of all created things his understanding of “thisness” ensures that within that unity each created thing has its own place, a place that can be taken by no other. We tell one thing from another by perceiving the “thisness” that each thing possesses.

When we combine the notions of the primacy of Christ with those of univocity of being and the essential thisness of each thing then we can see a powerful ecological message emerging for the people of our day. For if all things are rooted in a being which is of the same order as the being of God, if all things are predicated on Christ as the first-born of all creation, and if each thing expresses this in a unique, and uniquely beautiful way – then we are forced to contemplate our created order with awe and reverence. For each creature shines with something of God that can be expressed by no other. Each sun, star, proton, grape and grain is charged with a divine meaning – a meaning that no other can express. And each creature speaks to us of Christ who is the first among creatures.

Poetic Inspiration

The significance of this doctrine has not been lost on poets and theologians, and especially on one of the greatest of English religious poets Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins, writing in Oxford in the 19th century, considered it a privilege to be in the city in which Duns Scotus had lived six hundred years earlier.

“Yet ah! This air I gather and I release
He lived on; these weeds and waters, these walls are what
He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to peace.
Of reality the rarest-veined unraveller; a not
Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece;
Who fired France for Mary without spot.”¹²

Scotus' theology inspired some of my favourite lines from Hopkins. In this extract from the *Wreck of the Deutschland* we hear Hopkins expressing the univocity of being in his poetic language of "instressed" meaning:

"I kiss my hand
To the stars, lovely-asunder
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder;
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west;
Since tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when
I understand."¹³

In "God's Grandeur" we hear Hopkins telling of the manner in which we perceive something of God in those moments in which we are open to the reality of nature.

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like a shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil."¹⁴

And from the first poem I ever loved, Hopkins delights at the majesty of a windhover in the early morning skies and perceives the fire of Christ in the beauty of the creature's actions:

"Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!"¹⁵

In this poetry we discover that when a grain of sand is being a grain of sand, it is doing what it is. And if we enter closely enough into what it is doing/being (Hopkins called it do-being) we see Christ. Trying to express it in prose is difficult and so it is not surprising that it is the poet Hopkins who best interprets it for us. Nor is it surprising that many theologians, numbed from the effort of trying to figure out what this subtlest of scholars is on about, retreat with gratitude to the clarity and simplicity of Aquinas' assertion that whereas God has true being, we have being only by analogy. One who has stopped and stared at a cloud or a tree or a brick or a stone or a twig or a bird or anything – and felt that in doing so he was in touch with God, might understand better Scotus' philosophy of univocity of being. It provides a key to understanding the fascination we have for nature and the relationship between our scientific curiosity and our faith that few other theologies can deliver.

The Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin had just such a moment when the Franciscan scholar Fr. Allegra explained to him Scotus' doctrines of univocity of being and the primacy of Christ, for these were insights that Teilhard's own intuition had led him to. He declared "Voilà! La theologie de l'avenir." (There it is! The theology of the future.)

Synthesis with Science

It is not just theologians and poets who benefit from exposure to Scotus' theology. For the physicist who searches for a unifying principle for our universe can find his insight reflected in his faith and so nourish his relationship with God by understanding that his science is intimately connected to it. The biologist who looks with fascination at the structure of a beetle can see in the thinsness of each beetle the glory of Christ peeking through. The child watching with fascination as the ant carries a leaf 50 times its size is undergoing a moment of contemplation. This should not really surprise us for Scotus was raised in the same intellectual milieu of Franciscan Oxford that had produced Roger Bacon, the father of modern scientific methodology.

We can grasp the attractiveness of such a theology, but its unfamiliarity sometimes puts us off. Is there not something of pantheism in this? Does Scotus not devalue Christ's saving work by positing that the Incarnation is not a result of the need to rescue us from the folly of our sin? Is it really Catholic?

Church Teaching

Well, one could justify the orthodoxy of Scotus' doctrine from patristic and biblical sources and there are books that do so. One could also subjectively point to the conformity of Scotus' theology with personal experience of God and observation of creation. I could say, and it would be true, "Scotus speaks to my soul as he spoke to Hopkins and Teilhard de Chardin and as he has spoken to so many down the ages." But such a justification for following his theology lays one open to charges of subjectivism. Fortunately, there is an objective authority that urges Catholics to look to Scotus as a source of orthodoxy: the magisterium of the Church.

Down the ages much has been written and preached to discredit Scotus in the eyes of the faithful, largely in the misguided view that to do so was to protect the authority of Aquinas. But there has never been a need for this, and the Church has never approved it. Instead in our day we have seen a great affirmation of the value of Scotus' teaching by the ordinary magisterium of the Church. On 20th March 1993 Pope John Paul II beatified Blessed John Duns Scotus, whose cult has always been observed in Cologne, Edinburgh and Nola. In his sermon on that day the Holy Father invited "everyone to bless the name of the Lord whose glory shines forth in the teaching and holiness of life of Blessed John, minstrel of the Incarnate Word and defender of Mary's Immaculate Conception."¹⁶ He also quoted his predecessor Pope Paul VI who said that the doctrine of Blessed John Duns Scotus "can yield shining arms for combating and chasing away the dark clouds of atheism which casts its shadow upon our era", and continued to state that the doctrine "energetically builds up the Church, sustaining her in her urgent mission of the new evangelisation of the peoples of the earth."¹⁷ In 2003, when the Scotus commission presented to the Pope the 20th volume of a critical edition of the *Opera Omnia* of Blessed John, John Paul was fulsome in his praise of the subtle Doctor saying:

"Duns Scotus, with his splendid doctrine on the primacy of Christ, on the Immaculate Conception, on the primary value of Revelation and of the Magisterium of the Church, on the authority of the Pope, on the possibility of human reason to make, at least in part, the great truths of the faith accessible, of showing the non-contradictoriness of them, remains even today a pillar of Catholic theology, an original Master and rich in ideas and stimuli for an ever more complete knowledge of the truths of Faith."¹⁸

If we look at his predecessor's declaration which Pope John Paul quotes, we get an even more explicit affirmation of the doctrine of Blessed John Duns Scotus and its truly Franciscan nature.

"Saint Francis of Assisi's most beautiful ideal of perfection and the ardour of the Seraphic Spirit are embedded in the work of Scotus and inflame it, for he ever holds virtue of greater value than learning. Teaching as he does the pre-eminence of love over knowledge, the universal primacy of Christ, who was the greatest of God's works, the magnifier of the Holy Trinity and Redeemer of the human race, King in both the natural and supernatural orders, with the Queen of the world, Immaculate Mary, standing beside him, resplendent in her untarnished beauty, he develops to its full height every point of the revealed Gospel truth which Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Paul understood to be pre-eminent in the divine plan of salvation."¹⁹

Supported by such eloquent and authoritative statements I have no hesitation in affirming that the theology of Blessed John Duns Scotus is not only attractive, but eminently sound and worthy of study and proclamation – for in it we find answers to many problems of our times.

A British Vision

As an Englishman and a Franciscan I would dare to go further. The English, like Hopkins, instinctively warm to Scotus' theology because it grew and was nourished in the English thought of the Oxford Franciscan school. This school, the only orthodox theological tradition to have originated in this country, drew not only from the mystical insight of Saint Francis but also from the pragmatic Anglo-Saxon theology of its first lecturer Robert Grosseteste, whom Richard Southern describes as "an English Mind in Medieval Europe".²⁰ It originated in the aftermath of and under the influence of the *Magna Carta* which underlies so much of the modern political development of Britain. The Oxford Franciscans, with their links to the barons' party, were among the keenest promoters of this constitutional settlement that led to our current Parliamentary democracy.²¹ Similar ideas are also present in the Declaration of Arbroath, the founding document of Scottish nationhood. Scotus' philosophy and theology dominated the pre-reformation Scottish church.²² The Oxford school produced figures such as Roger Bacon and Scotus himself who are crucial to the development of English and Scottish thought. Given the solid English and Scottish pedigree of scotistic thought, it is arguable that the loss of the scotistic tradition in Catholic theology has contributed to the alien feel of Catholic thought to many in these countries. It is, perhaps, not the fact that our theology is Catholic that makes it feel alien to many of our compatriots, but the fact that it derives from a continental tradition (Parisian/Italian Thomism) that is uncomfortable with our traditions of individualism and pragmatism. If this is correct then the recovery of Scotus' theology into mainstream theological discourse in this country can make a crucial contribution to an evangelisation that does not require abandonment of our national heritage but instead taps into the deepest intellectual and cultural instincts of the English and Scots. Now there's a prize worth running after – a Catholic, orthodox theology that appeals to both English and Scots culture.

NOTES

¹B. de Saint Maurice. *John Duns Scotus A Teacher for Our Times*. Franciscan Herald Press: Quincy IL, 1958. p. 12.

²Quoted in A. Wolter and B. O'Neill. *John Duns Scotus Mary's Architect*. Franciscan Herald Press: Quincy IL, 1993. p. 1.

³Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter. *Aeterni Patris*, 4 August 1879. In John Wynne (editor) *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII*. Benziger Brothers: Chicago, 1903, p. 35.

⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁵Innocent IV, *Serm de St. Thomas*. In *ibid*. p. 51.

⁶Leo XIII. *Aeterni Patris*. p. 56.

⁷B. Jansen quoted in: B. de Saint Maurice. *op. cit.* p. 13.

⁸*Histoire religieuse de la nation française*. Paris, 1922. p. 274. Cf. E. Longpré. "Pour le Saint Siège et contre le gallicanisme." In *France franciscaine* 11 (1928) 145.

⁹Cf. B. Tierney. *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350 A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages*. Brill: New York, 1988.

¹⁰I. Delio. *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World*. Vol. II. The Franciscan Heritage Series. The Franciscan Institute: St. Bonaventure NY, 2003. p. 36.

¹¹Scotus invented the Latin word "*haecceitas*" which translates literally as "thisness" to express his insight.

¹²Gerard Manley Hopkins. "Duns Scotus' Oxford." In: W. Gardner. *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. OUP: Oxford, 1948. p. 84.

¹³"The Wreck of the Deutschland". *Ibid*. p. 57.

¹⁴"God's Grandeur." *Ibid*. p. 70.

¹⁵"The Windhover: To Christ our Lord." *Ibid*. p. 73.

¹⁶John Paul II. Sermon. *Con queste parole*. In *The Pope Speaks* 38 (July/Aug 1993) 245.

¹⁷*Ibid*. 246.

¹⁸John Paul II. Discourse. *With lively joy*. Vatican, 16th February 2002. Cf. <http://www.ofm.org/01eng/news/0216NeO84.html>

¹⁹Paul VI. Apostolic Letter. *Alma parens*. Rome: St Peter's. 14th July 1966.

²⁰cf. R.W. Southern. *Robert Grosseteste The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1992.

²¹Grosseteste excommunicated those in his Lincoln diocese who repudiated the Magna Carta and his friend and successor at the Franciscan school Adam Marsh was on good terms with Simon de Montfort. Little describes the Oxford Franciscans as "The spokesmen of the constitutional movement of the thirteenth century." cf. A.G. Little. *The Grey Friars in Oxford*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892. p. 32-33.

²²In his 1994 Gifford lectures, the philosopher Alexander Broadie described Scotus as "Scotland's greatest philosopher" and outlines the influence of his philosophy on pre-reformation Scottish philosophy. Cf. A. Broadie. *The Shadow of Scotus: Philosophy and Faith in Pre-Reformation Scotland*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1995. p. 1

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

QUENCHING THE CATECHETICAL THIRST

An interview with Marianne Cuthbertson

A big handicap for many priests in the work of spiritual formation is the marked degree of religious ignorance of many parishioners. The Church does have a remedy for this, which is being attempted at the parish of St Benedict's, Ealing Abbey. It seems to be bearing fruit.

The Parish Priest of St Benedict's is Dom Peter Burns and the Catechetical Co-ordinator is Marianne Cuthbertson. Marianne conducts her catechetical work in the light of the fact that the Parish Priest is responsible to the Bishop and before God for handing on the faith. She is responsible at the Abbey for running sacramental preparation programmes, catechist training and other more general adult catechesis.

Over the last few years she has run a short parish-based programme for handing on the faith, produced by Maryvale, called Echoes. She has now run it five times touching the lives of 180 parishioners who have followed the 11 session course. Seventy of these are now active trained catechists and many are now pursuing further studies at Maryvale ranging from certificate to BA and MA levels.

This interview with Marianne brings out the substance and the practical application of the Church's own catechetical vision for integral catechesis as outlined in the two great catechetical gifts of the Church for our time, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the General Directory for Catechesis. It would seem to be a timely illustration.

Marianne is married with three children, is an experienced teacher and has recently completed a BA in Applied Theology specialising in catechesis after six years of part time study at the Maryvale Institute. She continues to enjoy support and formation from there and now works with the BA Course Director Caroline Farey as an associate member of staff in the catechetical team.

Editor: As a professional teacher and practising Catholic you discerned a call to work as a parish catechist. Could you tell us a little more about this moment?

Marianne: In my initial desire to help in the catechesis in my own parish I knew that being a teacher and a practising Catholic was not enough and that I needed training and formation. My search began for a place that would guide me, not into anything primarily speculative or experiential, but into that which, in complete faithfulness to the Magisterium, would enable me to learn the Catholic faith more fully from the Church herself. I found what I was looking for at the Maryvale Institute.

My first lecture at Maryvale was on the Holy Trinity. Although I had always thought of myself as an educated Catholic, I was shocked to realise the depths of my ignorance. For a short while I became quite angry because I had come to see that this is the birthright of every baptised person and I had not been offered the opportunity to hear the fullness of the truth, the truth that sets us free.

The Church teaches us that there are three stages in Christian formation: receiving the faith proclaimed, catechesis and then ongoing adult formation for the rest of our lives. The riches of the faith are so deep and so wonderful that we'll never ever in our lifetime have our thirst for truth satiated.

Editor: How do you understand the purpose of the catechesis in which you engage?

Marianne: Catechesis is the handing on of Christ with the fullness and integrity that nourishes communion with Him in all the dimensions of our being (cf *Catechesi Tradendae* 5).

Many people think catechesis is only about knowledge, others think it is only about a religious experience: the Church is always richer in her thinking than any one of us, and asks us to participate in this integral, objective and personal handing on. The context for everything we teach is salvation history.

I understand the purpose of all catechesis in the way that this is described in Acts 2:42. This little verse outlines the four dimensions of the Christian life. These have been handed down to us through Tradition as the 'four pillars' of the Catholic faith and these are present in the four parts of the Catechism. The General Directory for Catechesis describes them as faith believed, celebrated, lived and prayed. (GDC 122)

Editor: Would you say that there is a perception among some people that if you simply teach content, say directly from the Catechism, it can be off-putting, it can be boring for people, it can make them not want to go deeper into their faith? It can make the faith seem like an abstract system.

Marianne: There are several issues here. As I have said, catechesis is not simply the teaching of content. Such teaching is vital but it is only one of the dimensions of life in Christ and therefore of catechesis. Secondly, if catechesis is boring it is usually due to a lack of conviction or lack of love in the catechist. A catechist should approach this task with the attitude that the Catechism is awesome, it is wonderful, it is awe-inspiring. Thirdly, God's Revelation, which is what the Catechism contains, is life-giving. It is often wrongly portrayed as an abstract system, but if one trusts the Church when she speaks of her dogmas as 'lights along the path' (CCC 89) then as a catechist one does not separate truth from life.

Editor: What is at the heart of expressing the content of the faith with awe and wonder?

Marianne: I think it is very important that catechists be convinced of the truth of the faith for themselves. Sadly, some catechists have a relativist approach which is not helpful when catechising because it suggests that we don't know what is really true, but by Revelation we do. We come to bring a wonderful truth, given to us by the Holy Trinity.

Editor: What methodology do you use?

Marianne: In this country, for the last thirty or forty years the experiential method, often described as the Pastoral Cycle has been prevalent. We don't use that method. We use what is called the Ecclesial method, reflecting the methodology of the early Church Fathers. It is a rich methodology, chosen in 'the light of the pedagogy of God' as described in the GDC Part 3. The steps of this pedagogy can be followed in the story of the Annunciation in the first chapter of Luke's gospel where the angel Gabriel announces a truth that God wants people to know. At the beginning of a session we take time to turn to God, because the message that is being given is a message from the Holy Trinity. The Trinity is at work in catechesis. We need to distinguish catechesis from teaching in the secular sense. Something different is going on here.

Editor: How would a particular session flow?

Marianne: We indicate something different is going on firstly by preparing the room, always having a focal table utilising elements of our rich Catholic heritage, together with cloths and candles. The crucifix must always have a prominent position together with the Sacred Scriptures. The session will always begin and end with prayer. The end prayer will be a little longer, usually with some link to the liturgy of the Mass.

We first proclaim the teaching, then explain it using brief notes. We don't give a pre-prepared speech. It's very important that the catechist is extremely familiar with the Catechism text and uses an appropriate Scripture passage as the driving force of the talk, the doctrine hanging on the Scripture. We invite questions and discussion, it's so important that they understand what is being handed on. And then we ask those being catechised the question: "How does this apply to your life?"

There will also be some social time, fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

Editor: How would you approach a lack of acceptance or understanding?

Marianne: We encourage people to question with the purpose of clarifying meaning and understanding. For example people might say, "I have a problem here, can you help me on this, can you clarify." It is the catechists job to respond to that type of question, as patiently and painstakingly as is necessary – for instance to explain apostolic authority, that Christ gives his authority to the Church.

If on the other hand someone is saying "You, or the Church, has a problem here" or in general has a problem in believing, that is different, it is a deeper spiritual problem. So, for example someone might say that they don't believe in the Church's teaching on contraception. That is a more difficult situation than not quite understanding. This is not the catechist's task to resolve because it is a spiritual problem that requires a priest. We would try to guide the person towards confiding in a priest. Fundamentally the catechists' role is to assist the Parish Priest.

Editor: Could you talk a little about preparation for a particular session?

Marianne: Prayer is the most important thing of all. We encourage all catechists to pray before they begin their preparation. Closely allied with this is reminding ourselves that we are about to proclaim the faith of the Church. The catechist then prepares the lesson plan focusing firstly on the purpose and the key points of the teaching as outlined in the Catechism ensuring that every session is Christocentric (according to the four types of Christocentricity in GDC 98). The relevant scriptural

passages and liturgical references which are given in the Catechism's footnotes are studied and selections made for the session. We reflect the liturgical and devotional dimensions through the use of sacramentals and the rich prayer heritage of the Church.

Editor: Does your training as a teacher help you in your role as a catechist?

Marianne: I would say that my training as a teacher has helped me in that I am able to talk to groups and give explanations. But catechesis is quite different from teaching. It is about formation of the whole person. That is why the demeanor of the catechist is important. Negative attitudes such as "this is going to be difficult material", or "this might be a bit sticky tonight", or "you're not going to like this" are unacceptable. The faith is beautiful and the only appropriate attitude is to teach it as such. That's why it's so important that the catechist truly believes everything that he or she is teaching, believes that it's from God and that it gives life. This manner permeates the whole session. I would note here that Dom Peter requires all the catechists at the Abbey, in public during Sunday Mass, to take the *mandatum*, the oath of fidelity to the Church's teaching.

So in terms of my current role my training and formation at Maryvale has been much more important than my training as a teacher.

Editor: Could you mention for us some of the feedback you have had?

Marianne: One of the parents of children preparing for First Holy Communion told me that in the bar after their sessions parents will ask another "Did you know any of that?" Most of the parents will say no. For example: many of them have never heard of the heavenly liturgy, they don't know what "memorial" means, or the meaning of interior participation. Many have been thinking of the Mass as a community celebration without an understanding of the depth of the link with the Paschal Mystery. Even more fundamentally not a few have an understanding of the Holy Trinity that is simply incompatible with Church teaching. So a lot of our teaching is very new to them especially the theological language. There has been an erroneous attitude that people can't possibly understand the language of the Church. This is a profound disservice to our people. The human mind is made to receive God's revelation, and therefore to receive the truth that the theological language conveys. Our pedagogical technique attempts to take account of the fact that we are imparting language which is new to many. We introduce them to appropriate texts and most come back for more.

Editor: What might be the main thing you have learnt from your pastoral experience at Ealing Abbey?

Marianne: I think it was in 2005 that the Holy Father spoke to the Bishops of Austria and encouraged them not to dilute doctrine, not to be frightened of giving people the fullness of the truth. I have discovered that after hearing part of the fullness of the truth most want more. They become more excited by the faith and want to pass the faith on. The message that we're increasingly trying to get through to our parishioners at the Abbey is that today people don't know that they don't know. And once they recognise that they don't truly know they become hungry. They then want to pass the faith on, but you cannot pass on what you have not yet first received. This experience gives one a deeper appreciation of St Paul's proclamation:

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received". (1 Cor 15:3)

I myself am still hungry and thirsty for the truth about the love that never ends (CCC 25) and I recognise that the people who come for catechesis are hungry and thirsty too.

It is God's will that they receive the fullness of the truth in order to set them free.

FROM THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.
(n. 25)

letters to the editor

The Editor, St. Mary Magdalen's
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A QUESTION OF MATTER

Dear Father Editor,

I have been looking again at your September 2006 editorial (*Form and Matter: Towards a New Synthesis*) and I find myself in agreement with pretty well all your conclusions. On the positive side, I am sure you are right that Catholicism goes beyond all other religious traditions, Christian and non-Christian, in the dignity it confers on matter and the human body; on the negative, we must indeed get rid of 'infinitely contrary poles of existence' and the successive swapping of abstract forms by parcels of intrinsically featureless matter.

I think that (partly thanks to J L Austin and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) among modern analytical philosophers idealism in the form that matter doesn't exist at all, or that if it does, it cannot be known because our knowledge is limited to the contents of our own minds, is a dead duck. Some philosophers cling to 'qualia', the latest make of sense-data, but the current orthodoxy, thank goodness, is realism about the material world. On the other hand though not many analytical philosophers will have read Holloway's *Perspectives* (I myself am acquainted only with his *Catholicism*), there might be widespread sympathy with his notion of a 'relative substance'. It would be agreed (with Aristotle) that artifacts like houses and tables cannot be described simply in terms of their structure; very different structures are all houses because they have the same function of providing shelter for human beings. Animals equally must be seen not just as clusters of cells but as units which seek food and avoid predators. And even materialistic philosophers say that however much mental states may depend upon brain states, what makes something the belief,

say, that the cat is on the mat is not the brain's satisfying a certain physical specification, but the belief's arising from our seeing the cat and its resulting in our stepping carefully round the mat. The contentious issue today, it seems to me, is not whether matter of every kind has an intelligible structure, but whether there is any purpose for which it has this. Do physical interactions in the world occur, and do the complexes we call 'animals' arise, for no purpose whatever, or do they occur because God so desires and is his purpose that animals, ourselves included, should arise and thrive?

If I have understood the Holloway position correctly, I prefer it to what your Jan/Feb correspondent Rev. John Deighan apparently takes to be the traditional Thomist position. I think he is disingenuous in saying 'Prime matter, for Aristotle as for Thomas, doesn't exist.' He does not mean, I suspect, that Aristotle and Aquinas rejected the notion of prime matter, or that they never had it; rather he thinks they believed that there is a kind of matter with no properties or causal powers, but that it never exists except in things that do have properties and causal powers. This idea is indefensible, and it is no use saying 'the metaphysical and the modern/scientific concepts of matter *are not the same*' (his italics): the modern/scientific concept is what a metaphysician worth his salt should be discussing, not some chimera known only to his philosophical allies.

Yours Faithfully
Dr William Charlton
West Woodburn
Hexham

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Dear Father Editor,

After reading that Simon Conway Morris had attacked the *Intelligent Design* (ID) school of thought yet again (*Road from Regensburg*, Sept. 07), I decided to re-read Michael J. Behe's *Darwin's Black Box*. In 276 pages he mentions God around ten times and that was in the chapter on "Science, Philosophy, Religion". Nowhere does he mention God as an Intelligent Designer.

What Behe in fact does say is that: "Inference to design doesn't require that we have a candidate for the role

of designer"; and "The conclusion that something was designed can be made quite independently of knowledge of the designer."

ID does not deny evolution, but is an attack on Neo-Darwinism. One of its main critiques is that the latter cannot explain the clear fact that the human body includes amazingly complex chemical mechanisms which natural selection select for as it only 'chooses' systems that are already working.

In science discerning an effect from a cause is only the first step in furnishing an explanation. In order to overcome criticisms of such methodology from people such as David Hume, a detailed reasonable mechanism is required. Conway Morris and his fellow Christian evolutionists fail in this aspect. Their God may have the property of love but not, it seems, of intelligence.

Yours Faithfully
Bill Fielding
Greenford Close
Orwell
Wigan

Editorial comment: As ever we are pleased to be encouraging such reading and debate. As ever we remain interested in ID's pointing out of the significantly incomplete explanatory power of neo-Darwinism. We would sympathise with Professor Conway Morris in as much as ID sees such incompleteness with regard only to some "amazingly complex" aspects of the universe, not all of it. With regard to these 'highly' complex structures Natural Selection as a sufficient explanatory cause is depicted as not "detailed" enough. For us nothing in the cosmos is fully explained without the rest of the cosmos under the Mind of God.

All observed causal patterns and structures, however detailed and complex, have further environmental contexts, still, to some extent, to be unveiled by the development of time and of human understanding. This discovery does undermine the Platonic view of true explanation, based as it is upon static 'forms', but does not justify Hume's scepticism. There is a middle way which accepts both the realistic and developmental nature of the scientific mapping of our cosmos (cf. Holloway's *Perspectives in Philosophy*).

TERTULLIAN: UNSTABLE FOUNDATION?

Dear Father Editor,

You add an editorial comment to my letter on your quotation of Tertullian as a "Latin Church Father" that you kindly published in the latest issue of *Faith*.

One certainly agrees with the importance of founding sacramental theology solidly on a patristic basis but, unfortunately, the comment is otherwise at times imprecise and tends to play down the difficulties of using Tertullian as an ecclesiastical author representative of orthodox Catholic thought.

Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born about 155 AD and is considered to have converted to Christianity about 193. His writings are dated between 195 and 220 and, although the date of his death is not known, St Jerome tells us that he lived *usque ad decrepitam ætatem*. He was already reflecting Montanist ideas by 206; Quasten tells us that he openly went over to them by the following year.

Tertullian wrote two treatises, *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione carnis*, the first mentioning his intention to write the second: they seem to be dated to about 210 and 212, already his Montanist period. The first treatise demonstrates some of the quirkiness of which Tertullian is only too capable (he defends the reality of Christ's humanity to the point of asserting that the Lord was ugly!); the second, from which you quote, concludes with an openly Montanist belief in a new descent of the Paraclete.

Tertullian, then, did not "fall into schism at the end of his life". At least half of his life after his conversion in 193 was spent as a member of the Montanists – to the point of founding his own North African version, one destined to last to the time of St Augustine – and the Montanists, we must remember, were not simply separated from communion with the Catholic Church: they were indeed, as St Thomas Aquinas says of Tertullian himself, actual heretics.

Yours Faithfully
Gerard McKay
Piazza della Cancelleria
Rome

LOVE AND SEX: ADVICE FOR ALL

Dear Father Editor,

Interesting exchanges on sexuality (letters, November 2007), are not helped by concentrating so much on sexual tendencies and outward observances, so much deplored by the Lord who simply urges us to clean up our minds and hearts (Mt 5.8). The more we do this, the more apparent it becomes that sexual activity is for having children. The more this becomes a conviction, the more love grows as is apparent in marriage and religious experience. That's how we become blessed as the Saviour teaches not otherwise.

Yours Faithfully
Fr Bryan Storey
Tintagel
Cornwall

PRO-FAMILY POLITICS

Dear Father Editor,

In the light of John Deighan's engaging overview of the inexorable political attack upon the family (Nov. 2007) your readers might be interested to learn of the British People's Alliance. It is an emerging pro-life, pro-family, pro-worker and anti-war party of economically social-democratic, morally and socially conservative British and Commonwealth patriots. We are planning to contest every seat in the United Kingdom at any and every General Election from 2009 onwards. Provided, of course, that we can find the candidates. The press release containing our Founding Statement of Principles may be read at <http://davidaslindsay.blogspot.com/2007/10/british-peoples-alliance-just-released.html>.

Yours Faithfully
David Lindsay
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RESCUING THE KNOX BIBLE

Dear Father Editor,

The past 40 years have seen a welter of English translations of the Bible. One seems to have been quite lost in this biblical multiplication: that of Ronald Knox which was so immensely popular in the 1940-1950s. I was no more than a very relative fan when it first came out: readable, interesting, debatable... But in any case it descended into practical oblivion after Vatican II. It might – and perhaps should – have survived if Knox had not made the mistake of sticking to the "thou" forms throughout.

Some time back, seeing the very varied quality of the newer versions, I began to wonder if Knox, in "you" forms throughout, might not be of interest and help to some people. So (more as a divertimento than anything else), I began to while away odd moments by "you-ing" his New Testament (I have a good program for such a task). With "you" etc. throughout, many passages take on a new freshness and interest. Probably this would apply even more to the Old Testament.

May Ronald Knox forgive me from his heavenly abode, if he does not approve of my efforts. But I would not like to see any of his masterly prose being lost because of a few pronouns or adjectives here and there.

To date, only the first books of the New Testament have been subjected to this orchestration. Perhaps they represent no more than a curiosity: but those who are curious can read them on my website: <http://www.cornmacburke.or.ke>

Yours Faithfully
(Mgr.) Cormac Burke
Strathmore University
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KENYA

comment on the comments



by
William Oddie

A PROVIDENTIAL EXAMPLE OF COUNTER-CULTURALISM?

I begin with a story from my own experience: for, since my column this time will be about faith and how to engender it – or at least about how not to wreck it once it is up and running – that is probably the only basis on which to proceed. In 1991, about six months after my wife and I had been received into the Church, we visited Moscow. It was at an intensely interesting historical juncture, a few weeks after the attempted coup against Gorbachev and in the last days of the Soviet Union. I had gone, at the behest of *The Sunday Telegraph*, to track down those behind a new Russian edition, recently published by one of the Soviet State publishing houses, of works by G.K.Chesterton: not the fiction, as might have been expected, but his great apologetic classics, *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*, together with *St Francis* and *St Thomas Aquinas* – truly, a sign of the times: these editions were set up directly from samizdat translations which had been circulating secretly among Christian dissidents since the eighties.

On Sunday, we went to Mass at the Church of St Louis, which under the protection of the French Embassy had operated, in the shadow of the Lubyanka, during the darkest days of the Stalinist terror. We had expected the Mass to be in Russian: in fact it was in Polish, and the Church was packed to the doors with Polish expatriates. My readers will by now have worked out what I am going to say. I had never been part of a liturgy celebrated with such power and such absolute conviction, not only by the priest (who preached a sermon incomprehensible to me with real passion) but by the people: the hackneyed and often meaningless phrase 'the People of God' has never

seemed more convincing; I have never heard such congregational singing, before or since.

The Poles really believe their religion. So it can only, surely, be good news for the English Church that in some dioceses churches are being inundated by large numbers of Poles: surely, some of this passionate belief will rub off on us? Might this not be the shot in the arm the often lacklustre Church in this country so sorely needs? The trouble is that lack of conviction has its own potency, its own deadening and almost irresistible power to discourage and dismay, rather like J.K.Rowling's dementors, whose kiss sucks out and annihilates the souls of their victims. The danger is that unless the Poles build on their existing network of Polish language pastoral care, the new Polish immigrants will become integrated into the secularised mentality of English Catholicism and will, many of them, simply lose their faith like many Englishmen before them: and if they do not, their children will.

Damian Thompson summed up the problem in *The Daily Telegraph*. 'There are', he reported, 'about half a million more Roman Catholics in this country than there were five years ago... The influx of Poles and other east Europeans into Britain has come as a shock to the Catholic hierarchy of England and Wales, which had resigned itself to ever-shrinking Mass attendance. The question is: will these new worshippers help to revive the Church, just as they have revived struggling service industries?' His answer is predictable (I hear on the grapevine that Thompson has replaced the present writer as the Bishop of Portsmouth's *bete noire*): 'Alas,' he continues, 'the omens are not good. From 1978 to 2005, the English Church drew inspiration from the most charismatic Pole in history; yet during those years it turned into a moribund and narrow-minded institution'. It might be objected that this happened precisely because most English bishops did everything they could to *block* the inspiration of Pope John Paul: certainly, they consistently ignored everything he ever said. Whatever the cause, the effect was a disaster. 'No wonder', Thompson rightly continues, 'the Poles are not impressed by their new spiritual home.

They have petitioned the bishops to provide them with more Masses in their own language. The answer, as often as not, has been no: you must "integrate".'

But not quite yet: there is a current problem that has to be dealt with first. As Jonathan Petre reported in the *Telegraph*, 'Fr John Boyle, the parish priest at St Simon of England in Ashford, Kent, said scores of young Poles queued at his church when he invited a Polish priest to hear confessions. "Confession is very difficult when it's not in their language," he said. "It is their intimate secrets. It needs to be in their language... They are used to a clear Catholic way of living in Poland. If they're not in regular contact with the Church they drift away and get in all sorts of problems. ..." He said there was a need for more Polish priests in Britain. "Polish people can find themselves lonely because of the lack of Catholic Church culture," he said.'

Even those bishops who would certainly like to coil their dementor's embrace around these embarrassingly religious (and even worse, orthodox) Poles realise that they just don't have the resources to integrate them, *not yet*. So Polish priests are, for the time being, being used to cope with the new influx, even where the local bishop's reluctance is being made very clear. As Jonathan Petre reported, 'Canon Nicholas France, the Dean of Jersey, said the number of Poles on the island peaked at 6,000 in the summer, and the Bishop of Portsmouth, the Rt Rev Crispian Hollis, had arranged to send a Polish priest next month. "There are always people who say that they should integrate," [Canon France] said. "Our approach is that they should integrate but we want to respect cultural and spiritual differences."' Bishop Hollis, however, is not very keen on these cultural and spiritual differences, and 'cautioned against perpetuating a separate Polish community with its own language and cultural identity, saying it could become a source of tension. "The Vatican tends to talk about preserving national identity, which isn't appropriate in the modern world," he said.'

Why, precisely, the existence of a Polish identity within the English Church should cause tension now, when it has never done so over the last sixty years, he did

not explain. Other dioceses, notably Birmingham (one of the dioceses where the Pope's writ often runs) have been more encouraging to the preservation of a Polish national identity. At a Polish Mass in Birmingham, according to the *Independent Catholic News* website, 'Mgr Tadeusz Kukla, Vicar Delegate for Poles in England and Wales, thanked Archbishop Vincent Nichols for the respect for Polish culture and traditions that had been shown to the Polish Catholic Community in the Archdiocese of Birmingham since the post war years. Mgr Kukla said: "This tragic generation of Poles, who were forced to settle in Britain after the communist regime was imposed on Poland, at the end of the Second World War, desperately wanted to uphold their culture and traditions including religious traditions and spirituality. Throughout all these years all your illustrious predecessors helped and encouraged the existence of Polish ministry interwoven into the rich tapestry of the diocesan pastoral care. This understanding and support of the Polish Catholic Communities helped the first generation of Poles to uphold their faith. Although the second and third generations of Poles who have been born here are fully integrated into British society, contributing to its wellbeing in a variety of ways, *they still cherish and greatly value their roots.*"

What does that mean? I strongly suspect it means that though they are fully integrated into our secular culture, they still, wherever they can, go to Mass in Polish. Why should that be? Is it because

they have detected that something has gone badly wrong with the dominant culture of the English Church, and that they need to keep it, if they can, at arm's length? But why would that be? It is here, surely, that we can learn something from the Poles that might be of some help in regenerating our often sadly despiritualised English Catholicism. For, what the Poles have always understood (and their history has made it inescapable that they should understand) is that secular culture, any secular culture, is something from which their faith has set them apart: their Christian calling, in the words of the late Pope, is that they should be 'signs of contradiction'. First under the Nazis, then under the Communists, this was self-evident. What Pope John Paul knew was that the same principle is fundamentally true even under the comparatively benign conditions of Western democracy: for it is materialism (whether dialectical or not) that is the great enemy of faith. A modernist Catholicism that has simply embraced the values of the current secular altruism is not merely ineffective: it has actually joined the enemy: it will destroy real faith wherever it can be hunted out and subjected to the demontor's kiss. It will do this because it has entirely forgotten that though, in Newman's words, we must accept 'the reality and importance of the secular', since 'the world is framed by God himself', nevertheless, 'this well-ordered... world, with all its blessings of sense and knowledge, may lead us to neglect those

interests which will endure when itself has passed away... The sciences of good government, acquiring wealth, of preventing and relieving want, and the like, are especially dangerous; for fixing, as they do, our exertions on this world as an end, they go far to persuade us that they have no other end...'. Or, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews (13:14) 'here have we no abiding city, but we seek one that is to come'.

These are sentiments by no means agreeable to those who determine the priorities of the English Catholic Church today, for whom the values of this world rather than the next are the only ones that have any definite reality. In this, they have simply absorbed the general immanentist ethos of the liberal Protestantism of the late twentieth century, summed up thus by the Oxford theologian Alister McGrath: 'Convinced that nobody (well, nobody who really mattered that is) could believe in a transcendent God any more, revisionist theologians launched a makeover of their faith. Ideas such as eternal life, Resurrection, "a God out there" and any sense of the mysterious were unceremoniously junked as decrepit embarrassments.' That, fundamentally, is why the Poles should be allowed (indeed, encouraged) to maintain their own traditions and have their own priests: they have understood that for them this may be a matter of eternal life or death. I just wish there were a few Polish priests surplus to their new requirements: they would have a lot to teach the rest of us.

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn makes an important distinction

From an interview with Paolo Gambi published in the Catholic Herald last October.

I wrote in the New York Times about the overwhelming evidence of design. I did not say, as I think the intelligent design school seems to affirm, that through scientific methodology, through natural sciences, it is possible to prove design in nature. But what I said – and what I still say – is that it's really possible for the human intelligence to discern design in nature. This is an affirmation that goes beyond scientific methodology. It is a philosophical and, perhaps, a religious affirmation. It's an affirmation that is grounded in human intelligence, human reason. As Pope Benedict has often stated, this primordial question is whether at the origin of all there is a logos or there is pure causality, randomness. And, as Pope Benedict again has said, this fundamental question, which is a question we have to answer with our intelligence sustained by the light of faith, is that if we discern reason in the world, in nature – if nature is understandable – the question arises; where does this come from?

The road from Regensburg

Ecumenical and inter-religious developments in the search for a modern apologetic



SPE SALVI

In his second encyclical, this time on Christian hope, Pope Benedict XVI has said that without faith in God, humanity lies at the mercy of ideologies that can lead to "the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice... Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope." He addresses the 'crisis of Christian hope' in modern times, and critiques philosophical rationalism and Marxism, with reference to the advent of science. The encyclical also includes a criticism of contemporary Christianity, saying it has largely limited its attention to individual salvation instead of the wider world, and thus reduces the "horizon of its hope... As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking, how can I save myself? We should also ask, what can I do in order that others may be saved?"

Catholic Online, 30 November 2007

OF ISLAMIC INTEREST

Papal Response to the Open Letter

Pope Benedict XVI has replied to a letter from Muslim scholars, stressing the need for dialogue between Islam and Christianity and saying he would be willing to meet Muslim representatives at the Vatican.

In a letter to Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, head of the Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, the Pope praised the "positive spirit" behind the October 11 message signed by 138 top Muslims from around the world and sent to Christian leaders.

Benedict "was particularly impressed by the attention given by the 138 Muslim signatories to the twofold commandment to love God and one's neighbour."

It recalled the pope's statement in August 2005 soon after he took office that "we must not yield to the negative pressures in our midst, but must affirm the values of mutual respect, solidarity and peace."

"Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the one God," the pope said in his reply, which was sent via the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

Referring to the Pope's letter, Vatican analyst Sandro Magister said: "In a dialogue to be intensified with Islam, we must bear in mind the fact that the Muslim world today is finding itself faced with an urgent task. This task is very similar to the one that has been imposed upon Christians since the Enlightenment, and to which the Second Vatican Council, as the fruit of long and difficult research, found real solutions for the Catholic Church. The pope is asking Islam to make the same journey that the Catholic Church made under pressure from the Enlightenment. Love of God and neighbour must be realised in the full acceptance of religious freedom"

AFP, 29 November and Catholic Online 30 November 2007

Patriarch Responds and Comments on post-Regensburg dialogue

In an interview with *Il Foglio* Cardinal Scola, Patriarch of Venice and founder of the Oasis cultural centre for understanding between Catholics and Muslims, said that the Open Letter to the Pope and other Christian leaders by 138 scholars from various Islamic traditions was "not only a media event, because consensus is for Islam a source of theology and law... The fact that the text is rooted in Muslim tradition is very important and makes it more credible than other proclamations expressed in more western language... It is only a prelude to a theological dialogue ...in an atmosphere of greater reciprocal esteem. ...(such) theological dialogue is in no way possible if there is not a preceding respect."

The Cardinal commented that before the Regensburg lecture there was a lot less such dialogue.

Vatican Bishop on post-Regensburg dialogue

The Bishop of Vasai, Bishop Dabre who was appointed in November to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue by Pope Benedict XVI, spoke to *Asia News* about the importance of the Pope's Regensburg 'lectio' in which he laid down the bases for a true and fruitful dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

Benedict XVI described religion as "a fundamental ingredient for dialogue in which faith is open to science and science to faith. Unfortunately some did not correctly understand the intention of the author and its great meaning, said Dabre.

He added: "His speech was a clarion call for dialogue between religions and faith on the one hand and reason and science on the other.

"For the Pope, Western intellectuals should be open to other civilisations and the societies who believe in God. In turn, religion must be open to reason and reason must be open to faith. ...Instead, some in the West have exclusively emphasised the role of reason, science and technology neglecting the positive contribution that religions and faith can make to humanity. In fact [in his Regensburg speech] the Pope was telling Western intellectuals that they should be open to other civilisations and the societies who believe in God."

Asia News 21 November 2007

British Imam encourages dialogue on Infallibility

A Cambridge Imam, Abdal Hakim Murad Winter, one of the Open Letter signatories, has stated "Infallibility is an occasion for dialogue, not an obstacle". Murad Winter, director of Britain's Muslim Academic Trust has written "For Muslims, the Koran is the integral, infallible word of God; traditional Christians believe something no less ambitious about Christ." Muslims and Christians both have sincere convictions. This does not mean they cannot be "theologically challenged by others."

Science lags behind in Islamic countries

Sayyed Misbah Deen is Emeritus Professor of Computer Science at the University of Keele and a Muslim with a family tradition of theology. In his book *Science under Islam* he argues that in the early days of the religion Muslim scientists led the world in many fields. But, he says, "for the past six hundred years, a darkness has descended over Muslim lands everywhere, preventing the cultivation of secular knowledge in all its forms, including scientific knowledge". With the post-8th century weakening of the Caliphate, conformity and attribution of all physical causation solely to God became required. This put some scientists lives in danger. Philosophy became devalued. Today no Muslim country has a technical university of international standing. He argues that the only way forward is to embrace religious and social transformation.

BBC Sunday programme, 21.10.07

Critic of fundamentalists calls for reason

In a *Guardian* article Ed Husain, author of *The Islamist*, has called on mainstream Muslims to "have the courage to stand and reclaim the faith" from extremists who are intent on creating a conflict between Islam and the West by promoting an irrational ideology.

"The modern West stems from a Judaeo-Christian-Islamic heritage. More than ever, Western Muslims need to stop viewing the world through bipolarised lenses and assert our Western belonging.

"Islam is not a monolithic entity. Inherent within Muslim tradition is a plurality of thought, practice and reasoning that can help create a genuine Muslim renaissance or *tajdid* in Arabic."

The Guardian, 2 December, 2007

In an interview with the US online political magazine *Frontpage*, Moorthy Muthuswamy, an expert on terrorism in India and author of the new book, *The Art of War on Terror: Triumphing over Political Islam and the Axis of Jihad* asserted that

the world's enemy is 'political Islam' which holds that the faith should have a dominant say in governing the affairs of government.

"There are good reasons for this outlook, going back to Islamic scriptures," said Muthuswamy. "Islamic trilogy, consisting of the Koran, Hadith and Sira, is the basis of political Islam. In the past few years sophisticated scientific analysis of the trilogy has been carried out. The Center for Study of Political Islam has published a series along these lines. Their analysis points to a very dominant political nature of the trilogy, i.e. domination of political deeds of Islam's founder Mohammed – as opposed to spirituality.

In the context of the trilogy, inner political Islam prevents Muslims from acquiring new knowledge to create a better future for themselves; external political Islam commands them to wage a religious war (called jihad) with unbelievers until the whole humanity is converted to Islam. This strong political component also means that Islam may not be structurally amenable to reform or moderation. If one takes away this political component, there is no Islam.'

FrontPageMagazine.com, 29 November 2007

In one more of a continuing series of admonitions concerning religious freedom, Pope Benedict XVI has asked the Government of Indonesia to ensure that its Catholic minority and other Christians receive full religious freedom.

The Church, he said, "unequivocally condemns the manipulation of religion for political ends, while urging the application of international humanitarian law in every aspect of the fight against terrorism."

Catholic Online, 15 November 2007

TEMPLETON FOUNDATION and Cambridge

Purpose and Science

The Templeton foundation has sponsored a series of essay on whether "the Universe has a purpose?", by a range of academic scientists. Their contributions can be seen at www.templeton.org/purpose

Multi-verse?

At a day conference on the "Multi-verse" at Emmanuel College Cambridge, the Cape Town Professor George Ellis, as agnostic bio-chemist from South Africa, suggested that the theory of multiple, even infinite, universes, of which our finely tuned one is just one, might be useful as an explanatory tool but not in terms of contributing to the theistic debate. It has little supportive evidence, is probably unnecessary scientifically, though perhaps not speculatively and politically. Its proponents can ignore inconvenient data and, often, the relevance of the philosophy of science.

A New Synthesis?

The Templeton Foundation has sponsored a Sarah Coakley's research project *Evolution and the Theology of Cooperation*. She has been on the Harvard faculty since 1993 and the Mallinckrodt Professor of Divinity since 1995, and is to become the Norris-Hulse Professor at Cambridge University. A number of her ideas dovetail with those propagated by *Faith* magazine. Here are some quotations from her brief paper "God and Evolution".

'...it is vital to avoid, in the case of precultural evolution, the presumption that "God" competes with the evolutionary process as a (very big) bit player in the temporal unfolding of "natural selection." ...Rather, God is that-without-which-there-would-be-no-evolution-at-all; God is the atemporal undergird and sustainer of the whole process of apparent contingency or "randomness,"...

'We can apply this same model to the problem of divine providence and human cultural evolution, ...we can think not deistically but trinitarianly and incarnationally of God. We can make Christ's agony in the garden, or his submission to divine will on the cross, as the hallmark and pattern of achieved human freedom rather than its supercession. ...we see human freedom, in its truest and best sense, as freedom-for-God, rather than freedom-against-God...

'...it is not that God has not intervened in the history of the evolutionary process to

continued overleaf

put right the ills of randomness and freedom. For in one sense God is “intervening” constantly – if by that we mean that God is perpetually sustaining us, loving us into existence, pouring God’s self into every secret crack and joint of the created process, and inviting the human will, in the lure of the Spirit, into an ever-deepening engagement with the implications of the Incarnation, its “groanings” (Romans 8), for the sake of redemption. ...from a robustly theological perspective, (Christ’s resurrection) might be *entirely* natural, the summation indeed of the entire trinitarian evolutionary process and thus its secret key.

‘...Dogmatic “scientific” atheism... constantly goes well beyond the empirical evidences of evolution itself, and can give no convincing account of its own pessimistic reductionism; it thus falls on its own methodological sword. Intelligent Design, or ID, in inverse contrast, tends to assume a God who only occasionally bestirs himself to action; even if this were not already unacceptable theistically, its “solutions” prove deeply problematic and vulnerable scientifically as well...

‘...we now need to consider how the discovery of “natural cooperation” – as what Martin Nowak calls the “third fundamental principle of evolution” (alongside mutation and natural selection) – might (help)... theology and metaphysics (need) together (to) strive to complete the vision toward which evolutionary cooperation seemingly gestures ...the phenomenon of cooperation... provides a significant modification of the “nature red in tooth and claw” image that Darwinism early accrued to itself...

‘...At the very least, then, this is the seedbed for higher, intentional forms of ethical virtue, though these latter (with their complex forms of human intentionality and freedom of choice) are of a distinctively different sort from the prehuman varieties of cooperation, and cannot in my view be reductively subsumed under mathematical prediction.’

Sunday by Sunday



Sunday 6th January The Epiphany of the Lord Year A

Matthew 2:1–12

Some of the last figures to emerge at Christmas are the three wise men, the leading intellects of their day. Their science and learning were driven by a profound desire to find the truth and meaning that lie at the foundation of everything. The light of the star was the light of reason that brought them to God made man, not in the splendour and dignity of a palatial throne, but in a poor and wretched manger. You would have thought that men of such sophistication and rank would have recoiled at what they found but they did not.

These men were great because they were open to having their expectations turned upside down; open to a higher Wisdom. Their courage was admirable: they ventured into a strange land, into the domain of a hostile ruler, unafraid of where the truth would lead them, unafraid of looking mad and misguided among their own contemporaries.

And what of the God they found? Yes, God reveals himself in the wonder of creation but the real sign is that of hiddenness – from the failures of the Israelites to this tiny baby in a manger through to the broken body on the cross. The long and eagerly anticipated Saviour now made his appearance in abject poverty. The lesson is in the appalling contradiction: the things of this world that seem to us so important are not, in the end, important at all. And more: this sign of hiddenness points to the fact that the reality of truth and love, the reality of God himself, is not found in the world of things but beyond it, in the sphere of a new order that this tiny baby was ushering in. The kings, whose hearts were not caught up in the pomp and wealth of their status, were open to receive him. How receptive are our hearts?



Sunday 13th January: The Baptism of the Lord Year A

Matthew 3:13–17

The atmosphere in Jerusalem at the time of John’s baptising was one of eager anticipation. Here in their midst was a prophet at last, baptising not in the usual way of customary ablutions but in a new way that called for conversion. He called those gathered to transform their thinking and acting; he proclaimed God’s judgement and announced the arrival of One who is greater. The whole of Judea and Jerusalem was there but the really striking thing was that Jesus was among them. How could Jesus count himself as one of the crowd of sinners awaiting baptism? To this natural question, Jesus replied that he should ‘do all that righteousness demands’ and, by ‘righteousness’, he meant bearing the whole yoke of the Father’s will.

The full significance of his actions would only be seen later, in the light of Jesus’ cross and resurrection. In immersing himself in the Jordan, Jesus was burdened with the sins of all of us – thus his first move in his public ministry was to take our place as a sinner. The baptism was an anticipation of the cross, just as the Father’s words, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved’ were an anticipation of the resurrection.

What does that mean for us who are baptised? It means that on the day of our baptism and every day after we must go to the place of Jesus’ baptism where he identifies himself with us, and we identify ourselves with him. Every day, we must strive to become more fully what we became at our own baptism, i.e. children of God, and share in the Son’s obedience to the Father. That place where we meet sin and death in ourselves is now the place where we meet the resurrection. Jesus’ baptism, then, is the seed of our hope.



Sunday 20th January:

2nd Sunday Year A

John 1:29–34

When John says, 'I did not know him myself...' we can assume he did know *who* Jesus was but not what Jesus was. The truth having been revealed to him, however, he knew that he existed only to point others to Christ. What does he tell us of Christ? That the Spirit came down on him like a dove. In Palestine, the dove was considered a sacred bird; it was neither hunted nor eaten. In reference to God's creative Spirit hovering over the waters, the Spirit fluttered like a dove over the primal chaos breathing order and beauty into it.

The Jews believed that the Spirit embraced the prophets of the Old Testament, so that i. the truth of God would be presented to them; ii. they would have the power to recognise it; and iii. they would have the ability and courage to proclaim it. For the Jew, the Spirit meant that God was entering into a person's life, and this happened to Jesus in a unique way at his baptism, the day before the events of today's Gospel. We may experience moments of illumination, but John tells us twice that the Spirit rested on Jesus, i.e. took up permanent residence in Jesus. The mind and power of God permeated the whole of Jesus' being.

The Spirit also acts at our own baptism: he illuminates us so that we see God's will with clarity; he gives us the strength and power to do it; he purifies and cleanses us of sin; and breathes order and beauty into lives inwardly devastated and broken, making us whole again. Sometimes we forget to pray for gift of the Spirit – if we knew what we were praying for, we would pray for it with every breath we take.



Sunday 27th January

3rd Sunday Year A

Matthew 4:12–23

The substance of the message is twofold. The first part calls for conversion and the reorientation of one's whole life; the second part supplies the reason for the command – that God's sovereignty and power are very near. By his teaching, proclaiming the Good News and healing, Jesus indicated to us that the kingdom of heaven is already here. The reign of Satan, the reign of sin that had so darkened our intellects, hardened hearts and ravaged our bodies was now, at last, nearing its end. 'The people that lived in darkness has seen a great light.' Here is the Messiah the Jews had been yearning for.

The call of the disciples is very striking from a number of points of view. First of all, it was customary for prospective disciples to seek out a teacher rather than vice versa. Here we have Jesus himself hand picking those first apostles whose lives would be changed for ever and who, through Jesus, would go on to change the face of the earth. When Matthew writes, 'He saw two brothers...' the idea of that 'seeing' is far more intense than a mere looking. Rather, it refers to a deeply penetrating gaze that saw these men through and through – their strengths as well as their weaknesses.

The personal and deliberate nature of the call, as well as the sheer simplicity of it, with very little by way of preparation, emphasise just how attractive and compelling Jesus' call was. But the call was not a one-off. Along with the other disciples, they would spend the following few years with Jesus, learning, gradually, and with plenty of misunderstandings along the way, the kind of Messiah Jesus was. Their Yes to Jesus would have to be reaffirmed time and again. The generosity and openness of their response was all Jesus needed to help him in his mission of spreading the news of the kingdom. That is all he asks of us, too.



Sunday 3rd February

4th Sunday Year A

Matthew 5:1–12

The simplicity and familiarity of the beatitudes can sometimes dull our response to them. Often they are dismissed as an impossible ideal with poetic value but little else. In fact the beatitudes have a very definite value in our day-to-day living. The setting itself gives the tone for this authoritative teaching: while Luke's account of the sermon takes place on the plain, Matthew has Jesus up a mountain, thus evoking the biblical notion of mountain as a place of divine revelation, and Mount Sinai in particular as the place where God's will for his people Israel was revealed.

The formula of the beatitudes would have been familiar to the crowd from the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. What is very unusual is the timing of the reward. The Wisdom books assume that virtue will be rewarded in this life, whereas Jesus' beatitudes speak of fullness in God's kingdom to come. When Jesus looks at his disciples from the mount, he sees they *are* literally poor, hungry, persecuted; yet worldly standards are turned on their heads when they are seen from God's perspective. And so the beatitudes are not purely eschatological: when we begin to see ourselves and the world as God does, then something of the *eschaton* is already present. Jesus brings deep joy in the midst of our suffering.

Thus the beatitudes teach us the meaning of discipleship, a meaning that can never be understood in purely theoretical terms but rather in the joy and suffering of living life in union with God, the constant lived reality of dying in order to rise again. As Benedict XVI writes on the beatitudes, in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Christ who had nowhere to lay his head is truly poor; Christ who said 'Come to me... for I am meek and lowly in heart' (Mt 11:28–29) is truly meek. In truth, the beatitudes are an expression of the mystery of Christ himself, and a call to communion with him.



Sunday 10th February

1st Sunday of Lent

Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus' temptation in the desert is not so much about the devil luring Jesus into this or that sin but about portraying Jesus as the Son, who had to be like us 'in all things' (Heb. 4:15). The three temptations in today's Gospel both reflect the inner struggle of Christ's mission and broach the subject of what really matters in human life. At their core lies the act that is common to every sin, from Genesis onwards, namely that of pushing God to one side as a secondary concern.

Our lives are too full of urgent, important matters to be bothered about God. We build our own foundations without reference to him and refuse to give credence to anything beyond the material and the political. We reckon that what really matters is that which is here in front of me; God is an illusion. And so the first temptation is a demand for proof of divinity, something Jesus would encounter again and again. Even today, we long for that great miracle that will take all ambiguity and uncertainty away, and yet we have been given all that we need to believe.

To the second temptation Jesus answers, 'You must not put the Lord your God to the test.' It centres on how we can and cannot know God. The idea that we can submit God to a series of laboratory-like experiments is so arrogant and misguided as to end our search before we begin it, because we are already denying God his status as God by setting ourselves above him. The third temptation speaks of the earthly powerlessness of Jesus and our perennial desire to secure this precarious situation with earthly power. This dynamic would recur in Jesus' earthly life, when he and Barabbas would stand before Pontius Pilate. One a leader of an armed struggle, promising freedom and independence, the other a teacher calling us to lose our life to gain it. We can hardly be surprised at the outcome that day. Who would we choose today? To what extent do we really understand who Jesus, the true Messiah, really is?



Sunday 17th February

2nd Sunday of Lent

Matthew 17:1–9

The three Synoptics link Peter's confession to the Transfiguration, which is significant because it shows that Jesus' glory is inextricably linked to his passion. The glory, or divinity, and the cross go together and only when we put them together do we come to an understanding of the true Jesus. On the mountain, the truth which Peter declared in his confession was made manifest, albeit briefly, to the senses – that is, in the presence of light, Jesus becomes light. He is truly 'light from light'. But Peter continues to misunderstand and, in asking about putting three tents up, he fails to see that glory can only ever be preceded by suffering.

The long-awaited salvation, revealed throughout scripture, has to be reinterpreted in the light of the suffering Christ, and the heavenly voice confirms this: the Father tells us that when Jesus speaks of his suffering and death we should listen to him, for this too is part of God's master plan. Although paradoxical, the passion and glory together make sense in (and only in) the Sonship of Jesus. 'Listen to him', the Father tells us, even when he calls us to lose our life that we might win it.

It all makes sense in the light of the Son's surrender to the Father's will, just as the suffering we ourselves endure before the hoped-for glory only makes sense within our own sonship and submission to the Father. The passion was not something that merely 'happened' to Jesus: he gave his life freely. So, too, our own suffering can always be the result of our own choice, a positive action for God. The choice of doing the Father's will can never be denied us. And, in all the struggle, let us never forget that, whether in suffering or in glory, we, too, are the Father's 'beloved'.



Sunday 24th February

3rd Sunday of Lent

John 4: 5–42

The Gospel today speaks to us of true worship. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the day has come when old controversies surrounding worship on Mount Gerizim in Samaria and its rival Mount Zion in Jerusalem are irrelevant: those who want to worship God can now do so anywhere. Jesus tells the woman, 'You worship what you do not know', and there is a sense in which this is true. The Samaritans only acknowledged the Pentateuch and rejected all the rest of the Old Testament. They knew nothing of the prophets or the psalms and so their religion was stunted because they were not open to much of the knowledge they might have had. What of our own worship?

To worship the Father 'in spirit and in truth' is not easy. Very often we select the articles of faith that suit us and ignore those that don't. Those aspects of our faith that we find difficult or too challenging are quickly disregarded. Another type of false worship is ignorant worship. God wants the *whole* of us to worship him, our minds and hearts together. We may have come to faith through an emotional response but the time must come when we think it out. Our faith is inherently reasonable and, unless we know why we believe, it is unlikely to sustain us in the heat of battle. We might also ask ourselves: is my faith founded on love of God and gratitude for his many gifts or am I just covering my back against divine wrath? God wants love, not fear.

So Jesus points us to true worship. No longer confined to a certain place or time, true worship exists wherever an altar is raised for the one true sacrifice of the Mass. As Christ gave his life (in its entirety) in worship to the Father, so we must do likewise – the worship we offer through the Son in the Church is the perfect worship of which Jesus speaks.



What the heavens said by David Walsh

I

The bright star signalling between the vista of trees on the
low horizon led us, with dromedarian footfall, through the
lonely, undulating sands. And the ascent through
bitter nights of cold, through months of knowing nothing but the halting
slowness of a journey against the snowy heights,
the trek by high mountain passes.

II

Weeks and months turning on the sundial, through
villages and towns indifferent to the stranger, not hostile,
inquisitive at most. And through the valleys, soft with vegetation,
along the meadowed waters, we witnessed the dawn
break upon us from on high.

III

That which had risen in the firmament pulsed with a definite life.
We have seen his star rise and have come.
We have seen his star arise...

And inside the city walls, the street bazaars and markets, men haggling over the rate of a day's wage,
some, unable to work, unhired even unto the eleventh hour. But night would see torch lit streets and
our own procession to make inquiry of the king, the sign in the heavens to be pondered.

Uneasy city, why have we come? What cause to overthrow? Time to slip covertly through the eye of the
needle? I had not thought Life could unease so many.

The praetorian judgement will itself be judged in a time beyond our own, thrown down
like a gauntlet on the smooth paving stones, a challenge to the future from the voices that will
eventually fade in the wind.

*For the voice that was heard in Rama was the voice of Rachel
weeping, weeping, weeping for her children,
refusing consolation, because they were no more.*

IV

Descending the palace rooftop steps, I stopped... half-glimpsing our own fate. No need to be a prophet
to see the writing on the wall. Is that what Nebuchadnezzar knew as he sat slowly down to the banquet
food, more palatable now than his future which had turned in his belly? He still had the appetite to
rule, but his life had been weighed in the scales. Consider! The sword never far from the king's door,
for the blood of the innocent infants poured out like water.

*And you Bethlehem Ephrata,
Least among those who reign,
Out of you shall come the Governance of the people.
We have seen his star arise...*

Book reviews



After Asceticism: Sex, Prayer and Deviant Priests

By The Linacre Institute, AuthorHouse (2006), Paperback, 276 pages, £9.95

After Asceticism offers an analysis, response, and recommendations in the wake of the scandals of clergy sexual misconduct that have beset the Catholic Church in America. The study from the Linacre Institute (not to be confused with the Linacre Centre in England) is honest and hard-hitting but offers a positive way forward.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, the Catholic psychologist, Dom Thomas Verner Moore published research showing the positive psychological effect for the clergy of ascetical discipline. His articles demonstrated the very low levels of psychopathology among the clergy looking at the data on psychiatric hospitalisations. Moore showed that the development of the moral and spiritual virtues depended on simple ascetical practices including prayer and penance.

Sadly, his work was largely ignored when greatly increased attention was paid to psychology from the late 1960s onwards. Instead, Catholic psychologists focussed on the abuse of asceticism which they saw as contributing to the pathological repression of the sexual appetite. In reaching conclusions that were applied in practice in seminary formation and in the ongoing formation of clergy, the assumptions of secular psychology, were accepted as necessary guides to priestly spirituality. For example, in the early 1970s, Eugene Kennedy, using Erikson's psychosocial model of personality development, claimed that two-thirds of priests in the US were emotionally immature because of the absence of women and a stunted capacity for personal relationships. *After Asceticism* does not explore the obvious effect of such a claim in encouraging clergy to erode the boundaries which had previously been seen as protecting their chastity, and, in the interests of a supposed

psychological benefit, allowing familiarities of a kind that were hitherto regarded as occasions of sin. The authors do point to one of the most extraordinary features of Kennedy's published work was that it either ignored or failed to discover the sexual misconduct of the clergy that was greatly on the increase at the time.

The principal thesis of the study is that habits of prayer, ascetical practices, including the mortification of the flesh, frequent confession, and the control of sexual fantasies are all essential to chastity and to the overall pastoral effectiveness of the priest. The spiritual classics all promote this model of the ascetical life, and to many people, it might seem obvious that it is necessary for the preservation of priestly chastity. However, *After Asceticism* points to common deficiencies and aberrations in the religious purpose and intellectual formation of priests dating back to at least the 1950s.

Many of the traditional ascetical practices disappeared from the formation of priests in favour of promoting psychological "wholeness", achieving "psychosexual and affective maturity", meeting the "need for intimacy", "befriending your sexuality" and a number of other ambiguous ideals that could co-exist with what were previously considered mortal sins. The only sin now was "repression." In a striking comparison with classical ideals, the book quotes the Hippocratic oath in which physicians pledged purity and holiness, and promised not to seduce men or women. As the authors observe, there was no quarter for the "wounded healer."

Through popular preaching, the therapeutic mentality contributed to shorter queues for confession, and longer queues for Holy Communion. In popular Catholicism, there was no longer any consideration of the possibility of damnation for a "mortal sin", let alone a sexual sin. A priest whom Kennedy considers to be "fully developed" in psychological terms says that masturbation is not sinful, that he doesn't accept the "theory of mortal and venial sin", and that there is not much guilt or sinfulness associated with sexual misbehaviour.

As is now painfully public knowledge, some of the clergy, met their "need for intimacy" in activity with teenage boys for which dioceses are now paying out millions of dollars in compensation. It is notable that in many cases the priests who indulged in this activity continued routinely to celebrate

Mass. It is telling to compare the clergy misconduct at the time of the reformation which did at least take note of the notion of sacrilege.

It is a principal contention of *After Asceticism* that the problem has not been adequately addressed because of the failure to understand its root causes. In a section that is painful to read, the authors give a number of examples of the "sexual apology" even after the abuse scandals. For example, an Archbishop wrote to Fr John Geoghan, a notorious molester with hundreds of victims, "Yours has been an effective life of ministry, sadly, impaired by illness." As they say, it is this use of the therapeutic mentality which provides a moral cover for sexual sin. Therefore, they consider the Dallas Charter to be an incomplete response to the sex scandals because it ignores the importance of the virtue of chastity.

The study draws a number of important conclusions on the basis of careful analysis both of the research data and on the basis of the understanding of human nature that was unanimous until recently among Catholic philosophers. It is shown that previous personality flaws in the priest were not the root cause of sexual abuse and that therefore the problems of clergy sexual abuse were not the result primarily of a failure in personality screening or therapeutic intervention. Rather, the collapse of asceticism and the expectation of unchaste behaviour served to cultivate those personality flaws and provided the environment where sexual misconduct was almost inevitable.

There is an interesting chapter dealing with homosexuality and asceticism. One of the most important conclusions that the authors draw is that the sexual abuse of minors did not follow as a result of a homosexual subculture in seminaries. On the contrary, sexual misconduct of various kinds had already become much more common as a symptom of the collapse of religious asceticism. This sexual misconduct itself meant that some seminaries became unsafe places for young men. Innocent, susceptible to manipulation, and lacking the strength of character that would have been developed through ascetical discipline, they did not resist for long the determined advances of their peers or superiors. The general atmosphere of indiscipline and disobedience, for example with regard to liturgical norms, made for a confusing environment, lacking in those safeguards of virtue that had been proved over time, such as the suspicion of particular friendships.

In proposing a way forward, the study rejects the primacy of place that is given to the therapeutic mentality because it fails to appreciate the role that religious devotion and faith play in the moral life of the priest, and has no proper understanding of human nature, original sin and free will. Taking its foundation instead from the classical psychology of virtue, shame in doing what is wrong and a delight in doing what is right, it insists that hope is at the centre of the arduous task of chastity – and that chaste celibacy is a singular manifestation of hope for others. This focus on hope gives a central place to the strengthening of the will. Christ offers a continuous call “will you take up your cross and follow me? As the authors say, “Man answers this question, either yes or no, in his behaviour, and his behaviour is the result of a choice between good and evil.” (page 171)

At the end of the study, the particular recommendations come as no great surprise: seminary training should include the study of asceticism and the regimen of ascetical discipline; assessment should be of the candidate's capacity to live a life of chaste celibacy and spiritual poverty; wilful deviations from discipline should be taken to indicate the lack of a religious vocation; those who form and mentor students should be sterling examples of ascetical discipline. The study does not neglect the importance of an unconfused and consistent fidelity to the moral teaching of the Church's magisterium.

After Asceticism is an important contribution from the laity to the question of the formation of priests in the wake of major scandals. The book has largely been ignored in the mainstream of the Church where the therapeutic mentality of secular psychology continues to hold a privileged position. The return to a solid ascetical discipline will not be an easy path, but the considerable improvements made to seminary formation in recent years would benefit greatly from the insights of this study.

Timothy Finigan
Our Lady of the Rosary
Blackfen

In the Light of Christ: Writings in the Western Tradition

by Lucy Beckett, *Ignatius* (available from Family Publications, Oxford), 648pp, £15.50

Exploring the Western tradition of writing from Aeschylus to John Paul II, Lucy Beckett provides an encyclopaedic account of what might be styled an ‘alternative canon’ of

great writers. She traces the line of a tradition of writing specifically relative to, and interpreted in the light of Christian revelation, encompassing authors as disparate as Bede and Beckett, Plato and Pushkin. Hers is a more than simply literary canon, for it not only includes poets and novelists, but philosophers, theologians, historians and critics.

The breadth of this study is impressive, but Beckett holds the book together by not simply bringing all these disciplines and authors into a synoptic view, but by creating a narrative that is coherent and often convincing. While some chapters stand out as excellent independent essays, the reader rarely loses sense of the whole; many of these chapters are an excellent introduction to a writer's work, inspiring the reader to seek it out on the strength of a well-chosen array of quotations and Beckett's enthusiasm.

The thesis of the book is that “the[...] value [of these texts]... rests in their relation to the absolute truth, beauty and goodness that are one in God and that are definitively revealed in Christ.” (p.1). This thesis aims to counteract the prevalent relativist evaluation (de-valuation) of human thought as “sound and fury, signifying nothing” most powerfully articulated by Nietzsche. A quotation from Allan Bloom depicts this devaluation of speculative writing: “the grownups are too busy at work, and the children are left in a day-care centre called the humanities, in which the discussions have no echo in the adult world”, this despite the fact “[a]ll that is human, all that is of concern to us [lies] outside of natural science” (p.569).

In order to demonstrate the central importance of the humanities, Beckett attempts a recuperation of the Augustinian tradition of thought (distinguished from the scholastic tradition founded on Aquinas). This tradition Beckett summarises in two concepts: the ‘Order of Love’ and the *civitas terrena/civitas Dei* opposition. The former concept focussing on aesthetic intuition, linking beauty to truth and love, allows her to draw on Augustine's notion of the ‘restless heart’ as a golden thread through her selected writings. She argues that the works we find most moving and enduring contain a common intuition of transcendence, or ‘intimations of immortality’. This argument is bolstered by von Balthasar's aesthetics; his *Glory of the Lord* is as important an influence as Augustine himself. Balthasar's concept of allegory, for example, is central to Beckett's discussion of Athenian tragedy, and draws out ideas crucial to her general argument: “it restores the lost connexion between

the partial and relative truth, goodness and beauty of the plays to their intelligible place beside or within, the truth, goodness and beauty of God ...returning them to the coherently describable.” (p.33).

This relative truth of texts to the truth of God leads to the second Augustinian concept employed in Beckett's argument – awareness of the opposition and relativity of the *civitas terrena* to the *civitas Dei*. The most valuable texts are those which look for the “undiscovered country” and have no illusions about the contingency of earthly life and power. This is her answer to the flipside of Nietzschean relativism, the Will to Power, as well as to the doomed efforts of Arnold and Leavis to mend modernity with art religion or Milton and Tolstoy's conflation of state and religious eschatology.

The need to hold together this collection of widely differing worldviews and types of writing into such a coherent project occasionally results in over-arguing. For example, the influence of Augustine on later writers is sometimes overstated, and this becomes a little damaging to her argument when Augustine is summoned as if to ratify the insight of a later writer. Similarly, Beckett's distinction between Augustine and Aquinas ignores the influence of the former on the latter and perpetuates an opposition that is commonly held but largely fallacious. Chesterton once mistakenly lamented the triumph of Augustinianism, and Beckett makes precisely the opposite mistake.

Beckett's apparent insistence, later in the book, on the importance of Catholic sympathies (e.g. in Shakespeare and Samuel Johnson) suggests apologetics, not aesthetics, and reminds one uncomfortably that arguing the case for reasonable faith and faith-based reason is tremendously difficult without straying into what appears to be a partisan position. Despite this, Beckett's book remains an important survey and reminder of what in Western thought is of value, and why, and demonstrates the truth articulated by both the Second Vatican Council and Saint Julian: “Whatever has been spoken aright by any man ...belongs to us Christians; for we worship and love... the Logos which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God ...[and] those writers were able, through the seed of the Logos implanted in them, to see reality darkly” (p.51).

Matthew Ward
St John's
Cambridge

Saving Secular Society

by Dudley Plunkett, *Alive Publications*, 266pp, £10

Dr Plunkett looks at the world and sees it riven, with uncertainty, perplexity and doubt. In *Saving Secular Society*, he undertakes some thought-provoking analysis of these problems and attempts to provide a solution. This solution is a strategy to re-evangelise society.

There are however two main difficulties which prevent this re-evangelisation. The first is the negative attitude of society towards Christianity. This varies from ignorance to indifference and even antagonism. Society has its own interests and agenda and these rarely include religion, especially organised religion. The second difficulty is the fact that the Christians are disorganised, uncertain of their teaching and lacking in confidence. They see their numbers dwindling and their beliefs ridiculed. The first part of his book looks in particular at these problems.

Many people, including Dr Plunkett, seem to place the emphasis upon the former, and feel that our problems stem mainly from the negative attitude of society. In fact, in this writer's opinion, the boot is on the other foot. It is largely because Christians lack belief in their own teaching and give no clear guidance either on faith or morals, that society safely ignores them and wisely avoids them. If Christians spoke with conviction they would at least get greater respect – witness the Servant of God, John Paul II.. However, since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has shown an unprecedented lack of conviction, at least as far as the ordinary Catholic is concerned. Too many priests and local experts no longer seem sure of what the Church teaches, or they deliberately ignore that teaching, or worse still, give the impression that traditional teaching is subject to change even on the most fundamental matters. Further, this attitude is portrayed as 'advanced' and 'sophisticated'. Dr Plunkett does not deny the drift of this but it does not seem to be his main tack.

In the second and longer that part of his book, Dr Plunkett proposes a seven step plan to re-evangelise society. I will attempt to summarise each of these steps.

The first step is dialogue. We will be addressing people formed in a milieu of materialism, moral relativism, instant gratification and a culture of soaps and celebrity. We must be prepared to face this

reality. The second step looks more closely at moral relativism, at political correctness, post-modernism and media bias. These tend to deride and deny that truth and goodness have any real and absolute value. But people cannot live in a spiritual vacuum. As a result they turn instead to false prophets and trivial spirituality. In the third step the gospel is proclaimed either directly or by the witness of holiness and goodness in the lives of individual Christians. The fourth step is a definite call to conversion. This will involve the rejection of many of the world's values so the Church must be seen to judge and stand against many of the claims of our culture.

Next the church must inspire the world of ideas. It must make its voice heard. Its wisdom and spiritual riches should be available to everyone. This is the fifth step. The sixth step concerns beauty, which both reflects God, and draws man to him. It is closely linked to truth and goodness. Even in the last 40 years, the Church has been a source of beauty and an important patron of the arts but Dr Plunkett fails to mention the massive destruction of art, architecture and music in the Church during this time. The seventh step is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He discerns the Spirit moving in the new orders and associations, in Marian apparitions, and in the many charisms seen in the Church today. Of course the Holy Spirit guides and inspires all the previous steps as well.

Saving Secular Society is generally written clearly and is free from jargon. With obvious and intelligent concern Dr Plunkett raises one of the most important questions that faces Christians today. In a usually engaging manner he discusses many of the issues which challenge us today. However overall, it is not an easy or simplistic book, it requires both time and attention.

When I had read the book, I asked some colleagues from a variety of backgrounds what steps they would propose to re-evangelise Society. In fact, many of their answers had already been covered in Dr Plunkett's book. However, two further suggestions were mentioned. We must have confidence in what we believe. We must have courage and clarity in teaching it. I tried another test. I explained the seven steps to an Anglican vicar and asked him what he thought of them. He said, 'It sounds as though he wants to reverse the Reformation'. After a pause he added, 'Not necessarily a bad thing'.

Fr Francis Lynch
Usk

Pure Womanhood

by Crystalina Evert, distributed by Emmanuel House, Dublin, 41pp, £2.99

Today have you ever heard the words 'virginity', 'chastity', 'purity', 'modesty', or 'self-mastery'? Yes indeed, these words seem to belong to an archaic society which has refused to move to the post-modern times. In fact, today they are no more than romantic concepts where we all hark back to our parents' and our grandparents' generation when they would go on a date to the cinema to watch 'It's A Wonderful Life'. Of course, we live in a world where 'Chastity' is merely a cool name for our daughter. Chastity, it would seem, is as extinct as the dodo. Or is it?

Thankfully, there still are alive human beings of this time, men and women full of integrity and character, who practise and promote the value of a chaste lifestyle. They are fully aware that no one can have sexual intercourse outside of a committed monogamous relationship, that being marriage, and not endure sufferings of a physical, emotional or spiritual nature. The notion and practise of chastity exist even today.

Crystalina Evert has produced a short booklet that is accessible and to the point. It contains her own painful testimony which is powerful and heart rending. The first line states "...I'll never forget the day he walked away from me for the very last time. All I could think was 'That guy is leaving with something that never belonged to him in the first place, and I'll never get it back.'" It begs the question, 'How many girls have we ever met who have reiterated the same question?'

Crystalina highlights 21 statements from her own experience and from girls whom she has encountered, each justifying their reason for practising pre-marital sex and she answers each one with truth, love and honesty. These statements are arguments which she used herself to validate her own decisions. We have the opportunity to read about her own life in which she makes no attempt to disguise her actions and with which perhaps many girls can empathise.

As a youth worker who presents chastity to girls (and boys) Crystalina does not omit any possible opinion. She delves from "Boys will be boys" to "I'll change him" to "It's my body, it's my choice" to "I'm damaged goods." Crystalina knows too well the pressures which our sisters, our nieces, our daughters, our grand daughters are under. Hence, the publication of the booklet.

She relays to these girls the most important message of all. Self-control is achievable. Boys do desire girls who are pure.

Finally, she attempts to reach out to all those girls, like herself, who bought into the lies and the propaganda of the secular world. This section is headed "It's too late for me." Crystalina emphasises that "...the regrets about your past may seem overwhelming, but God's love is greater."

The booklet is highly impressive and is written from the heart of a girl who knows that sex is sacred. She offers many practical tips to girls who find themselves in situations of temptation and offers advice on praying for the grace to practise chastity. The booklet is one of the best I have encountered and I would encourage every teenage girl to read it. From the first sentence it is captivating and intriguing. It is complemented with light humour and refuses to apologise for the truth echoed throughout the entire booklet that "being pure, you're loving your body, you're loving your future children, you're loving you're future husband, and, most importantly, you're loving your God."

Crystalina has met a man of integrity of character called James Evert. Today the pair travel the USA to share their testimonies to thousands of hundreds of teens. Equally impressive to "Pure Womanhood" is her husbands' "Pure Manhood." As you might imagine it is aimed at teenage boys and is a worthwhile buy in a similar style.

Sarah Holmes
Hull

An Infinity of Little Hours

by Nancy Klein Maguire, *Public Affairs*, 265pp, \$13.95 (available from Family Publications).

This is a remarkable and painstaking work which emerged at the same time as Philip Groning's film, *Le Grand Silence*.

Both deal with the life of the Carthusian monks. Groning follows the life of La Grande Chartreuse whereas Nancy Klein, having married a former Carthusian, has a more direct interest. She wanted to catalogue the life before Vatican II in the same way that Tony Parker put on record the routine of the lighthousemen before automation.

Nancy Maguire has managed to portray the austerity of the English Chathouse at Parkminster in a way that few could accomplish. She does it through the lives of five Carthusian novices. One of her correspondents suggested she should have

been hired by the CIA, because she had to get in touch with men who had gone their separate ways and persuade them to share their experiences, as well as to persuade the community in Horsham to allow her to enter the cloister. Queen Victoria had to obtain papal permission when she asked to visit La Grande Chartreuse.

There is no glossing the extreme penitential nature of the vocation. Carthusians never eat meat and fast frequently. In the early fourteenth century, the Pope commanded them to break their abstinence when ill. A delegation of twenty-seven monks was sent to Avignon: the youngest was twenty-eight and the oldest ninety-five. The command was rescinded although they did agree to wear hats in bad weather. There have been changes in the last thirty years – clocks have made their appearance, there is more heat and the monks concelebrate. Will Pope Benedict rescind the changes and return them to the rule of 1127?

The monastic appeal, judging from Groning's film, remains strong. Nancy Maguire's novices never regret the time they spent at Parkminster and are welcomed back. There is a tradition at Parkminster of faithfulness to the witness of St John Houghton, the Prior of the London Charterhouse who, aged 48 on May 4th 1535, was silent and suffered. St Thomas More witnessed the scene from his window in the tower and said that he and his companions went to their deaths as to a wedding. The Carthusian vocation, *Soli Deo*, is not for all but remains in the Church as that call to give all for love of Christ.

Fr James Tolhurst
Chislehurst
Kent

A Year book of Seasons and Celebrations

by Joanna Bogle, *Gracewing*, 111pp, £7.99

A Yearbook of Seasons and Feasts works through the Christian calendar looking, not only at the particular seasons, but also several of the feast days. It talks of many traditions and customs that were once followed when celebrating these days. It is both a practical and informative book, with everything from ideas from creating things to poems and prayers to say.

When my husband and I got married we decided that we were fed up with fasting on days of abstinence but not really feasting on feast days. With the birth of our daughter we zealously sought a book that would help us in this mission and after enjoying a talk

by Joanna Bogle we bought *A Book of Feast and Seasons* (F&S). *A Yearbook of Seasons and Celebrations* (S&C) claims, with some justification, to be a 'companion book'.

The format of this book is well arranged into the seasons, and the introduction works through the Christian calendar. The first has a greater emphasis upon practical ways of celebrating the feast days, but it is good to have the additional information which is in the companion volume. I personally feel that the content of both could have been combined.

I noticed one or two inaccuracies. For instance Joanna says that the Polish take baskets of food to be blessed on Easter Sunday morning, though it's actually Holy Saturday, with it being eaten on Easter Sunday. Also I was a little disappointed at the Michaelmas entry, where Joanna said "the old tradition was to eat a roasted goose", advising one to "invite your family round for a harvest supper – roast chicken." My husband and I had a great celebration, preparing roast goose for the first time, with friends and family. N.B. Trinity cake actually needs 8oz of flour. 4oz I discovered produces Trinity biscuit.

All in all this book is very good and written with the vigour and zeal of someone who clearly enjoys being a Catholic and feels that traditions which help us to teach the faith are not only worth maintaining but encourage us to feast and be merry. It can be a good way to evangelise our non-Christian friends, particularly in a culture which perceives the Catholic faith to be dull, and much more about fasting than feasting. I took Angel cakes into work at the start of October and told all my colleagues about the Feast of the Guardian Angels day, and when recalling our evening with the goose discussed Michaelmas with them. This is a defiantly informative book.

Ella Preece
Hull



Notes from across the Atlantic

by Richard John Neuhaus



QUESTION OF INTIMIDATION

Who is intimidating whom? *The New England Journal of Medicine* is alarmed by the Supreme Court decision *Gonzales vs. Carhart*. "The Partial Death of Abortion Rights", "The Intimidation of American Physicians", are among the alarms raised. A reader writes: "I was surprised at the notion that physicians who support abortion are intimidated. As a young physician who is pro-life, I know about intimidation. We carry our convictions quietly within the established medical community. Biding our time, we wait to act or speak out when necessary to protect unborn life." Ask Dr. Maureen Condit about intimidation. Deviating from the establishment position, she wrote about embryonic stem cell research in *First Things* ("What We Know About Embryonic Stem Cells," January 2007) and for her effrontery was attacked by the scientific establishment. No doubt some abortionists are intimidated. More generally they are despised. It is the specialty that dare not speak its name. A doctor once introduced himself to me saying, "I work in the field of reproductive health." I'm sure I did not intimidate him. Contempt for what a person does is not intimidation.

CONSTRUCTIVE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

There is an office called the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Social Development and World Peace. As you can tell from the name, the office has weighty responsibilities. John Carr is the head of the office, and he recently testified before another institution with weighty responsibilities, the Senate Committee

on Environment and Public Works. Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Centre of Reform Judaism, also testified, as did the National Council of Churches, the Episcopal Church and a group of evangelical Protestants who signed a statement warning against global warming. Speaking for the bishops, John Carr said, "The U.S. Catholic bishops seek to offer a constructive, distinctive and authentic contribution based on our religious and moral teaching and our pastoral service." He went on to say, "Our Creator has given us the gift of creation: the air we breathe, the water that sustains life, the climate and environment we share." Further, he said, "Global climate change is about the future of God's creation and the one human family." In addition, he said, "This is an essential time to build up the common ground for common action to pursue the common good." The representatives of the other groups also made these "constructive, distinctive and authentic" contributions presumably based upon Catholic teaching and pastoral experience. Mr. Carr said, "Pope John Paul II insisted that climate is a good that must be protected." I don't know what statement of the pope Mr. Carr has in mind, but it is true that we would be in a fine fix without climate. He refers to meetings his office has held with global warming groups and says "such gatherings can create an environment of dialogue and common ground for common action on climate change," and he urged that such gatherings be expanded. So at least one environment is being not only protected but expanded. In one meeting, he learned that parts of Alaska are "already being destroyed by erosion, flooding and other forces". Much of Mr. Carr's statement is devoted to the poor and to "sustainable development". Sustainable development is an idea developed in World Council of Churches circles in the 1970s and 1980s, and focuses attention on how much poor countries should be allowed to develop before they jeopardise the environment on which we all depend, although Mr. Carr does not put it quite that way. In any

event, we can all agree that there is climate, and there is, as always, climate change. The U.S. bishops, according to John Carr, believe that these constitute "problems" that "require taking bold action weighing available policy alternatives and moral goods and taking considered and decisive steps before the problems grow worse". Such is the "constructive, distinctive and authentic contribution" of Catholic social doctrine. Where would the senators or, for that matter, all of us be without it? The national bishops' conference recently underwent across-the-board cutbacks due to financial difficulties. One may be permitted to wonder whether cutbacks, or even eliminations, might not be more carefully targeted, with an eye toward, for instance, the Department of Social Development and World Peace. (For a crisp, informed, and cliché-free reflection on climate change, see Thomas Derr's "The Politics of Global Warming" in the August/September issue of *First Things*.)

LENIN ON DISPLAY

The Fremont district of Seattle proclaims itself to be the "Centre of the Universe". One should not begrudge the folks who live there whatever consolations they can contrive. Fremont is also the sharpest edge of edgy, as in avant-garde. After the people of Poprad, Slovakia, pulled down a seven-ton statue of Vladimir Ilych Lenin in 1989 and threw it into the town dump, it was discovered by an American who had it transported to Seattle and it was placed in the town centre of Fremont. This report says, "The statue was controversial and remains so – especially to Russian immigrants." Those touchy Russians. The report continues: "Lenin the Man was a violent sociopath, catalyst for wholesale slaughter across half the world. But Lenin the Public Artwork is a beautifully crafted sculpture, and a catalyst for healthy discourse." Now if only they could find an artistically worthy statue for Hitler the Public Artwork, one can imagine the catalytic effect on public discourse in Fremont.

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CLONING PIONEER'S VASCILLATION: SOME PRO-LIFE FRUIT?

In a surprising development only announced in November, Professor Ian Wilmut, the pioneer of cloning techniques, has decided not to pursue human cloning, even though granted a licence to do so. In 1997 he gained worldwide fame as the leader of the team at the Roslin Institute, a government-sponsored biotechnology research institute in Midlothian, Scotland, which brought to birth the world's first cloned mammal, a sheep known as 'Dolly.' Ian Wilmut is now the professor of reproductive biology at the Scottish Centre for Regenerative Medicine at Edinburgh University, and in February 2005 he was granted a licence by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to proceed to make human clones. As pointed out at the time, this was in contradiction to statements he had made previously, in which he had repudiated the idea of human cloning: "Human cloning has grabbed people's imagination, but that is merely a diversion – and one we personally regret, and find distasteful," he had said in *The Second Creation*, the book on Dolly's cloning which he co-authored with embryologist Kenneth Campbell in 2002.

However, his latest *volte-face* seems to have occurred in response to some very encouraging results from Japan. Shinya Yamanaka, since 2004 a professor at Kyoto University's Institute for Frontier Medical Sciences, has had great success recently in creating suitable stem cells from adult cells instead of from living embryos. On his website he writes: "Embryonic stem (ES) cells are pluripotent stem cells derived from inner cell mass of mammalian blastocysts. Pluripotency and rapid proliferation make human ES cells attractive sources for cell therapy. However, clinical application of ES cells

is confronted with ethical objections against utilising human embryos. The ultimate goal of our laboratory is to generate ES-like cells directly from somatic cells by nuclear reprogramming ...which converts adult cells back into embryonic state. If we can make pluripotent ES-like cells directly from patients' somatic cells, that will be a tremendous advantage in regenerative medicine."

The *Daily Telegraph* on 17th November 2007 reported that Professor Shamanaka had now been able to achieve this technique with adult human cells, and it quoted Professor Wilmut's reaction: "extremely exciting and astonishing." It quotes him further as admitting that, "I decided a few weeks ago not to pursue nuclear transfer [the method by which Dolly was cloned]" – and that the new approach is "easier to accept socially" – perhaps a partial fruit of contemporary pro-life efforts to keep the moral issue alive. The same issue of the *Daily Telegraph* concluded its comments in an editorial: "How refreshing to be able to report a possible breakthrough that narrows rather than widens the gulf between cutting-edge science and traditional morality."

Professor Shamanaka describes his particular work on the Kyoto website: http://www.med.kyoto-u.ac.jp/E/grad_school/introduction/1517/

CARDINAL SCHÖNBORN'S LECTURES

The Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna's catechetical lectures on Creation and Evolution, mentioned in this *Cutting Edge* column twice in 2006, have now been reworked into a book just published in English by Ignatius Press under the title *Chance or Purpose: Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith*. It is a thorough-going theology of creation which tackles many of the questions which arise at the interface of faith and science in the area of Darwinian evolution. In this book he is able at length to elaborate on the key distinction between evolution and ideology which he drew to the world's attention in his now-famous article in the *New York Times* in July 2005. As the foreword says, "Cardinal Schönborn repeatedly distinguishes a scientific interest in the way that life evolved, from an ideological view that attempts to understand the

world as a whole starting from the theory of evolution. Cardinal Schönborn refers to this latter as 'evolutionism,' and consciously distances himself from it."

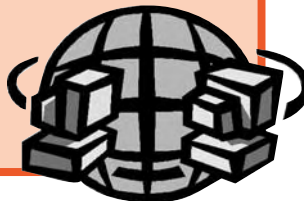
GOD ON THE BRAIN?

Researchers have once more been investigating possible connections between spirituality and the mental processes of the human brain. *Scientific American* reported in its online edition in October that the neuroscientist Mario Beauregard of the University of Montreal has been using magnetic-resonance-imaging techniques to look at the brains of 15 Carmelite nuns to determine the key locations of activity

Their brain activity, and the locus of this activity was determined for two "control" states of mind: resting with closed eyes and recollection of an intense social experience, and then a third recollection of what the sister believed to be a vivid experience of God. They found that many different parts of the brain were involved in activity in the third of these states. At this point the *Scientific American* article combines interesting conclusions with possible presumption concerning our Creator's playing along with the experiment: "The quantity and diversity of brain regions involved in the nuns' religious experience point to the complexity of the phenomenon of spirituality. "There is no single God spot, localised uniquely in the temporal lobe of the human brain," Beauregard concludes. "These states are mediated by a neural network that is well distributed throughout the brain'." There are no easy conclusions from their work, except maybe to show that the religious experience is unlike any other. The study in not trying to dismiss religion as all 'in the brain.' They hope to help those who have trouble experiencing the divine in becoming more amenable to meditation, which can, of course be one of the helps to listening to God. It's not clear the study distinguishes between Christian spirituality and that of the New Age. "For the nuns, serenity does not come from a sense of God in their brains but from an awareness of God with them in the world. It is that peace and calm, that sense of union with all things, that Beauregard wants to capture – and perhaps even replicate."

Faith online

A guide to Catholic resources on the World Wide Web



The links to all the websites mentioned in Faith online are available on the Faith website at www.faith.org.uk

Blessed Antonio Rosmini

A few hours before his beatification on Nov 18th, Pope Benedict described this priest as an "illustrious man of culture, who witnessed ...to what he called 'intellectual charity', which means the reconciliation of reason with faith." The site provides a fairly substantial biography and details concerning his Cause. Links are given to Rosminian parishes in England and Wales (one of the first missions, in 1835). His philosophical, theological and spiritual works can be downloaded free.

www.rosmini.org
www.rosmini-in-english.org

Europe For Christ

This is an international and ecumenical initiative for a Europe built on Christian values; it provides a network of prayer and support for all issues concerning European Christianity. Participants pray the Our Father at 12 noon everyday. You can sign up for a monthly newsletter or read some thoughtful articles challenging the prevailing relativism/culture of death. What other organisation boasts support from Cardinal Schonborn and Nicky Gumble? It has a rather effective logo.

www.Europe4Christ.net

A Treasury of Catholic classics

"Why don't 'average' Christians know about the works of St John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila? The purpose of this site is primarily to make these impeccable sources of saints, doctors of the Church and respected theologians available to Catholics (and all men of goodwill) looking for help on life's journey." The webmaster has reformatted the writings for easier viewing; from Catherine of Siena's dialogue to Francis de Sales' Introduction to the Devout Life. Even if *Lectio Divina* online doesn't quite work, the texts are there to peruse or download.

www.catholictreasury.info

Matercare

Here is an association of Catholic Obstetricians and Gynaecologists dedicated to improving the lives and health of countless mothers and their children both unborn and born throughout the world, "in accordance with the teaching contained in *Evangelium Vitae* and reiterated in *Deus caritas est*". One can read about some of the projects in Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Indonesia and donate air-miles as well as money to this truly worthy cause. There are some useful links.

www.matercare.org

Sacred Music

The Church Music Association of America advances Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony, and other forms of sacred music, including new composition, for liturgical use. There are chants to download or listen to.

www.musicasacra.com

Life

Life has re-jigged its site once more; it is now particularly straightforward and user-friendly.

www.lifecharity.org.uk

The Golden Compass

By this time, there will doubtless have been a debate in the media about this movie; Pullman's explicit intention in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy is to subvert Christian values. Follow the links from these sites for some thoughtful evaluations of the books. Despite all intentions, the alethiometer remains a powerful Christian metaphor!

<http://studiobrien.com>

<http://www.firstthings.com>

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www.faith.org.uk