

# faith

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# The Impact of Infallibility and The Future of Catholicism

*After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer went with him. Jesus said to the twelve: 'Will you also go away?' Simon Peter answered him: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we have believed and we know that you are the Holy One of God'. (John 6, 66-69)*

*"If we really believe what we say in the Creed, that Jesus is 'God from God: Light from Light: true God from true God' then we must also expect him to teach an objective faith and a definitive moral way. And the same objective certainty that lives in Christ must also live infallibly in the solemn declarations of his Church."*

## Church Teaching and Parish Life

The idea of 'Church teaching' as the primary source of doctrinal and moral guidance seems to impinge less and less on the consciousness of the average Catholic parishioner in the UK. Given the Catholic claim that the Church's Magisterium is organically and apostolically linked to Christ's messianic authority—his commission from the Father to proclaim the final and plenary Truth to the world—this is surely a great cause for concern.

This decline in the impact of the Church's teaching authority among ordinary Catholics seems to apply not just to controversial and perhaps predictable issues such as questions of sexual morality, the debate over women priests or intercommunion with non-Catholic Christians. It now applies across the whole range of Catholic doctrine and apologetics.

When it comes to core issues of belief and morality, the people in our parishes increasingly regard the Magisterium as just one voice among others to be considered. Church teachings are seen as the opinions of the institution which, along with other publicised views, may or may not command respect and attention, according to their perceived relevance to one's own life. Church teaching, no matter how often or how solemnly it may be defined, is no longer the decisive factor that commands the conscience of the faithful in many cases.

## Decline in Catholic Culture

During an address in Rome last April entitled *"The Presentation of the Magisterium of the Church in the World of the Media"* Archbishop Amato, secretary to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, spoke of the "extreme cultural poverty of the majority of the Catholic faithful". This, he suggested, has allowed the media to present the Magisterium convincingly as just a human institution, whose authority rests on purely human insights and motivations. He concluded that "professionals are required, especially lay people, who know the two languages: of communication and of theology."

Although we agree that many Catholics suffer from cultural impoverishment, in our opinion the task of restoration is much more than just one of communication. The impoverishment of the Catholic laity is more than just cultural. It is rooted in a profound intellectual and spiritual crisis over the nature and identity of Catholic Christianity altogether.

The claim to infallibility is yet another area where the intellectual coherence and pastoral power of Catholic theology is in urgent need of development and renewal. We need to demonstrate that the Church's charism of infallibility is a fundamental aspect of the presence and impact of Divinity within human history, deriving directly from the fact of the Incarnation. In this issue we publish a fascinating study of the theology of Dom Gueranger, who promotes this insight in a similar way as our own late editor Fr. Edward Holloway.

## Popular Perceptions and Secular Propaganda

To the secular mindset, the very idea of Church authority belongs to an outdated and oppressive monarchical model of community. And centuries of anti-clerical propaganda have prejudiced the popular imagination—even among many Catholics now—so as to effectively divide Christ from his Church. The widely held perception of an unwieldy and remote Vatican is felt to be hard to equate with the image of Jesus the gentle preacher by the lake of Galilee. Of course these perceptions beg many questions both about the true nature of the Vatican and about the real preaching of Jesus.

Yet constant reminders in the media, both secular and Catholic, about the ‘iniquities’ of the Inquisition and the Crusades, or supposed Papal ‘mistakes’ over usury, Galileo and so on, continue to undermine the confidence of the Catholic faithful in their own ecclesial heritage. We publish corrective views about slavery and usury later in this edition.

Unfortunately—one could say tragically, even scandalously—further disorientation of the faithful arises from dissent on important issues where authoritative Catholic Tradition ought to be decisive, even at the highest level inside the Church. Luke Gormally’s topical and timely corrective note about Catholic teaching on the concept of ‘lesser evil’, which we also publish in this issue, is occasioned by exactly this sort of question.

## Absolute Truth?

What is at stake is far more than just conformity to ecclesiastical authority and the spirit of obedience. The core of the issue is this: “Life in fact can never be grounded upon doubt, uncertainty or deceit; such an existence would be threatened constantly by fear and anxiety. One may define the human being, therefore, as *the one who seeks the truth.*” (*Fides et Ratio*, 28).

This may explain the widespread retreat into subjectivity in modern pastoral life, eg. the emphasis on “feel-good” liturgies. For the liturgy is also linked to issues of truth and magisterium. Liturgy is the public expression of Divine Truth accepted and lived out joyfully by the members of Christ. It celebrates the active, dynamic and, yes, authoritative Presence of God the Word, Incarnate as Sacrifice and Sacrament of salvation.

Of course we all want Parish liturgies to be warm with devotion and the spirit of familial charity, but in the end no amount of getting “high” on incidentals can stave off the disorientation of conscience and the sense of spiritual dissipation and anxiety caused by the Word-

uncertain, the impact of a Christianity that is tentative and relativistic in matters of faith and moral doctrine.

Historic Christianity claims to answer definitively the human search for meaning and truth. It claims to offer a Light by which we can focus and direct our deepest yearning for freedom and for loving. If we really believe what we say in the Creed, that Jesus is ‘God from God: Light from Light: true God from true God’ then we must also expect him to teach an objective faith and a definitive moral way. And the same objective certainty that lives in Christ must also live infallibly in the solemn declarations of his Church.

Those who reject the possibility of infallibility *per se*, dismissing the idea of any voice that can speak with divine certainty in human history, cannot really have pondered or accepted the literal truth of the Incarnation. For if God lives on earth among men, then that infallibility which belongs to him by right and title of being must find expression in the ongoing work, or ‘economy’, that is the Church he founded on the apostles.

Truth is not only his possession and identity, it is his vocation: “I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the Truth” (Jn 18:13). It was a very modern and secular agnostic Pontius Pilate who dismissed this claim with a puzzled shrug: “Truth, what is that?” (Jn 18:14). Jesus did not intend the Truth he brings into the life of the world to die with him on the cross. The Incarnation and its consequences were to abide in the world as an institution; indeed as *The Institution*, which he established for ministering both his Grace and his Truth to the ends of the earth and until the end of time.

## The End of the Reformation Era

Across ‘Western’ or European culture—what used to be known as Christendom—and its derivative cultures around the globe, we are witnessing the end point of a movement that began with the Reformation. At the heart of the Reformation lay the principle of ‘private judgment’. This effectively took the defining power of the Word of God out of the public fabric of society. It did not at that time reject the Word outright, but deposed its living articulation through the teaching Church and enshrined the Word in the written text of the Bible alone.

But who is to say what The Book really means? The Holy Spirit speaking in the conscience of every believer? That is the answer given by most “Bible believing” Christians. But what when those voices contradict? Ultimately who knows where and when the Spirit speaks to men with final authority? What the Reformation really achieved,

therefore, was to replace the Apostolic College centred on Peter—divinely appointed to preserve and interpret Scripture and Tradition through the ages—not with The Bible as an alternative source of infallibility, but with the subjective mind and heart of every reader.

### Secularism The Consequence of Private Judgment

**T**he fruit of this has not only been the inevitable splintering of Protestant denominations, but the eventual triumph of rationalism, relativism and secularism. For if the only truth is every man's personal judgement, the only authority is the consensus of public opinion at any moment in history. This is the end to which the era of "private judgment" in matters of faith has inexorably led.

Every believer makes God in Jesus according to his own image and likeness and accommodates divine teaching to his own tastes and standards. If this is the final outcome of that dynamic, missionary Gospel Jesus entrusted to the Apostles, then it is a great sadness, but really no surprise that Christianity appears to have run into the sand at the beginning of the Third Millennium. If this is all we have to offer, then the best we can hope for is that Jesus will join the pantheon of gods, gurus and buddhas in the mystical East and perhaps be admired in the West as one of the 'great souls' of history, but no more than that.

This is certainly not the same Gospel that converted the Roman Empire, surviving wave after wave of bitter persecution. It is not the Faith that made Britain and Ireland into islands full of saints and courageous missionaries during the Dark Ages and later rebuilt a glorious civilisation in the European Middle Ages. Such achievements can only come from God's Word accepted as living and objective certainty in the Magisterium of the Church, and the Majesty of that same Godhead humbly adored in living and objective reality in the sacraments. Catholicism alone answers this description.

### The Need For A Renewed Catholic Vision

**B**ut this thought should give us no cause for triumphalism. The Church is the custodian of Truth, not its author. She also has a duty to deepen her understanding of Revelation and to explain it anew in every age. And she can at times, for a while, fail in that duty. In 1978 Edward Holloway wrote in this magazine:

"The Roman Catholic Church... is at the end of an era, that is why she finds herself in crisis. This era is the end of the Counter Reformation and the Counter Reformation is only the final development of the old philosophical and theological synthesis of Scholasticism. Scholasticism is not a dirty word in the

Church. It spans the magnificent and comprehensive achievement in the Christian West, which extends from St. Augustine to St. Thomas, and continues through to the great saints, mystics, and teachers of the post Reformation period.

"This synthesis of Christian thought is not the Faith: it is the frame through which the Faith has been presented and focused in the Western Catholic Church. The last time it was an adequate frame through which to focus definitions of faith and morals, was the First Vatican Council of 1870. From that Council developed the period of 'Fortress Vatican' which lasted until 1960. From that fateful date the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Pope and the Fathers of the Council (not the *periti*) told the Church that a new frame was needed, both to safeguard the ancient treasury of the Faith, and to draw forth from that treasury 'new' things for this age, as well as the old things.

"It has been the tragedy of the Church that men blew up the portcullis of the fortress and filled in the moat with a happy zest, before they had any new strategy or new formulation of thought through which to focus anew and to develop anew the riches of the Faith. So many of the bishops did not know that the old mould of Scholasticism would not do as the means to recast the ideas and the ideals of the *Aggiornamento*. Besides, any new mould had to be adequate to safeguard the old, and still objective and utterly divine teaching of the Church.

"A large number of the theologians, and some very influential European prelates did know that the old mould would not do, but they had no alternative mould to offer, except what is technically called 'Modernism' or rationalism in theology. That is why the theology and cult of the Subjective is sweeping the Church: there have been no fruits, only increasing divisions and disintegration. Obviously the will and leading of the Holy Spirit is to be looked for elsewhere..."

### In Search of New Coherence

**W**hat we needed then, and what we need all the more urgently now, is to see the meaning of The Magisterium of Christ with fresh eyes and a larger vision. We must trace the outlines of the Majesty and Magistracy of the Mind of God through the whole of sweep of Creation from quarks to the brain of Man—and see in the process that modern scientific discovery is the ally not the enemy of this insight. We must follow this same Divine Word, Who is both Light and Joy for men, as he builds up both the Church and the Scriptures through priest, prophets and saints in the Old Testament. Above all we must ponder with renewed depth the full

significance of the Incarnation of the Word, literally and personally, in Jesus Christ and all that flows from this Mystery. So we must also come to understand, with renewed wonder and gratitude, how the Magisterium of the Word made Flesh lives and speaks in the Church with divinely guaranteed infallibility in the essentials of belief and moral principle until the end of the world.

Only through such a vision will we be able to recover that profoundly human attitude of listening to revelation, which is given to us in an equally human way through the Church. We all need to listen to the Word of God before we can proclaim it. We must be learners and followers—sheep who listen to the voice of the Shepherd—before ever we become teachers and leaders. Time and again history has proven the point that if we do not listen to Christ's infallible voice speaking in his Church, then some fallible, culturally appointed cult figure will command our attention—and they always turn out to be false prophets.

Timothy Finigan's analysis of *Opening Up: Speaking Out in the Church* in the book reviews section of this issue shows us a striking example of precisely this malaise which threatens the heart of British Catholicism and already grips the heart of British culture. The resultant confusion and uncertainty—even immorality—undermines the ability of large numbers of Catholics in this country to commit to a counter-cultural religious movement and blocks many of the young from discerning a vocation to the religious life.

### False Ecumenism Undermines The Faithful

**W**e also have to say honestly that the direction taken by ecumenism in this country has been singularly unhelpful, if not positively destructive, in this matter. This is not to say that there cannot be and should not be a genuine ecumenism which could reunite all Christians around a renewed vision of the fully divine Messiah.

Most Catholic parishes trustingly contribute to the improvement of ecumenical relationships through shared spiritual events. Thankfully we have shed the ghetto mentality of the recent past and the point scoring approach to apologetics that often went with it. But among the ordinary laity there has been little growth in a true understanding of Catholicism in relation to the various forms of non-Catholic Christianity.

All that has happened is that most of our people have been subconsciously drawn into following more or less the mental outlook of the Reformation. It is not uncommon to meet Catholics who have tacitly adopted a vaguely evangelical Christianity. They see the Bible as the ultimate authority and the last line of defence

against Christianity dissolving into the relativism of the surrounding culture. So they hold Scripture to be a more secure source of certainty than the Church.

### Misleading Uses Of Scripture

**T**his impression is reinforced by some diocesan schemes designed for use by small discussion groups in parishes, which encourage debate about scriptural passages without any doctrinal framework or guidance. RCIA programmes can all too often be of the same non-directive, non-doctrinal character. No one explains that the Bible is actually the Church's book. We all too easily forget that the Scriptures derive from and can only be understood properly in the light of the Apostolic Faith. So it is more true to say that the Bible is based on Catholicism than the other way around.

More and more of our people are losing the Catholic instinct which interprets the Bible 'with the Mind of the Church'. Therefore they do not benefit from the true formative power of the inspired text. Rather than building sound faith, such unguided use of scripture easily creates more confusion than clarity.

By default rather than by design, many Catholics are drifting into the same mind set as the average secular humanist. While this grieves us, it should not surprise us, for it is the unavoidable effect of relativism in theology and pastoral practice which has its roots in the Reformation philosophy of private judgment which has held sway among Catholics for some decades now.

### The Journey of Faith that Leads to The Light

**I**t is shocking to the modern mind that the Church claims to know better than the individual, even to know better than the intellectuals of the day. Yet if we truly believe that the Incarnation is the crowing glory of creation, of history and of humanity, then we have no need to fear that Church teaching will somehow rob us of our intellectual initiative or suppress our true selves.

The Word always rings true in the deep recesses of the human spirit. In an unfallen world it would always have been welcomed with joy, but the reality of sin means that it is most often heard either with a sadness borne of honesty that leads to repentance and peace, or else by a shrug of dismissive indifference and then by bitter and angry rejection—well, the Lord spoke frankly about the lethal danger that lay down that road!

To be "orthodox" in attitude does not simply mean that one's opinions happen to coincide with the Magisterium. This is a common prejudice among those who routinely dissent from the Magisterium. In fact those who uphold the Church's teaching on difficult and controversial

points may not have always understood why the Church teaches what she does. When faced with perplexity the orthodox mind concedes that the Church is right, then through prayer and reflection comes to understand and experience the liberating power of the Truth she teaches.

Submission of the Mind to the Divine Word is not slavish or unreasonable. St. Peter said to the Lord: "To whom else shall we go, you have the message of eternal life" (Jn 6:60). At first for the Prince of Apostles this was an act of pure faith in the darkness and crisis of the moment. But by journeying through that darkness in trust and attentiveness, the doctrine of the Master gradually filled his mind with the most fulfilling vision of Man in God. We can read it for ourselves in his letters which form part of the New Testament itself.

#### "Whatever You Bind On Earth"

In terms of dogma, moral doctrine and indeed of Church discipline, there is no higher court on earth than that of Peter and his successors. Immediately above it stands the court of Christ and the Sanhedrin of the angels, who validate in heaven whatever the supreme Apostolic office binds or loosens upon earth (Mt 16:19). Does this mean that the office of Peter is immune from scandal or sinfulness in its office holders? Not at all, as the tragic

witness of history has sometimes shown, although we have been blessed in recent centuries with many Popes of outstanding personal holiness.

Through all the ups and downs of history, the office of Peter stands at the head of the Church on earth. It is not the whole Church, of course, but it is the essential focus of communion in Truth, because it is in fact the office of "The Master's Voice"—the Magisterium—in public proclamation of the Word.

#### The Church: A Sign of Contradiction

Christ rightfully claims his place at the heart of humanity and at the heart of every human being, calling them to live the life of perfection in communion with Him. But, just as when he preached in Galilee and Judea, his Magisterium will be both welcomed and resented throughout the centuries.

It will elicit cries of outrage among the Sadducees and Pharisees and incredulity among the nations for the "impossible" doctrines of perfection that are preached. But it will also be welcomed with joy by many as the Light to enlighten the Gentiles and the Glory of your People Israel, that brings Life and Life in its fullness.

## The Word is The Life-Giving Force of The Church

No one believes purely on his own. We always believe in and with the Church. The Creed is always a shared act, it means letting ourselves be incorporated into a communion of progress, life, words and thought. We do not "have" faith, in the sense that it is primarily God who gives it to us. Nor do we "have" it either, in the sense that it must not be invented by us. We must let ourselves fall, so to speak, into the communion of faith of the Church. Believing is in itself a Catholic act. It is participation in this great certainty, which is present in the Church as a living subject. Only in this way can we also understand Sacred Scripture in the diversity of an interpretation that develops for thousands of years. It is a Scripture because it is an element, an expression of the unique subject—the People of God—which on its pilgrimage is always the same subject. Of course, it is a subject that does not speak of itself, but is created by God—the classical expression is "inspired"—a subject that receives, then translates and communicates this word. This synergy is very important.

We know that the Koran, according to the Islamic faith, is a word given verbally by God without human mediation. The Prophet is not involved. He only wrote it down and passed it on. It is the pure Word of God. Whereas for us, God enters into communion with us, he allows us to cooperate, he creates this subject and in this subject his word grows and develops. This human part is essential and also gives us the possibility of seeing how the individual words really become God's Word only in the unity of Scripture as a whole in the living subject of the People of God. Therefore, the first element is the gift of God; the second is the sharing in faith of the pilgrim people, the communication in the Holy Church, which for her part receives the Word of God which is the Body of Christ, brought to life by the living Word, the divine Logos. Day after day, we must deepen our communion with the Holy Church and thus, with the Word of God. They are not two opposite things, so that I can say: I am pro-Church or I am pro-God's Word. Only when we are united in the Church, do we belong to the Church, do we become members of the Church, do we live by the Word of God which is the life-giving force of the Church. And those who live by the Word of God can only live it because it is alive and vital in the living Church.

*Benedict XVI, from an informal allocution  
to the priests of the Rome Diocese*

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# Slavery, The Gospel of Life and the Magisterium

Linus F. Clovis

*Fr Linus Clovis is a priest of St Lucia in the Caribbean, where he was influential in the recent successful fight to prevent the legalization of abortion. He is a founder member of Family Life International.*

*In this article he gives a magnificent witness to the role of the Magisterium in opposing the slave trade of yesterday and the anti-life culture of today. Both authoritative teachings have met with rejection, inside and outside the Church, for similar reasons it would seem.*

*"The promise to Peter has not failed. His successors were criticized for speaking against slavery. Today his successors are ridiculed for defending human life. Peter will not fail."*

## The Magisterium Did Condemn Slavery

History's uncanny facility for repeating itself is manifest in the recurrence not so much of the same events as of the same individual and collective responses to the challenges of the time. Human nature does not change, it is a time traveller encumbered with the seven deadly sins. History is the record of humanity's striving to become more human by the cultivation and exercise of the cardinal virtues. From this perspective moral challenges are simply part of the divine mechanism to civilize and divinize us. As such we should expect the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, to be at the heart of this process, as Christ Himself was at His final Passover Feast, bearing witness to the Truth.

The modern world faces the same moral challenge of yesteryear, namely, to acknowledge the inherent dignity of the human person. Previously manifested as the rights of workers, the just wage, the (im)morality of slavery, etc., it is now articulated through the right to life of the pre-born, the aged, disabled, the (im)morality of embryonic experimentation, etc. Against the modern assault on human life and dignity, the Catholic Church has mounted a determined opposition which has such striking parallels with her 400 year struggle against slavery and the slave trade.

As we shall see the Papal Magisterium, the Church's highest teaching authority, to its honour and credit, did consistently condemn slavery and the slave trade from their first appearance in the fifteenth century. The impact of this prophetic stance was lessened by its lack of reception amongst some Bishops and priests. This will have fuelled the common but false perception that not only did the Catholic Church do nothing to halt slavery but that she even supported it until the end of the nineteenth century when she 'changed her doctrine to suit the times'. This latter claim has been a too convenient basis on which to argue, as some Bishops, priests and religious do today, that Catholic doctrine in regard to contraception, abortion and other life issues can likewise be modified to suit the times in which we live.

Hence the durability of the scandalous impression of official Church collaboration, support and participation in that most heinous institution of rapine, murder, exploitation and greed.

The Papal Magisterium's clear and unequivocal condemnation of slavery was not echoed, supported, preached on or translated into action by the generality of local hierarchies, clergy and laity. It is similar today with abortion and especially with that other aspect of the Gospel of Life, condemnation of contraception, which teaching is, in at least partial consequence, ignored by many Catholics today.

## Types of Slavery

Slavery, as generally understood, is the condition of involuntary servitude in which one human being is regarded as no more than the property of another, a creature without any rights; in other words, as a thing rather than a person. Under this definition, slavery is intrinsically evil, since no person may legitimately be

regarded, or treated, as a mere thing or object. This form of slavery is properly called 'chattel slavery.'

There is however, a legitimate form of slavery called 'just servitude' which may be voluntary or involuntary. The former is a system of indentured service where people *sell* their labour for a period of time, or even for an entire lifetime. The modern equivalent is the situation in which many immigrants and foreign workers living in developed countries find themselves: they accept harsh conditions and low wages in order to obtain the necessities of life. Historically, debtors and children of indigent parents who might otherwise have been left to die by exposure also fall into this class. The latter, or 'just involuntary servitude', arises from circumstances in which a person can legitimately be forced into servitude against his will.

It could be argued that criminals and prisoners of war justly lose their freedom and can be forced into servitude within certain limits. This policy was initially adopted as a humane substitute for death. Although the enforced servitude of criminals is proscribed today, the 1949 Geneva Convention still recognizes the right of detaining powers to utilize the labour of prisoners of war.

'Just servitude' differs not only in degree but also in kind from what is called 'chattel' slavery. Although prisoners of war and criminals lose their freedom against their will, they do not become the mere property of their captors, even when such imprisonment is just. They still possess basic, inalienable human rights and may not justly be subjected to certain forms of punishment—torture, for example. Similarly, indentured servants sell their labour, not their inalienable rights, and may not contract to provide services which are immoral. Moreover, since they freely agreed to exchange their labour for some benefit such as transportation, food, lodging, *etc.*, their servitude is not involuntary.

#### Vatican II Proscribes Modern Slavery

**T**he Second Vatican Council<sup>1</sup> condemned slavery (i.e., chattel slavery):

"Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery... the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed... they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator."

Slavery, as a social institution, is found in all cultures and in every quarter of the globe and from ancient times has received wide social acceptance. This, of course, does not

make it moral any more than abortion is made moral by its existence in antiquity or its current gradual universal proliferation.

#### Scriptural Teaching

**S**ervitude, as a punishment imposed on criminals and prisoners of war and as a condition freely embraced for economic reasons, has biblical approbation. The first instance of slavery is that of Noah punishing his son Canaan for some serious sexual sin: "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." (Gen 9: 27). This text has been widely used by racists to justify their oppression of Negroes. Thieves and enemies of the Jews could be enslaved, (cf. Ex.22:1; 2 Chr 28:8-15) but a Jew who arbitrarily enslaved a man would be punished by death (Ex.21:16).

Mosaic Law afforded the slave certain rights and corresponding protections, such as his master being punished for killing him (Ex 21:20). If the master were responsible for a woman slave's miscarriage, he would be liable to a fine determined by the woman's husband, and "If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Ex 21: 22-23) Slaves could rest on the Sabbath day (Ex 20: 8-11) and be liberated after six years of servitude (Ex.21:2).

The Law, however, forbade the practice of slavery based upon poverty: "When, then, your countryman becomes so impoverished beside you that he sells you his services, do not make him work as a slave. Rather, let him be like a hired servant or like your tenant, working with you until the jubilee year, when he, together with his children, shall be released from your service and return to his kindred and to the property of his ancestors." (Lev 25: 39-41) In view of the Israelites reluctance to release non-Jewish slaves after six years, Moses permitted their detention until death with the caution: "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Ex 23:9)

#### Servitude Not the Same as Chattel Slavery

**W**ithin the Mosaic dispensation slaves were never the objects of contempt, since manual labour was regarded as a noble work. In fact, every educated Israelite had a manual trade: Our Lord was a carpenter and St. Paul was quite proud of being a tent maker. The New Testament teaches that despite the inequalities of this life, in God's eyes, there is a fundamental equality: "There is neither slave nor free... you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3:27-28). St. Paul made no general defense of slavery, but rather equally exhorted slaves to obey their masters (Col. 3:22-25; Eph. 6:5-8) as he appealed to masters to treat their slaves justly and kindly (Eph 6:9;

Col 4:1), implying that slaves are not mere property for masters to do with them as they please (Philem.16).

The early Church ameliorated the harsher aspects of slavery in the Empire, even promoting legal protection for slaves. Several of the early Popes were themselves manumitted slaves. As a social condition, servitude is not ideal, but it is not contrary to the Scriptures or to the natural law.

### Modern Slavery and the Magisterium

Slavery, on the other hand, the total and arbitrary subjugation of a group of people, is without moral foundation. It was described in 1557 by Pope Paul III as a crime “unheard of before now”. Neither natural law nor Scripture sanctioned it since the people captured and enslaved were not at war; neither were they guilty of any crime; nor was there any economic pressure on them to sell themselves into slavery as they were not only free and in possession of their own goods but they also had the means for earning their livelihood. Modern or chattel slavery is a total violation of natural and divine law since it targets a specific group of people because of their colour or race, and unjustly deprives them of their liberty and goods.

Sixty years before Columbus crossed the Atlantic, Pope Eugene IV, responding to news of the Portuguese enslavement of the Canary Islanders, condemned this activity with the Bull *Sicut Dudum* (1435). This was the first papal condemnation of modern slavery and its significance lies in that it:

1. identified the crime, namely, the deprivation of the natives of their property and their being enslaved and sold;
2. was addressed to all Christians, lay and clerical, regardless of rank;
3. called on them to desist from “illicit and evil deeds” against the natives and to prevent others (and, if necessary, to “restrain them rigorously”) from taking advantage of them;
4. ordered the liberation of all the unjustly enslaved natives within 15 days of the Bull’s publication without any payment or reception of money; and
5. imposed an excommunication<sup>2</sup> *ipso facto*, reserved to the Roman Pontiff, on the recalcitrant.

### Successive Popes Ignored

Thus *Sicut Dudum* condemned unjust racial slavery in the strongest terms possible as soon as it was discovered. But the sorry business continued even though two other Popes, Pius II and Sixtus IV, both likewise protested against it. This showed not the indifference of the Church to the sin of slavery but rather the weakness

of papal authority at this time and the rejection of papal teaching by European Christians operating in Africa and the New world.

The age of exploration was initiated by Portugal and Spain and since it was the norm for explorers to declare newly found lands the dominion of their sovereigns, papal intervention was sought primarily to avoid war between these two nations. Pope Alexander VI’s Bull *Inter Caetera* (1493) is one such intervention though it has been interpreted incorrectly as “giving away” the New World to Spain. As Paul III subsequently made clear, Alexander VI was neither *giving away* newly discovered lands nor yet was he giving Spain and Portugal the right to make war on and to enslave the peoples of the New World. *Inter Caetera* merely gave Spain and Portugal the Church’s authority to bring both the Catholic faith and their own civil authority “to those people who are freely willing to accept them.” Alexander and his successors repeatedly express concern about maintaining the free will of the Indians.

Since the Church had ruled in favour of the Indians, it was not long before an attempt was made to circumvent that teaching by questioning the Indians’ humanity. It was argued that if they were not rational men capable of receiving the faith, then they could be conquered. Spain actually suspended further conquests to debate the ethics of colonization, something never done before or since by an expanding empire. Theologians meeting at Valladolid examined Aristotle’s dictum that some people are “slaves by nature”. Following St. Thomas Aquinas’ teaching that “one man is not by nature ordained to another as an end”, Aristotle’s dictum was rejected and it was established, once and for all, that the natives were, in fact, rational and capable of self-government. And even if they weren’t, they could be governed by others only for their own advantage and benefit, and not for the advantage of the rulers. Thus to Spain’s credit, the Law of Burgos (1512) decided in favour of the Indians’ humanity and initiated ambitious programmes for their conversion. Human perversity, however, soon kicked in and hijacked this good start with the fallacious argument that the Indians could be justly conquered and enslaved not because they were “slaves by nature” but because they would not peaceably accept the Christian faith.

### No Human Being Inferior by Nature - Echoes of Abortion

Again, there is a striking similarity with abortion. The humanity of the pre-born child is debated by highly intelligent individuals and prestigious institutions of learning, in desperate cases, with the invocation Aristotle’s antiquated biology. It is worth noting that the countries of South America constitutionally recognise the full humanity of the pre-born.

The questions raised about the Indians' humanity were addressed by Paul III's Bull *Sublimis Deus* (1537) which, as the Church's central pedagogical work against slavery, is the most important papal pronouncement on the human condition of the Indians. *Sublimis Deus's* teaching was supported by two other bulls. While the first imposed sanctions on those who rejected the teaching, the other expounded on the sacramental consequences of the teaching of the Indians' humanity.

*Sublimis Deus*, addressed to all the faithful, taught the only qualification for receiving the faith is the possession of human nature which is common to all the different peoples of the world. Thus the specious theories that the Indians lacked a rational nature and consequently were "slaves by nature" are definitively rejected. Then because some argued for the conversion of the Indians by any means necessary and so would use the faith as an excuse for war and enslavement, the Pope, without any mincing of words about the evils of slavery, declared that Satan,

"the enemy of the human race ... has thought up a way, unheard of before now, by which he might impede the saving word of God from being preached to the nations. He has stirred up some of his allies who, desiring to satisfy their own avarice, are presuming to assert far and wide that the Indians of the West and the South who have come to our notice in these times be reduced to our service like brute animals, under the pretext that they are lacking in the Catholic faith. And they reduce them to slavery, treating them with afflictions they would scarcely use with brute animals... Therefore, We... noting that the Indians themselves indeed are true men... by our Apostolic Authority decree and declare by these present letters that the same Indians and all other peoples—even though they are outside the faith... should not be deprived of their liberty or their other possessions... and are not to be reduced to slavery, and that whatever happens to the contrary is to be considered null and void."

### The Church Defends Human Life, Liberty and Dignity

Concerned with restoring and maintaining the liberty of the Indians, the Pope specifically stated that the Indians are "true men" who together with "all other peoples, even though they are outside the faith" must not be deprived of their possessions nor reduced to slavery. Thus it is made clear that Alexander VI did not give away the Indians' right to liberty and property. The teaching of *Sublimis Deus*, being universal, applies to any and to all peoples. Further, it is insisted that the goal must be the conversion not the domination of the Indians, and this is to be achieved not by violence but "by preaching and the example of a good life". Analogously, we may note that

the child's humanity exists as much inside as outside the womb.

The Brief *Pastorale Officium* which accompanied *Sublimis Deus* was given the strongest possible ecclesiastical backing by the attachment of a *latae sententiae* excommunication remittable only by the Pope himself. There was also an exhortation to the Archbishop of Toledo to do whatever he deemed necessary to protect the Indians in this regard. These two letters of Paul III were epoch making and simultaneously laid the foundations and marked the true beginning of international law in the modern world. They were the first intercontinental proclamation of rights inherent in all human beings and the liberty of nations.

### The Church Upholds The Rights of Minorities

It is worth noting that the Spanish, in contrast to the Portuguese, were more compliant to Church teaching. In fact, Philip II of Spain forbade the taking of slaves "whether by just or unjust war" in the Philippines. Pope Gregory XIV gave his support with the Bull *Cum Sicuti* (1591) where he noted that although the Indians were "very fierce and many took up arms" in self defence, nonetheless, "much harm was done" them, and restitution, under pain of excommunication, must be made. Thus the argument that native hostility towards accepting the faith was a justification for war was officially rejected.

The papal anti-slavery teaching was widely ignored and had to be repeated by successive popes such as Urban VIII who, at the request of the Jesuits of Paraguay, issued the Bull *Commissum Nobis* (1639). The Pope reiterated the teachings of *Sublimis Deus*, listed the unjust actions that are condemned and confirmed the penalty of a reserved *latae sententiae* excommunication. Urban, aware of the opposition to the pontifical teaching on slavery, warned that the penalty would fall on "all who would give counsel, aid, favour and help of any kind and under any pretext or who preach or teach such acts are legitimate and all others who dare or presume to cooperate." He recognised also the source of the resistance and made a point of including the various religious orders. The Jesuits in Paraguay and Brazil defended the Indians but were themselves attacked by slaveholders and expelled for publishing the Bull. This action undoubtedly intimidated other well-disposed clergy. *Commissum Nobis* reminds us that we can share in other's sins by approval<sup>3</sup>. Of course, the principle is equally applicable to those who support or promote abortion today.

### The Inquisition Condemns The African Slave Trade

By the middle of the seventeenth century the colonization of North America was well under way and in Central and South America the Indian population was

in decline. The need for a cheap source of human labour led to the shameful European enslavement of Africans. Whilst Europeans admittedly are not responsible for initiating enslavement in Africa, they did however expand tremendously a system which, during the eleventh century, had already begun in Africa under Arab and Muslim auspices.

The same arguments used to enslave the Indians of the New World were now presented for Africans: since they were non-Christians, war could be waged on them as “enemies of Christianity”, especially those who were Muslim. Abortion and euthanasia’s hard cases are strikingly alike. During the pontificate of Blessed Innocent XI, the Congregation of the Holy Office (the Roman Inquisition) took up the matter and responded in 1686 with the *Instruction Number 230* in the form of questions and answers.

It was asked:

1. Whether it is permitted to capture by force and deceit Blacks and other natives who have harmed no one? It answered No!
2. Whether it is permitted to buy, sell or make contracts in their respect Blacks or other natives who have harmed no one and been made captives by force of deceit? It answered No!
3. Whether the possessors of Blacks and other natives who have harmed no one and been captured by force or deceit, are not held to set them free? It answered Yes.
4. Whether the captors, buyers and possessors of Blacks and other natives who have harmed no one and who have been captured by force or deceit are not held to make compensation to them? It answered Yes.

#### Protestant Collusion, Catholic Disobedience

Now although the papal bulls against slavery were hushed up in the New World, the antislavery views of the Church did have a significantly moderating effect in the Catholic Americas by means of the *Code Noir*<sup>4</sup> and *Código Negro Español*. In both cases, the Church took the lead in their formulation and enforcement, thereby demonstrating its fundamental opposition to slavery by trying to ensure “the rights of the slave and his material welfare,” and by imposing “obligations on the slave owners, limiting their control over the slave.” While the Church did her best in the circumstances, it must be noted that the introduction of slavery into the New World was not denounced by any leading Dutch or English Protestant. In fact, the Church of England usually did not recognize slaves “as baptisable human beings”.

The struggle against slavery continued unabated into the eighteenth century causing Benedict XIV to issue *Immense Pastorum* (1741) to the Bishops of Brazil and other regions governed by King John of Portugal. He recalled the Church’s past efforts to prevent slavery and lamented that “there are... members of the True Faith who deal with the unfortunate Indians... by reducing them to slavery, or selling them to others as if they were property or depriving them of their goods, or dealing with them inhumanely.”

Then exhorting his bishops, even “to the detriment of (their own) names and dignity”, to provide both material and spiritual help to the Indians, he confirmed, in full, both *Sublimis Deus* and *Commisum Nobis*. Benedict made specific mention of the various religious families and warned that the penalties also fell on “those who offer counsel, aid or favour” to slaveholders. There are undoubtedly many incumbent bishops who not only need but would greatly benefit from a similar exhortation to risk their names, dignity and reputation by standing up in defence of pre-born children; because, surely, a child’s life is worth a little lampooning!

#### Opposition From Bishops and Priests

It is noteworthy that the Bulls issued from the time of Eugene IV (1435) to Paul III (1537) were directed primarily at civil and military authorities, while those issued from Urban VIII (1639) to Benedict XIV (1741) explicitly and forcefully include all members of the clergy and religious orders—a sign perhaps there had been a growing clerical resistance to papal teaching on slavery. This corresponds to the tragic fulfilling of Paul VI’s prophecy<sup>5</sup> when his exhortation<sup>6</sup> to the hierarchy and clergy fell upon too many deaf ears.

In 1839 Gregory XVI struck at the continued resistance of bishops, priests and laity to papal antislavery teaching with the Constitution *In Supremo*:

“We prohibit and strictly forbid any ecclesiastic or layperson from presuming to defend as permissible this trade in Blacks under no matter what pretext or excuse, or from publishing or teaching in any manner whatsoever, in public or privately, opinions contrary to what We have set forth in these Apostolic Letters.”

He also praised Pius VII for using “his good offices with those in power to end completely the slave trade.” These good offices were, in fact, exercised after the Napoleonic wars at the Congress of Vienna when Pius VII demanded the suppression of the slave trade. An argument was made that the trade was the lesser of the two evils since blacks were living in a miserable state in their own countries, unable to govern themselves, but this was, of

course, a mere pretext to cover greed, just as wars were being waged simply to obtain title to slaves in order to sell them.

### Shame and Betrayal in the American Church

In North America, *In Supremo*, if not resisted was ignored. In 1840, John England, the Catholic Bishop of Charleston, informed John Forsyth, the US Secretary of State, that Pope Gregory XVI had condemned the trade in slaves, but that no Pope had ever condemned domestic slavery as it had existed in the United States. He also stated that the bishops attending the 1840 Council of Baltimore did not interpret the papal teachings against slavery as applying to the institution as it existed in the United States. Francis Kenrick, the Archbishop of Baltimore, concurred and, arguing that changing the law would bring more harm than good for those held in slavery, counselled

“nothing should be... done or said that would make them carry their yoke unwillingly: but rather prudence and charity... should be shown in such a way that slaves... should offer obedience to their masters.”

Bishop Augustine Verot of Florida proposed a biblical basis for a “proper kind of slavery” and with the other bishops opposed the papal position that “it is the right of slaves who have been unjustly reduced to slavery to flee.” This remains a shameful period of history for the Church in America, yet it could have been glorious had the Faith been preached in its integrity. *Humanae Vitae* once more comes to mind.

Leo XIII wrote *In Plurimus* (1888) and *Catholicae Ecclesiae* (1890), the last two papal documents dealing directly with slavery. The former encouraged the bishops of Brazil to do all they could to ensure that former slaves received the full effects of emancipation. The latter asked the bishops of the world to work to bring slavery (which still continues under Islam) to an end in Africa and to support the evangelization of that continent.

### The Popes: Prophets of Justice and Peace

Slavery is undoubtedly one of the greatest and most serious blots upon Christian civilization, if not on the name of Christ who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil.2:7). It was the greatest tragedy to afflict the African and Indian nations in the New World. An estimated 12 million Africans were shipped, like brute animals, across the Atlantic, while entire Indian populations were decimated like vermin.

From the very beginning of this holocaust, the Popes forcefully denounced the traffic in human beings as an arrant travesty of justice “unheard of before now” and

did all within their power to halt it. They were generally ignored by the civil authorities and their teaching disregarded and even opposed by the very ones who, as successors to the apostles, were expected to support it and translate it into action.

Where the papal voice was heard and heeded by individual bishops and priests they were generally too few in number, too isolated from each other and too feeble in the face of vested interest to halt effectively the progress of this unprecedented evil. The faithful efforts of Philip II of Spain were soon virtually neutralized and there was division and confusion among the clergy.

Thus, for instance, the Jesuits of Maryland were slaveholders while those of Paraguay, working with the Guarani Indians, established a flourishing republic (1609-1768) where the Indians were “free subjects of the Crown, equal to the Spaniards.” Others, such as the Dominican Bartolome de Las Casas (1474-1566), who had waged a bitter and quite successful campaign against enslaving Indians, confused the issue by proposing the importation of slaves from Africa. This proposal he later deeply regretted and expressed doubts that God would pardon him for this terrible sin.

The parallel with abortion which is also condemned in the strongest possible terms as a grave moral evil and which is never permissible, even for therapeutic reasons, is striking. Canon Law<sup>7</sup> imposes an excommunication *ipso facto* on all those directly involved in an abortion. Yet many Catholics give no more than lip service to the Church’s teaching and in some cases this includes bishops, priests and religious. We know that Christ guarantees that His Church will always teach the truth but whether her clerics and laity will give the required internal assent and obedience to that truth is clearly another matter.

Pope after pope has raised his voice in protest against the unprecedented slaughter of the pre-born and in favour of the whole integral Gospel concerning love, sex and marriage. Tragically, judging from the uneven support given by bishops and clergy to the papal teachings in defence of human life and love, it seems that the lesson of slavery has not yet been learnt.

### History Will Judge Us for Acquiescing in Abortion

At the Denver World Youth Day, Pope John Paul II said the “the outcome of the battle for life is already decided”. So when eventually the humanity of pre-born children is universally recognised and future generations look with mystified horror at our easy, comfortable connivance, will it be remembered that from the beginning the popes had defended it and them?

In our secular world, it is argued that Christians ought not to impose their religion's values on the wider society and that those who do not approve of abortion are not forced to have one. Such reasoning is spurious at best and certainly as shallow and callous as that of US Chief Justice Roger B. Taney who, in handing down the infamous Dred Scott decision in 1857, stated that no one who objected to slavery was obliged to own slaves.

### The Gospel of Life Through the Ages

**A**bortion (and euthanasia), like slavery, is not a private, sectarian issue but an issue of the broadest public morality—touching principles which are foundational to a viable society. It is not a trivial matter of personal choice but fundamental to the common good.

The Catholic Church is to the world the “light on the lamp stand” as she is the “pillar and bulwark of truth” to the faithful. To both she proclaims the integral message of the Gospel of Life: to the world by interpreting the natural law; to Christ's faithful by proclaiming the truths revealed by the Lord. The promise to Peter has not failed. He was criticized by the other apostles for bringing the Gentiles into the Church (Acts 11:1-3).

His successors were criticized for speaking against slavery. Today his successors are ridiculed for defending human life from fertilization to natural death. The promise stands. Peter will not fail, nor the bishops, clergy, religious and laity that stand with him.

- 1 *Gaudium et spes* 27; cf. no 29
- 2 Excommunication, the severest ecclesiastical penalty, is reserved for grave crimes against the Catholic religion. It can be imposed by ecclesiastical authority or incurred automatically from the very commission of the act, in which case it is called an *ipso facto* or *latae sententiae* excommunication. If it is reserved then, outside of danger of death, only the Pope can lift it. Excommunication excludes the offender from taking part in the Eucharist or other Sacraments and from the exercise of any ecclesiastical office, ministry or function.
- 3 We can share in the sins of others by direct and voluntary participation, by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them, by not disclosing or not hindering them, or by protecting evil-doers. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no.1868.
- 4 Operative in Catholic countries from 1724, this Code, inter alia, established legal protection for slaves, required the provision of religious instruction for them and encouraged marriage and family life among them. It stands in strong contrast to the *British Code of Barbados*.
- 5 *Humanae Vitae* §17 warns of an increase in infidelity, lowering of moral standards, men losing respect for women and coercive government population control.
- 6 *Humanae Vitae* §30
- 7 Can. 1398: A person who procures a successful abortion incurs excommunication *latae sententiae*.

## TOWARDS A MODERN MORALITY OF MONEY

Edward Holloway

**I**n the ancient world and in the medieval world, money still measured the value of goods and was a stable claim on goods. In the modern world, promises to give goods measure the value of present goods. Since these paper promises are created indirectly through banks and directly through governments, it is the state power which decides the value which, at any given time, measures the purchasing power of the money. For it is not a stable value, not objective at all. It depends upon the policies of government and the stability of government.

...we must ask for the introduction into the world system of a basic natural law of human morality. For modern money is based no longer on gold, but on the powers, virtues and initiatives of men living in human society. Like gold, this non-metallic ‘human factor’ is the creator of wealth and the stable value behind money. Through its needs—spiritual and material—the moral creation and manipulation of money must be defined. At present it is not. The very title of such control based on human rights is not even appreciated...

**T**he objections to papal infallibility drawn from the alleged prohibition of usury, and its later toleration by silence, is a different matter. The function of money as a means of exchange is, in the context of a just price, dependent upon the rate of increase of the fruits of the earth and of human labour. The creation of surplus value by the machine from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, modified this relationship, but most unequally in various places and cultures. In fact usury as the improper use of money is rampant in our civilisation nevertheless. Modern states offset it by taxation, and by doles, but at this very moment, the burden of Western usury upon Latin America is threatening to bring down governments, and also to destabilise the financial institutions of the West. It is not a point that can justly be raised to prove or to insinuate that ‘sometimes popes are wrong in fact, but right in principle.

*From editorial articles in Faith magazine 1985 and 1989*

## CHURCH TEACHING ON USURY: CHANGE OR DEVELOPMENT?

Gary Coulter

It seems to be in vogue today to find ways to attack the Church, to look for cases in history where it is claimed the Church may have been mistaken in its judgments and teachings. In reality many of these accusations are greatly tempered by a simple objective look at the actual facts of history. Yet one issue comes up again and again, the case of usury, that teaching of the Church (for at least 1500 years) which condemned the taking of interest on loans as a sin. Did the Church err or change in its teaching on usury? And if the Church's teaching on usury changed with changing circumstances; could not we expect its other teachings to undergo a similar change?

To begin, we must recognize the possibility of genuine development in doctrine, as famously described by Cardinal Newman. Then one should recognize that moral doctrine, like theology, is subject to development. Authentic development strives for a more adequate formulation of unchanging truths, to express the substance of the moral law in new ways without contradicting prior teaching or the truths they contain. Legitimate development may even appear to some to be a reversal, as occurred in the Church's teaching on usury, but it is not really such. (cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* 53)

The modern definition of usury is the taking of interest at an excessive or exorbitant rate. But the original sense of the word usury is any return taken on a loan which exceeds the original amount of the loan (the 'principal'). Thus usury does not specify if the amount taken was small or large, excessive or illegal. Usury is simply a charge for the use of money lent. As hard as it might be to imagine, usury is "profit on a loan," and this is what was prohibited and condemned by the Church.

The Church's Magisterium condemned usury, not just as a disciplinary teaching which could be changed at any time, but as something contrary to justice and natural law. The question is: did the Church condemn the taking of all interest on all loans? A simple reading of the Scriptures and Fathers may lead some to conclude that all return on a loan was condemned. Yet further study of Papal, Conciliar, and Scholastic teaching returns quite the opposite answer:

there existed legitimate titles to payment beyond the principal on a loan. If the former view was actually the Church's teaching, then the Church has reversed its teaching; but if the latter, then we have the basis of an authentic development of the concept of interest.

St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 78, a. 2) verifies the principle of emergent loss: a lender could charge, not because of the loan of money itself but for the loss incurred due to the circumstances in which the loan was made. This becomes the foundation for a lawful and justified title for the taking of something above the amount lent. For example, one could charge the costs incurred in hiring a courier to transport the money loaned. Initially debated, one particular type of loss was soon recognized: lost profit. If one could have made a profit with one's money instead of loaning it (and can prove it!) then this becomes a legitimate title for interest. Is this a change in the Church's teaching on usury? The answer is seen in *Vix Pervenit*, the 1745 encyclical of Pope Benedict XIV, the first pope to write encyclicals:

The nature of the sin called usury has its proper place and origin in a loan contract. This financial contract between consenting parties demands, by its very nature, that one return to another only as much as he has received. The sin rests on the fact that sometimes the creditor desires more than he has given. Therefore he contends some gain is owed him beyond that which he loaned, but any gain which exceeds the amount he gave is illicit and usurious. (3.1)

A very strong teaching, consistent with all previous declarations of the Church that prohibit usury, but then he continues.

We do not deny that at times together with the loan contract certain other titles—which are not at all intrinsic to the contract—may run parallel with it. From these other titles, entirely just and legitimate reasons arise to demand something over and above the amount due on the contract.

Nor is it denied that it is very often possible for someone, by means of contracts differing entirely from

loans, to spend and invest money legitimately either to provide oneself with an annual income or to engage in legitimate trade and business. From these types of contracts honest gain may be made. (3.III, 3-4)

**P**apal teaching and Church councils never stated that interest in itself and under all circumstances is wrong, only the taking of interest without a just title to it. "The sin of usury is not simply the charging of interest on a loan, but the charging of interest on a loan in virtue of the very making of the loan, rather than in virtue of some factor related to the loan which provides a basis for a fair demand for compensation." (Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus* vol. 1, p. 894)

The problem was that one had to prove a just and adequate title was present, or else the loan was assumed usurious. As loans became more and more frequent, it would be very tedious to prove each time that loss had occurred. This placed confessors in a quandary and thus bankers were often refused absolution until the 1830s.

As the Church exercises caution in such matters, it approached the question with great care, and the Vatican and confessional practice slowly came to recognize that in the modern circumstances of a widespread free market, extrinsic titles could be presumed to exist without proof.

**W**hat changed? Not the church's teaching on usury. At one time, the only cost to the lender was the loan itself, and so the Church taught in that particular time nothing above the principal could be taken on such loans. Today, the title of lost profit is a general fact of life. In economic terms there is an "opportunity cost" of loaning one's money which deserves just remuneration.

Numerous investment opportunities have together established a "price" for money: the market rate of interest. In addition, a common interest rate automatically devalues one's money over time. In making a loan, one would justly deserve compensation under the title of loss.

As the nature of money and loans changed, the Church's teaching applied less and less frequently, and the Church simply stopped prohibiting a usury that no longer existed in modern circumstances. There is a great difference between the claim that this teaching is now largely obsolete, and claiming that the Church's teaching was wrong or has changed, for the second premise is not a necessary conclusion of the first.

A change in the nature of financial transactions is not a change in the teaching of the Church on usury. The only change is that now the extrinsic title of loss can be assumed to exist on loans. This was a development of justice, not a reversal of the prohibition on the taking of interest without a just title to compensation. Does this "change" admit of change in other areas of Church teaching? If this teaching became obsolete, could not other moral teachings also be obsolete today? While modern society has drastically changed in recent centuries, fundamental human nature and divine revelation are unchanging and never obsolete in any time or culture.

This is an important distinction, for while usury involved changing economic conditions, almost every other moral teaching of the Church involves the unchanging human nature (e.g. the prohibition of abortion, contraception, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, etc.) or the contents of divine revelation (e.g. reserving the priesthood to males). One can never claim that teachings such as these could become inapplicable in today's circumstances.

**L**ast, some argue that only the "spirit of the law" must be followed, and usury was only prohibited to protect the Church's love and concern for the poor. Thus it is claimed Church teaching can be changed as long as the same goods are protected. Yet usury was prohibited as a violation of commutative justice, which binds all never to take more than their just due.

Usury was prohibited because in reality it was already a sin, not because the Church made it into a sin. Many claim today that only the intention of the Church's moral law has to be followed, not the letter of the law; but is not the intention of a lawgiver revealed by reading the law itself?

Usury is the prohibition of gain from a loan sought directly by a lender without a just title. This is the definition of the usury prohibition as it was taught, understood and interpreted by the Church for thousands of years, just as it is today. Anything charged beyond the legitimate claim is still called usury, and taking such usury is—as it always was—a sin against justice. There has been obvious change in our economic conditions, which resulted in a necessary development of how this teaching is applied, yet the Church's basic teaching on the subject remains unchanged, and thus usury fails to be a valid example of a reversal of Church teaching.

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# Dom Gueranger: Prophet of Ecclesial Renewal

*A Sister of Ryde*

*A Sister from St Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde on the Isle of Wight offers an insightful overview of this major figure of the Nineteenth Century, a father of the Liturgical Movement and champion of Papal Infallibility. He sees the latter as an important gift flowing from the Incarnation, as we have argued in our editorial. His works are being gradually republished at this time.*

*"God has done nothing greater than the Incarnation of which the Church is the prolongation."*

## A Great Man of God

One of the last acts of Pope John Paul II was to mark the occasion of the bi-centenary of the birth of Dom Prosper Guéranger, who restored monastic life at Solesmes and whose writings on liturgy, ecclesiology and monastic life would leave a rich legacy from which we and the rest of the Church still draw benefit today. In a letter to the Abbot of Solesmes signed in a shaky hand and dated 23 March 2005, ten days before he died, Pope John Paul "gave thanks for the work accomplished by this religious." Referring to the 1000 monks and nuns of the Solesmes Congregation, he desired that they

"be strengthened in their commitment and in the service that they give to the world in an invisible way, keeping vigil before God in liturgical prayer. Thanks to them, the world is lifted up towards God... In this year consecrated to the Eucharist, reviving the figure of Dom Guéranger is an invitation for all the faithful to rediscover the roots of the liturgy and to give a new breath to their journey of prayer, taking care to place themselves always in the great tradition of the Church, in respect of the sacred character of the liturgy and of the norms which mark its depth and quality. For that, I encourage the pastors and the monks to offer to the faithful a real education in liturgy, for a more profitable participation, which is before all a union with Christ, who offered Himself in sacrifice on the Cross, made present in the eucharistic act."

## Dom Guéranger and the Restoration of Monastic Life

One of the lowest points in Benedictine history was at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a result of the French Revolution and the work of Napoleon, Benedictine life on the Continent had been almost wiped out. Before the Revolution there were about 1500 Benedictine abbeys in Europe. Afterwards there were about thirty, much reduced in size and relaxed in observance. In France there were no masculine Benedictine houses at all. Renewal came because a young seminarian, Prosper Guéranger, fell in love with the early Fathers of the Church and the monastic ideal. "I have everywhere sought what was thought, done and loved in the Church in the ages of faith." On the day of his ordination in 1827, he wandered out to the ruined Abbey of Marmoutiers:<sup>1</sup>

"There was nothing but rubble everywhere, but the situation of a large cloister was still distinguishable, the walls of which had been razed almost to the ground ... I found the expression of what I was feeling in these words of Isaiah: 'Your holy cities have become a desert, Jerusalem is a waste, our holy and glorious temple in which our fathers praised you... I besought God to raise up zealous men to rebuild all the ruins.'"

He did not realise that he was to be one of those zealous men.

Prosper Louis Pascal Guéranger was born on 4 April 1805, at Sablé-sur-Sarthe, not far from Solesmes. His early education was under the direction of his father,

head of the school at Sablé. Very early he developed a passion for reading and all things ecclesiastical. In 1822 he entered the seminary of Le Mans. In 1826, the year before his ordination, he was appointed secretary to the bishop of Le Mans, Mgr de la Myre Mory. After his ordination, 7 October 1827, at the age of 22 (the bishop had to obtain a canonical dispensation), he continued to work for the bishop and when the latter died, as chaplain to the French Foreign Missions.

#### Extraordinary Appointment: Abbot of Solemnes

On 11 July 1833, after more than 40 years of eclipse, he restored monastic life at Solesmes. Just 4 years later, in 1837, the Constitutions of his fledgling community were approved by Pope Gregory XVI, who even gave him the authority to launch a Benedictine Congregation from Solesmes. After a fortnight's retreat at St Paul's-outside-the-walls, his first stay in a Benedictine house, he made his solemn profession and was appointed abbot of Solesmes, without ever having made a novitiate or been a simple monk. He knew monastic life only from his wide and deep reading and his instinct for monastic good sense. His understanding of monastic life was a charism in the truest sense of the word.

In an age which—if it thought about monastic life at all—focused on peripheral features such as the extremes of De Rancé's Trappists or the intellectual work of the Maurists, Dom Guéranger went straight to the essentials: a life of prayer, obedience, frugality, withdrawal from the world in order to focus on the "one thing necessary", lived in community under an abbot. His enthusiasm for the liturgy and the encouragement he gave to his monks in the restoration of Gregorian chant—these were not mere expressions of optional spiritual tastes but sprang from his insight into the Christian life.

#### Liturgy, the Spiritual Heart of the Church

For Dom Guéranger the monk is someone who tends towards God and who invites others by his example to tend towards God. The monk is a contemplative, and his contemplation, like that of the angels, expresses itself in a life of praise. In praising God, the monk is a sign to all in the Church of their primary duty to pray. According to Dom Guéranger the spiritual heart of the Christian life was the liturgical prayer of the Church. To recover the practice—and even the concept of daily prayer shaped by the liturgy—he published the first volume of *L'Année Liturgique* in 1841.

This work, original in form and content, is a 15-volume commentary on the texts of the Mass and Divine Office for each day of the year. Historical sketches, sermons of the Fathers, poetry and hymns from Eastern and Western liturgical sources, along with explanations of the

ceremonies, draw the reader into the mysteries of Christ during the various liturgical seasons and feasts. Although the book springs from Dom Guéranger's great erudition, his aim was to help people pray. The opening words of the first volume are as follows:

"Prayer is man's richest boon. It is his light, his nourishment, and his very life, for it brings him into communication with God, who is light, nourishment and life. But of ourselves we know not how we should pray as we ought; we must needs, therefore, address ourselves to Jesus Christ, and say to him as the Apostles did: "Lord, teach us how to pray."

#### The Prayer of the Church

Dom Guéranger could see in his day the dangers that came from the general lack of liturgical awareness among the faithful: a narrow subjectivism, the risk of error and distortion, spiritual mediocrity. In addition, there was (and is) in unofficial prayer books the danger of inadequate or even erroneous expressions of the truths revealed by Christ to his Church. The heresies of Jansenism, for example, with their view of a distant God, impossible to please, and a Christ who died not for all but only for a special few, had been able to infect much of French Catholicism (and then repel many into violent atheism) because of the widespread use in France of 'improved' liturgical texts which had not come from Rome. To counter both these shortcomings Dom Guéranger presents the prayer of the Church:

"Happy is he who prays with the Church. Prayer said in union with the Church is the light of the understanding, the fire of divine love in the heart. Let not the soul that is possessed with a love of prayer be afraid that her thirst cannot be quenched by these rich streams of the liturgy, which now flow calmly as a streamlet, now roll with the loud impetuosity of a torrent, and now swell with the mighty heavings of the sea. The liturgy is suitable for all souls, being milk for children and solid food for the strong, thus resembling the miraculous bread of the desert.

"Not only is the liturgy a true source of spiritual life; it is also the means *par excellence* to preserve and profess the truths of the faith. In the liturgy, wise theology and sound doctrine become prayer.

"Every single point of Christian doctrine is not merely expressed during the course of the liturgical year, but also inculcated with the authority and unction the Church has been able to instill into her language and rites, which are so expressive. The faith of Christians becomes clearer and clearer; the theological sense begins to form within them; prayer leads them to

knowledge. The mysteries remain mysteries, but their splendour becomes so vivid that the heart and mind are enraptured by it, and we come to the point at which we can get an idea of the joys which we will receive from the beauty of those divine things, when the glimpse of them through the clouds is already such a delight to us." (*The Liturgical Year*, extracts from the preface)

For the major feasts he prints the psalms from the Office with notes showing how they can be prayed in harmony with the mystery being celebrated: for Psalm 1 on *Corpus Christi*, for example, he comments:

"Christ is the Just Man *par excellence*; he is the tree, which brings forth its fruit in due season, the fruit, that is, of salvation, which the Lord gave us to taste at the time of his death." (*Time after Pentecost*, vol. 1, p203)

On the Magnificat during Lent, he says that it is as if Our Lady is making this promise:

"If the great God, whose triumph is to gladden us on the glorious day of Easter, finds us humble and submissive, he will exalt us, yea, raise us up even to himself; if we confess our misery and poverty to him, he will enrich us, even to the full, with every blessing." (*Lent*, p107)

### Admired by the Great and the Holy

One admirer of the work was Cardinal Manning who called it "the fruit of that spirit of prayer and retreat characteristic of Benedictine life, a prolonged meditation on the wonderful order of divine worship." Another fan, Adolphe Baudon, president of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, told Dom Guéranger that when he was in Rome during Holy week at the Sistine chapel, he saw the famous pianist Liszt following the ceremonies with *L'Année Liturgique*: "He was overjoyed when I told him of the forthcoming publication of the volume three of *Paschaltide*."

Sainte Thérèse received her first initiation into the liturgy, Scripture and the lives of the saints through *L'Année Liturgique*. It was read at Buissonnets, the Martin home: "During the winter evenings at Les Buissonnets we used to play draughts, then the board was whisked away and you or Marie would read out some of *The Liturgical Year* to us followed by a few pages from some other good and fascinating book."<sup>2</sup>

Dom Guéranger's purpose in these volumes was to deepen the understanding of liturgical texts, especially the scriptures, which he saw as the chief requirement for

renewed participation. "This liturgical prayer," he wrote in the preface, "would soon be powerless were the faithful not to take a real share in it... It can heal and save the world, but only on condition that it be understood. Be wise, then, ye children of the Catholic church, and obtain the largeness of heart which will make you pray the prayer of your Mother." Dom Cuthbert Johnson, Abbot of Quarr, comments:

"These words could be taken without exaggeration, as the signal which marks the beginning of the modern liturgical movement ... His teaching on the Church as the mystical Body, the centrality of the paschal mystery, the doctrinal character of the liturgy, and his insistence upon the need to study the texts of the liturgy, all these ideas were absolutely original in the 19th century."<sup>3</sup>

In a tribute to Dom Guéranger on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his death, Pope Paul VI called him the "author of the liturgical movement." This understanding of the liturgy as the highest expression of the church's life and the source of contemplation and holiness also gave rise to Solesmes' critical study of Gregorian chant and the work of restoring the original melodies.

### The Monk

It is important to remember in all this that *The Liturgical Year* was the work of a monk who preferred nothing to the work of God; Dom Guéranger the liturgical theologian cannot be separated from Dom Guéranger the monk who celebrated, prayed and chanted the liturgical year in choir with his brethren before taking up the pen. "How can anyone remain cold when singing about such things?" he would exclaim when commenting on the beauty of a text. His liturgical theology happened at the altar and in the choir stalls. It was lived by a community before it was written down.

Dom Guéranger would not have become the beginning of the revival of the liturgical spirit in the church if he had remained a seminary professor. Instead he did the one thing which alone could save the liturgy from the hands of intellectuals, archaeologists and reformers: he revived the Rule of St Benedict and founded a monastic community.

### The True Originator of The Liturgical Revival

He realized that before all else the liturgy had to be lived, and that the Rule of St Benedict was a practical way of life, of which the liturgy was the foundation: "Without Dom Guéranger, no Solesmes; without Solesmes, no Beuron; without Beuron, no Maredsous; without Maredsous, no Mount-César; and without these two, no Abbot Marmion and no Dom

Lambert Beauduin."<sup>4</sup> In spite of extreme poverty, limited resources, many setbacks and Dom Guéranger's fragile health, Solesmes slowly prospered, thanks to the abbot's spirit of faith and supernatural confidence that nothing could shake. Foundations were made, at Ligugé and Marseilles. Perhaps his most successful was for women at Ste-Cécile, Solesmes.

The origin for this community lay in Dom Guéranger's typically kind-hearted offer to undertake the First Communion preparation of a little girl who had missed making her First Communion with her class-mates because she had been ill.

The child was eleven year old Jenny Bruyère. Dom Guéranger became a family friend and to Jenny a spiritual father, helping her break out of her shyness and obstinacy and also fostering her intellectual development. In 1866 she and a few others began a community of women along the same lines as the monks of S. Pierre (The titular name of Solemnes). Jenny—or Mère Cécile as she had become—was the superior but Dom Guéranger was the novice master, visiting the little community each day to inculcate all the best of monastic tradition.

#### Champion of Educated Female Religious

**O**utsiders were surprised when he insisted that the nuns learn Latin so as to better understand what they were chanting in choir. In spite of the poverty of the community every nun was given a Bible: this is the same period as St Thérèse of Lisieux who never had a whole Bible to read.

There was the same emphasis as at S. Pierre on drawing spiritual nourishment from the purest sources—the liturgy, the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church—and the same interior liberty of spirit. Today the Congregation of Solesmes numbers 32 monasteries, 24 houses of monks and 8 of nuns, including Quarr Abbey and St Cecilia's Abbey on the Isle of Wight.

Dom Guéranger's work of monastic revival radiated far beyond the confines of Solesmes. The founders of the influential Beuron Congregation in Germany studied monastic life at Solesmes before reviving it in Germany and, later, in Belgium. His ideas entered the English Congregation through another enthusiastic disciple, Dom Laurence Shepherd, monk of Ampleforth and chaplain at Stanbrook, who translated his work into English.

Through the nuns of Ste Cécile Dom Guéranger's ideals were transmitted to the nuns of Jouarre, Stanbrook and Sainte Croix, Poitiers, among many others. But despite the many demonstrations of esteem for himself and his work, he remained deeply humble. Overhearing his

secretary Dom Berengier comparing Solesmes to Cluny in front of some visiting monks, Dom Guéranger was dismayed: "You think only of playing a role, of cultivating an image! A monk must think of God and how to serve the Church."

#### "The Incarnation with all its immense consequences"

**A**t the heart of both his work on the liturgy and his monastic life was the mystery of the Incarnation. In the first constitutions Dom Guéranger wrote for his nascent community, we find these words: "Adoring the mystery of the incarnate Word with all its immense consequences, this Congregation confesses this mystery present in the Eucharist and rejoices to see it manifested under the symbol of the most loving heart of Jesus." This devotion to the mystery of the incarnation had as its first immense consequence in the life of Dom Guéranger a great love for the Church. This was "his ruling passion", according to Dom Laurence Shepherd, a monk of Ampleforth and Dom Guéranger's devoted friend and disciple :

"His whole life was a life of prayer; and what he once read he never forgot, and could use it years after, when occasion served. In every line he reveals his burning love for the Church. This love for the Church might be called his ruling passion. It was his very life.

"His deep love of the Church was in fact only a consequence of his love of Christ, and, for Dom Guéranger, that is the root, the basis of every monastic vocation. To prefer nothing to the love of Christ, to follow Christ means to be attached to the Church, his Bride, his mystical Body. For Dom Guéranger there is a close and vital connection between the monastic life and the Church. "The life of a monk is intimately linked to that of the Church.

"The monastic life, like the Church itself, is a prolongation of the Incarnation: God has done nothing greater than the Incarnation of which the Church is the prolongation. Now the Church has a heart: the religious state. That is the most complete manifestation that there can be here below of the mystery of the Incarnation, by its exact reproduction of the life of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

#### The Struggle with Jansenism

**H**e sees St Benedict as heir to a tradition that plunges its roots into the gospel itself: "Monasticism is a form of Christianity as old as the Church herself. It was born in the East with our faith... The monk is simply someone who takes his Christianity seriously." His devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation also underpinned his great struggle against Jansenism:

"If I am worth the trouble of being summed up, my life has been nothing else than reaction against Jansenist tendency which is the greatest enemy of the whole economy of the relations of the creature with God". (letter to Dom Guépin 1874).

Harsh, austere and puritanical, Jansenism and Jansenist ideas poisoned the life of the Church and perverted the Gospel message by its excessive rigorism, its doctrine of predestination and its obsession with the fundamental weakness of human nature vitiated by original sin. For Dom Guéranger the Christian life was nothing else than a response of love to the prevenient love of God, of which the Heart of Jesus is the most compelling sign.

The Incarnation also lay behind Dom Guéranger's contributions in his *Mémoire sur l'Immaculée Conception* (1854) and *Monarchie Pontificale* (1870) to the formulation of the two great dogmas of the nineteenth century: the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the absolute purity of the *sedes sapientiae*; and the infallibility of the Holy See, the absolute integrity of the *cathedra sapientiae*.

"The dogma concerning Mary and that concerning the Roman Pontiff are closely related, they both have their origin in the mystery of the incarnation. The Son of God needed a Mother; and after the Ascension, he needed a Vicar on earth".

There is a correspondence between Our Lady's preservation from original sin and the Pope's preservation from error when defining the faith of the Church. In both these works he showed that the Church's faith, as experienced and professed by all the faithful, is the main argument in the definition of a truth. To study tradition was for him to observe "the continual and ever-growing life of truth in the truth."

### The Roman Church

Jansenism was also Gallican and anti-papal. Dom Guéranger's vision of the supernatural character of the Church made him implacably opposed to the Gallicanism of recent centuries where the French Church's claim to independence from Roman "interference" had too often degenerated into Erastianism. Like many other clerical and lay writers of his time, he sought to protect the Church against political control from both modern secular regimes and traditional Catholic monarchies by calling for dependence on papal leadership. These writers were called 'ultramontane' because they looked for leadership 'over the mountains' from Rome.

These men, like Ullathorne, Manning and Faber in this country, were responding to widespread social upheavals and frequent attacks upon the Church. It was against this

background that he affirmed the Church's universality, her unity and her liberty, because her existence and rights come from God. In all this, Dom Guéranger never confused unity and uniformity. The Church, he maintained, was a most diversified organic body, but one in which the members did not live except by being joined to the principle of unity, in the successors of Peter.

Not all ultramontanes thought alike, and Dom Guéranger's strong attachment to the Holy See was not naïve, sentimental or blind. When in 1856 he narrowly missed being raised to the cardinalate, he wrote to his friends:

"You will never know the happiness one feels at not being made a cardinal. I think I would have died of boredom and above all, exile... I love our excellent Pius IX very much, but I love him more from afar than from near."

### The Man

Dom Guéranger was also keen to bring out the contrast between the permanence of the Church and the upheavals of nations and states. He himself had lived under six different political systems and had seen France shaken three times by revolution: "Her permanence without alteration or adulteration is the miracle of history; and it is enough to compare her with anything founded by men to realize that she is not human."

When Dom Guéranger visited England in 1860, he called on Fr Faber who recorded the meeting in a letter:

I shall remember the face, voice, and the manner which betokened the tranquil, yet fervent, the deep yet gay spirit of the excellent monk ... So humble, so modest, so kindly and yet with an odour of prayer about him, he seemed the very spirit of the Benedictine beauty of holiness. (Letter to Miss Nugent, 17 Sept. 1860)

Dom Guéranger was in England for the consecration of the Belmont priory church. From Belmont Dom Guéranger and Dom Laurence Shepherd embarked on a tour of England, beginning with Gloucester, Bath, Prior Park and Downside.

### Dom Guéranger in England

It was at Bath that Dom Laurence persuaded him to have his photo taken. From Downside they proceeded to Stanbrook, where the abbot said Mass, and then on to Birmingham where they visited John Henry Newman. One would have thought that a wonderful friendship would arise from this meeting between two men who were both so full of love for the Church, both alive to the issues of the day and both steeped in the Fathers—Dom Guéranger's life had found its direction from his devouring the folios of the Maurists in his seminary library, while it

was his studies in the Fathers which showed Newman the weakness of his Anglican position: "I saw my face in that mirror, and I was a monophysite."<sup>6</sup> In fact, the meeting was a non-event. To all the Abbot's conversational overtures, Newman was "unresponsive" answering only in monosyllables, according to Dom Laurence.

From Birmingham, Dom Laurence and Dom Guéranger went on to York where they met Bishop Ullathorne who had missed them in Birmingham. The bishop regaled the abbot with Irish anecdotes in French. The abbot laughed heartily, noted Dom Laurence "not at the Irish wit but at the good bishop's French."

The tour ended in London where they were the guests of Manning and visited Faber. Their conducted tour of Westminster Abbey caused some anxiety to Dom Laurence, as Dom Guéranger expressed his feelings by kicking the tomb of Elizabeth I, and praying at Mary Stuart's and that of Edward the Confessor. It was in his habit that he visited the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, and the Tower, claiming proudly that "it was the first time that a monk in his habit has been in these places since the Reformation."

#### A Cheerful Spontaneous Soul

To many of his contemporaries who knew him only from his writing, Dom Guéranger seemed solemn and imposing. Mgr Fayette Bishop of Orleans, with whom Dom Guéranger had often crossed swords over liturgical questions, spoke of his impressions of the Abbot of Solesmes to a Jesuit who knew him well:

"I picture the Abbot of Solesmes as tall, thin and gaunt."

"I'm sorry my Lord, he is actually rather short, and plump rather than thin."

"But at least he is dark, with jet-black hair, and looks stern and humourless?"

"I regret to tell your Lordship that Dom Guéranger is very fair, with blue eyes, a constant smile, and that he is full of life and extremely amiable."

Dom Guéranger was five feet, five inches tall, with a powerful head and piercing blue eyes. Simplicity and joy were among his most striking characteristics, a kind of playfulness of spirit and infectious enthusiasm (one of his favourite words): "I have received a special grace against gloom," he once admitted. "It has never entered my house, and I chase it away wherever I see it." At the end of his life, speaking to the young nuns of Ste Cécile, Dom Guéranger told them, "I am a busy man, aged and often not well; but I will not have wasted my time if I can succeed in instilling in you one holy passion—an enthusiasm for things divine."

He loved variety and was the sworn enemy of uniformity and rigidity. "He made an excellent Benedictine," wrote a childhood friend, "but he would have been a terrible soldier." He cautioned Dom Maurus Wolter against the temptation of turning Beuron into a German Solesmes, insisting that local conditions should be seen as an expression of God's will. Later he resisted all attempts at centralizing the Benedictine Order: "What makes for the strength of the Jesuits would be our danger... A monastery is a living being. The day we become centralized will be the end of all possible reform; living spontaneity will be destroyed, only to be replaced by administrative machinery, perfect in its way, which might imitate life, but which would not be true life."

#### A Tender, Loving Superior

He was wholly devoted to those in his care, admitting that "I am often more like a mother than a father." At his funeral one of his monks, Dom Lemenant des Chesnais, prior of the monastery at Marseilles, said, "Each of us believed himself uniquely loved by him." His door was always open to his monks, and one recalled how, as a young abbot, he did not hesitate to kneel and ask pardon when he lost patience. "When I get to heaven," he used to say, "God will not ask me whether I have written books, but whether I have taken care of the souls entrusted to me... Love alone will give you the inexhaustible resources with which to lead them to God," he counselled a convent superior.

#### The Human Touch

As a consequence of his ability to "plumb the depths of the heart" as one retreatant described Dom Guéranger, and by his sympathy and affection towards all, he exerted an influence over a large and varied circle that included men and women, young and old, the marble cutters whose works were near the abbey, the foremost spirits of the Catholic revival—Montalembert, Lacordaire, Louis Veuillot, Alfred de Falloux, Joseph de Maistre, to name but a few. It was after a retreat to Solesmes and with Dom Guéranger's encouragement that Lacordaire decided to restore the Dominican order in France. St. Pierre Julien Eymard, founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, was also a frequent visitor who sought out the abbot's counsel.

That Dom Guéranger was well aware of the human condition is shown by remarks such as this in a prayer to the Holy Spirit:

"Preserve us from the sad inconsistency into which many imprudently allow themselves to fall, accepting one day your guidance, and abandoning themselves the next to the prejudices of the world, leading a double

life that satisfies neither the world nor you". (*Gifts of the Holy Spirit*,<sup>7</sup> p115).

He could be just as pastoral when occasion required. Here is his well-known advice to the young prior of Beuron:

"Encourage in every way you can a holy liberty of spirit among your monks and do everything you can to make them love their state of life more deeply than anything in the world. Make yourself lovable always and in all circumstances. Be a mother rather than a father to your children. Imitate the patience of God and don't demand that spring bear the fruits of autumn. Be accessible to everyone; avoid formality and ceremony. Adapt yourself to everyone and don't try to adapt others to yourself; for God has created us all different, and you are the servant of all, like Our Lord Jesus Christ".

### The Legacy

**W**orn out by his work and unflagging devotion, Dom Guéranger died on 30 January 1875, less than 70 years old. On learning the news of the death of the Abbot of Solesmes, Pope Pius IX declared, "I have lost a devoted friend, and the Church a great servant." He paid a remarkable tribute to his life and work in a Brief addressed to the whole Church: "Among the men of our time who have been most distinguished for their devotion, zeal and learning no one has more right to acknowledgement than Prosper Guéranger."

His last work was for Benedictine oblates, *The Church or Society of Divine Praise*. The day before his death he gave his last conference to the nuns of Ste Cécile. His body rests in the crypt of the abbey church at Solesmes; his heart, at his request, was placed at the foot of the altar at Ste Cécile. His cause has been introduced.

Our time needs Dom Guéranger as much as his own. In an age when spirituality too often succumbs to psychology or sentiment, Dom Guéranger's perception of the great panorama of the divine plan, of the sanctifying value of the liturgy, as well as his great love for the Church makes him a prophet for our time:

"Well beyond the monastic cloister, numerous faithful have benefited from his project," wrote Pope John Paul II, "becoming aware that the unfolding of the 'mystical seasons' of the liturgical year" can help them "to relive the different stages of the Mystery of Christ... It is by their participation in liturgical life in the heart of the ecclesial community that the faithful are to affirm their faith, because they are put in permanent contact with the sources of revelation and the whole of the Christian mystery."

### FURTHER READING

Dom Guéranger's *Liturgical Year in English* has been reissued by The Saint Austin Press in 15 cloth bound, sewn volumes, complete with dust jacket and ribbons.

If you can read French, the best biography of Dom Guéranger is that by Dom Guy-Marie Oury of Solesmes, *Dom Guéranger: Moine au coeur de l'Eglise* (Editions Solesmes, 2000); though most scholarly it is full of interest and has lots of pictures. The only biography in English is Dom Louis Soltner's *Solesmes* and Dom Guéranger, translated by Joseph O'Connor (Massachusetts, Paraclete Press, 1995) shorter and with no pictures but a useful introduction.

Much biographical material, however, together with pictures, is to be found in Sr Mary David Totah's book, *The Spirit of Solesmes* (Burns & Oates, 1997, 266 pages) available from St Cecilia's Abbey for £10. *The Spirit of Solesmes* is an anthology of the writings of Dom Guéranger, his second successor Dom Delatte,<sup>8</sup> and his pre-eminent disciple, Abbess Cécile Bruyère. *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (St Paul's Publications, 1998) combines in 141 pages two sets of reflections on the gifts, one by Dom Guéranger and the other by the former Archbishop of Milan and well-known spiritual writer, Cardinal Martini.

Dom Guéranger's *On the Immaculate Conception*, written four years before the definition of the dogma in 1854, is about to appear for the first time in English. (St Michael's Abbey Press, Farnborough).

- 1 Where St Martin had founded the first monastery in Gaul in 372; it remained a monastic site until the Revolution.
- 2 It would seem that the source of image of the eagle—a key image of her little way and which takes up much of Mss B of her autobiography, was taken from *The Liturgical Year* (cf. *Oeuvres complètes* (Cerf, ) p. 1279, note 63). For the feast of St Alexis, Dom Guéranger wrote that "it is not necessary to pretend to equal the saints but to be inspired by their example... Although we are not commanded to follow the Saints to the extremities where their heroic virtue leads them, nevertheless, they still guide us along the easier paths of the plain. As the eagle upon the orb of day, they fixed their unflinching gaze upon the Sun of Justice; and irresistibly attracted by his divine splendour, they poised their flight far above the cloudy region where we are glad to screen our feeble eyes. But however varied be the degrees of brightness for them and for us, the light itself is unchangeable, provided that, like them, we draw it from an authentic source." (*Time after Pent* Vol. 4, p.125.)
- 3 Cuthbert Johnson, OSB, *Analecta Liturgica* 9: Prosper Guéranger (1805-1975): A Liturgical Theologian, *Studia Anselmiana* 89 (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S Anselmo, 1984), p. 350.
- 4 Damasus Winzen, "Guéranger and the Liturgical Movement," *The American Benedictine Review* 6 (Winter 1955-56): 424-26.
- 5 Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* also presented the consecrated life as a special way of living out the Incarnation, "that form of life which He, as Son of God, accepted on entering this world" (16). The consecrated life is a "Christi-form life"; it constitutes "a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren. It is a living tradition of the Saviour's life and message" (22)
- 6 *Apologia pro vita sua*.
- 7 St Paul's Publications, 1998.
- 8 The second abbot of Solesmes, Dom Couturier, had been Dom Guéranger's trusted prior and in turn had had the vision to make the young Dom Delatte his own prior. After the monks had been violently expelled from the monastery in 1880 (with Dom Couturier himself dragged from his choir-stall by the police) he held the community together and even saw it grow, but in the circumstances had no time for writing.

### APOLOGY

In our May/June issue William Charlton's article on *The Soul* was inadvertently printed without its footnotes. However, these can be viewed on our website version of the article. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

In the September/October issue, Kevin Flannery, professor of philosophy at the Gregorian University, Rome, will reply to that article.

## A NOTE ON THE USE OF THE CONDOM BY A SPOUSE WITHIN MARRIAGE TO PREVENT THE TRANSMISSION OF HIV

*Luke Gormally*

### [1]

It is being argued that condom-use for intercourse within marriage would be permissible to prevent transmission of HIV between spouses. The reasons offered for this view are the following:

1. The use would not be contraceptive but would be intended to prevent the transmission of a potentially lethal virus.
2. One should permit a lesser evil in order to prevent a greater evil (in this case infection and the premature death of a spouse).

Both of these reasons are at odds with the Church's teaching about marriage and about moral responsibility.

### [2]

The first reason proposes that condom use would be acceptable because not contraceptive in intent. It is possible that it might not be contraceptive in intent. (But in the case of fertile couples this would be unusual, since apart from not wishing it to be the case that HIV is transmitted to a spouse they would also not wish to conceive a child with HIV, and so would also wish to prevent conception by condom use.) In those cases in which there is no contraceptive intent there is nonetheless a quite fundamental reason why condom use should never be adopted. Condom use would render the sexual activity of the spouses non-marital.

It is a condition of sexual activity being marital that it should be a generative or procreative type of act<sup>1</sup>—the type of act which, if the couple are fertile, can lead to the conception of a child. It is a condition of intercourse being generative that the husband ejaculates into his wife's reproductive tract. Precisely that is deliberately prevented by the choice to make use of a condom. If intercourse is not of the generative kind then it cannot be unitive.

That is what is meant by the solemn teaching of *Humanae Vitae* #12 when it speaks of the *inseparability*

of the unitive and procreative meanings of the marital act. To allow condom use within marriage even if there is no contraceptive intent would amount to an abandonment of the Church's fundamental teaching on what is required for sexual activity truly to realise the 'one flesh' unity of the couple and so to be morally acceptable.<sup>2</sup>

### [3]

The second reason offered for permitting condom use within marriage represents a misunderstanding of what traditional Catholic teaching had in mind when it spoke of 'permitting the lesser evil'. Traditional use of the phrase related to the *toleration* or 'non-impeding' by 'rulers' of the sins of *other* persons, and not to what may be chosen or counselled. Advocates of the acceptability of condom use do not have in mind 'tolerating' what some of them would concede is not in itself desirable but rather counselling the acceptability of condomistic intercourse to avoid HIV infection.

The first point to acknowledge in considering this view is that the Church has always taught that it is incompatible with an authentic sense of moral responsibility deliberately to choose what is known to be morally wrong, however good and desirable one's further purpose might be.

When people speak of 'permitting the lesser evil' they may have one or other of a number of different comparisons in mind, either between greater or lesser moral evils, or between what they think of as greater or lesser 'pre-moral' evils. On any accurate analysis of the choices which are at issue in the comparisons, it will always be the case that one term of the comparison will involve the choice to engage in condomistic intercourse.

In condomistic intercourse aimed at reducing HIV infection, what is chosen (what tradition calls the 'object' of the act) is, as we have seen ([2] above) an essentially non-generative *type* of sexual act, chosen *with the further intention* of reducing the risk

of infection. What is chosen therefore is one of those types of act which "in the Church's moral tradition have been termed 'intrinsically evil' (*intrinsice malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances."<sup>3</sup> It is *never* morally acceptable to choose to act in such ways.

#### [4]

Many couples will reasonably conclude from acceptance of the teaching that condomistic intercourse is intrinsically unchaste, that the only alternative for them is abstinence, which will indeed be a demanding cross for many of them. The Church's response to their situation should be to help them to embrace that cross in their lives as the instrument of their salvation. It is precisely in embracing what makes its appearance as the cross in one's own life that one experiences the power of the Resurrection. It is no part of the Church's mission to suggest or allow behaviour which defiles the sacred bond of marriage.

Abstinence is not necessarily the only reasonable alternative to condom use. While it is not reasonable for an infected spouse to *demand* marital intercourse when their spouse is unwilling to be exposed to the attendant risks, it may be reasonable for an uninfected spouse willingly to accept the risks associated with marital intercourse. These will vary according to which of the two spouses is infected, the phase of the menstrual cycle during which intercourse occurs, the stage of infection and the efficacy of medication in reducing infectivity.

A couple, one of whom is infected, cannot be condemned as necessarily unreasonable for having intercourse with a view to having a child. For a child is a great good, and we rightly do not condemn couples who seek to conceive a child though they run some quantifiable risk of conceiving a child with, say, a genetically determined lethal condition. The risk of a child getting HIV is greatest if the mother is infected at the time of conception when 13-35% of the newborn infants may be infected.<sup>4</sup> If the mother is not infected there is no risk to the infant.

#### [5]

In explaining the Church's teaching to individuals, pastors may readily concede that a particular couple could greatly reduce the risk of HIV transmission through the use of a male condom.<sup>5</sup> The essential case against condom use in marriage is that it is gravely unchaste, not that it is risky.

On the other hand, when pastors teach publicly that condom use is morally acceptable they should recognise that their message will influence a varied population whose behaviour in using condoms may in the long run be significantly hazardous. One should bear in mind that studies of populations show that condom use for contraceptive purposes has a failure rate of 12%<sup>6</sup> - where 'failure' means conception, which can occur only once a month, whereas HIV can be transmitted any day of the year.

The Church's ministry to couples, one of whom has HIV, is a challenging ministry. The challenge is evaded and they are betrayed if pastors think they can serve the good of couples and the good of their marriages by approving condom use.

- 1 "A conjugal act which is suitable in itself for the procreation of offspring, to which marriage is ordered by its nature and by which the spouses become one flesh", as the Code of Canon Law #1061 §1 puts it.
- 2 For an explanation of the wrongness of condomistic intercourse in the absence of contraceptive intent see Luke Gormally, 'Marriage and the prophylactic use of condoms', *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 5 (2005): 735-49; reprinted in *Faith* 38/2 (March-April 2006): 16-24.
- 3 Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* #80.1.
- 4 About half of these infections occur in utero and the others at the time of delivery. See Ambrosiak J, Levy J A 'Epidemiology, natural history and pathogenesis of HIV infection'. In Holmes K K et al. (eds) *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* (3rd edition), pp. 251-8.
- 5 Consistent use of a male condom has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV transmission by approximately 85%. [Workshop Summary: Scientific Evidence on Condom Effectiveness for Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Prevention, 2001. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services.] Sufficiently motivated individual couples would no doubt be capable of further reducing the risk.
- 6 Trussel J et al. 'Contraceptive failure in the United States: an update'. *Studies in Family Planning* 32 (1990): 51-4.

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## THE WHOLE UNIVERSE BEARS WITNESS TO TRANSCENDENT INTELLIGENCE

*Pope Benedict XVI*

**T**he great Galileo said that God wrote the book of nature in the form of mathematical language. He was convinced that God gave us two books: that of Sacred Scripture, and that of nature. And the language of nature—this was his conviction—is mathematics, which is therefore a language of God, of the Creator.

Let us reflect now on what mathematics is. In itself it is an abstract system, an invention of the human spirit, and as such in its purity it does not really exist. It is always realized approximately, but—as such—it is an intellectual system, a great, brilliant invention of the human spirit. The surprising thing is that this invention of our human mind is truly the key for understanding nature, that nature is really structured in a mathematical way, and that our mathematics, which our spirit invented, really is the instrument for being able to work with nature, to put it at our service through technology.

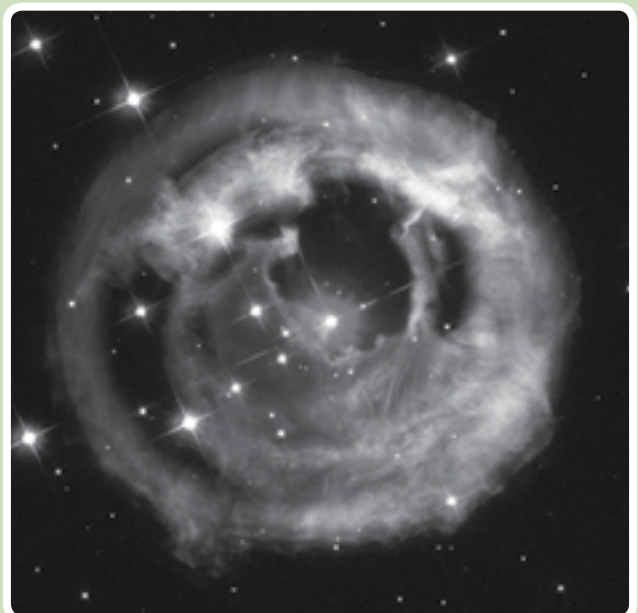
**I**t seems an almost incredible thing to me that an invention of the human intellect and the structure of the universe coincide: the mathematics we invented really gives us access to the nature of the universe and permits us to use it. [...] I think that this intersection between what we have thought up and how nature unfolds and behaves is an enigma and a great challenge, because we see that, in the end, there is one logic that links these two: our reason could not discover the other if there were not an identical logic at the source of both.

In this sense, it seems to me that mathematics—in which God as such does not appear—shows us the intelligent structure of the of the universe. [...] Technology is trustworthy only because our mathematics is trustworthy. Our science, which ultimately makes it possible to work with the energies of nature, presupposes the trustworthy, intelligent structure of matter, [...] the “design” of creation.

**T**o come to the definitive question, I would say: either God exists or he doesn’t. There are only two options. Either one recognizes the priority of reason, of the creative. Reason that stands at the beginning of everything and is the origin of everything—the priority of reason is also the priority of freedom—or

one upholds the priority of the irrational, according to which everything in our world and in our lives is only an accident, marginal, an irrational product, and even reason would be a product of irrationality. In the end, one cannot “prove” either of these views, but Christianity’s great choice is the choice of reason and the priority of reason. This seems like an excellent choice to me, demonstrating how a great Intelligence, to which we can entrust ourselves, stands behind everything.

**B**ut to me, it seems that the real problem for the faith today is the evil in the world: one asks oneself how this is compatible with this rationality of the Creator. And here we really need that God who became flesh and who shows us how he is not only a mathematical logic, but that this primordial reason is also love. If we look at the great options, the Christian option is the more rational and human one even today. For this reason, we can confidently elaborate a philosophy, a vision of the world that is based on this priority of reason, on this trust that the creative Reason is love, and that this love is God.



*From a spontaneous response of Pope Benedict to a question on Creation and Intelligent Design at a meeting of young people preparing for World Youth Day 2008 – 6th April 2006*

# THREE VOICES

## 1. THE NAILS SING

We were not made for this,  
to pinion frail flesh, to kiss  
it with such exquisite pain.  
Yet we should not complain.

On the furnace hearth where  
we were forged, the mirror  
of the shield gleamed fairest,  
and our place was the lowliest.

Now as the hammer strikes,  
loosing with our cruel spikes  
Mercy's aeonian fountain, are we  
not suddenly exalted, holy?

Not made for this! What more?  
What truer credentials, where?  
He who quells all worldly thirst,  
of him we tasted first.

## 2. THE TREE CRIES OUT

You came for this from heaven.  
While your mother grieves,  
you writhe in rescue's birthing,  
perfecting agony's leaven.  
Upon my ichored wood, where leaves  
no longer burgeon in Spring,  
your sacred veins dissever  
into a season of deluge forever.

Yet must it fall to me  
to be both death bed and cradle,  
to deliver you seemingly stillborn  
into the hands of your chosen destiny,  
through whose triumphal midwifery  
you call yourself up again,  
even from the corridors of Hell,  
to let sin's bonded servants free?

Splinter me then, spare me not, make  
matchwood of my ungainly body,  
a crooked covenant for ransom's sake  
your passive blood seals freely,  
and send me to the earth's four corners  
in the pockets of your messengers.

## 3. THE EARTH SPEAKS

For this I was forechosen  
as of your swaddling-stone  
every favoured inch was whilom known.

In me you reawaken,  
night rolls back, death's gone,  
and while your kind cerecloth's token,  
still warm with resurrection,  
for a short while is mine.

The tombs of your saints open,  
that rest I lent them ended, and in  
their stead, by your Passion slain,  
moulders the very ruin  
of Sheol's agelong dominion.

Upon my floor this maiden-morn  
your risen feet have printed plain  
their signature, your glorious AMEN.

**John Ellis**

**Aeonian:** lasting for an indefinitely long period of time

**Ichored:** stained with plasma from bleeding wounds

**Dissever:** divide, separate or cut into parts

**Whilom:** formerly, beforehand, erstwhile

**Cerecloth:** a waxed winding sheet or grave cloth

# Reawakening the Catholic Imagination

Keith Barltrop

*Mgr Keith Barltrop, Director of the Catholic Agency for Evangelisation, explains how fruitful mission in modern Britain can only come from a clear sighted discernment of the spiritual emptiness of our secularised culture, from renewed courage to project a truly Catholic alternative, and from the rediscovery of a childlike spirit of devotion.*

*"How does the Catholic imagination portray the spiritual state of England and Wales and what action does it lead to? The general lack of what Pope John Paul II called a 'new ardour for the new evangelisation' among us argues persuasively that our imagination has wandered down the wrong paths."*

## The Ambiguous Power of Imagination In Times of Social Crisis

One of the most fascinating signs of the times today is the revival of interest in fantasy stories, and the images associated with them. *The Lord of the Rings*, *Narnia*, Philip Pullman's work and Harry Potter are among our best selling novels and films, while angels, fairies, mermaids—and demons—are in vogue as never before in greetings cards, web sites and the growing interest in Japanese manga.

All this represents a turn to the imagination at a time of cultural crisis and conflict. With our own European culture well past its "best before" date, and with so many competitors in the field, the imagination, as represented above all by story and image, seems a more promising field than that of rational truth to those seeking a creative way forward.

Such an approach has deep resonance for Christians, especially for Catholics, as well as raising serious questions. The greatest Catholic theologian of our times, Hans Urs von Balthasar, turned in his magisterial *Herrlichkeit* (*The Glory of the Lord*), to the theme of beauty as a way of reviving a theology sterilised by rationalism and narrow scholasticism. In England many of the great imaginative writers of the last 150 years were Catholics or sympathisers: Chesterton, Hopkins, Dorothy Sayers, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, drawing, as Balthasar was aware, on a peculiarly English appreciation of the role of the imagination whose sources lie in Blake, Coleridge and Newman, to go back no further.

As Stratford Caldecott has written in the latest number of the *Chesterton Review* (p. 1), "every civilisation is the product not only of the human imagination but of a religious worldview. Some kind of faith in the transcendent is necessary for people to be inspired to look beyond themselves and form a community that has the power to bind them together." At a time when the European Union, with Britain and France in the forefront, cannot bring itself even to admit in its Constitution the pivotal role of Christianity in forming our culture, popular instinct turns to fantasy to fill the void of meaning and transcendence.

## Lack of Imagination in the Local Church

How is the Church to respond to this development, and how prepared are we to recognise these signs of the times?

It was said of a great Russian pianist during the 1940s that she played Bach's Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues, the very acme of a normally sober classicism, with such intensity that critics were moved to ask why: "Because we are at war!" she replied. Does the Church in England and Wales show any comparable signs of awareness of crisis in the way it plays the great themes of Catholic faith to today's audience?

Positive signs are not lacking, but it must be said that the overall impression is of a complacency and failure to grasp the situation that borders on the unbelievable. Since in many ways this is itself a failure of the imagination, it is difficult to convey

this impression by argument alone: it is something that you have to come to see, and which, once seen, cannot be forgotten.

It is noteworthy that Jesus accused his contemporaries precisely of such a failure in the realm of the imagination, and linked it to a moral failure, for the moral and the aesthetic are deeply intertwined (Balthasar again). “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (Lk. 12:55)

### Christian Imagination as Spiritual Insight

**A**s for Jesus himself, his human power of imagination was fully alive and in harmony with what we may by analogy call his divine imagination or creativity. Nowhere is this better seen than in Matthew’s beautiful description (9:36) of Jesus’ way of seeing the people: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Where the Pharisees saw a useless rabble, and the disciples a problem, the imagination of Jesus penetrated to the reality, he was moved with compassion, and acted accordingly.

The world of advertising, both commercial and charitable, knows this power all too well. Conjuring up a tropical beach immediately arouses in us the desire to get away from it all, while portraying starving children in Africa has us reaching for our credit card. But how does the Catholic imagination portray the spiritual state of England and Wales and what action does it lead to?

### Catechetical Incoherence and Evangelical Paralysis

The general lack of what Pope John Paul II called a “new ardour for the new evangelisation” among us argues persuasively that our imagination has wandered down the wrong paths. When I was working for the bishops on the creation of a new agency for evangelisation, which eventually became CASE, a Catholic layman working for the Church actually said to me, “Why on earth do you want to get Catholics involved in evangelisation, when there are so many non-Christians already living the values of the Kingdom?” What in *heaven’s* name is the picture we have allowed ourselves to create which leads to such incoherence and paralysis?

I admit this is not a question admitting of simple answers, but it is precisely the role of the imagination to grapple with such difficulties and create something new: in that it shares in some way in the Creator’s creativity. Our picture of the Church and the world used to be very much a matter of black and white, so that the classic image of evangelisation was a St Francis Xavier struggling heroically from morning to night to baptise Indian babies

in order to save them from hell. Such a picture will not work in a multi-cultural society or in a Church whose most recent Council encouraged us to look for the positive signs of the Spirit’s presence in the world as well as his all-too-obvious absences.

Indeed, our whole understanding of the relationship between grace and nature, retrieved so painstakingly from the Tradition by de Lubac and others, and enshrined in the Council, demands new pictures to do it justice.

Where are we to find such pictures? I would suggest two main sources, distinct but closely related.

### Source of Imagination: Wonder at the Gift of Being

**T**he first I have already hinted at in referring to the compassion of Jesus. The Navarre Bible, that wonderful commentary which has done so much to seed the wasteland of contemporary Biblical scholarship, refers in connection with the passage I quoted from Matthew (9:36) to words of St Margaret Mary Alacoque: “This Divine Heart is a great abyss which holds all good, and he commands that all his poor people should pour their needs into it. It is an abyss of joy in which we cast away all our burdens; an abyss of humility in which we discard our pride. It is a fount of mercy for the wretched, an abyss of love in which to drown our weakness.”

In other words, it is very much the role of what are sometimes called popular devotions to furnish the imagination with pictures of God which appeal not just to the head but also to the heart and so stir us to action. The Sacred Heart and the Divine Mercy are examples of such devotions, as of course are the many forms of devotion to Our Lady, St Joseph and other saints.

The attitude of many Catholics in England and Wales to such devotions is breathtakingly negligent and contemptuous. All too often they are written off as the preserve of a few strange people who happen to like such trifles. But as Bishop Malcolm McMahon pointed out recently in a meeting of CASE, if you go to countries such as Poland, the Divine Mercy is mainstream, particularly among young people. When popular devotion is lacking, the heart dries up, and the will loses its energy to live and share the Gospel in its fullness.

One reason popular devotions have withered in England and Wales since the Council is a mistaken idea that the aim of catechesis is to promote an “adult faith”. This highly ambiguous notion has done a great deal of harm, and has all too often been used to pour scorn on anything that can be labelled simplistic, overly dependent on authority, or—that other great bogey of today’s Church—“fundamentalist,” which is usually a code word

for anyone who believes the Gospel might actually be worth believing and acting on, especially if they belong to one of the new ecclesial movements.

### "Adult" Faith and the Death of Devotion

The repeated use of precisely the opposite image, that of childlike trust, by Jesus should immediately arouse suspicion of the agenda hidden behind this whole notion of an "adult" faith. Returning to our theme of fantasy literature, it was Chesterton who pointed out that most fairy tales portray a world of delights which is, however, bounded by an unexplained moral injunction: Cinderella can go to the ball but must be back at midnight, Pandora has a magic box but must not open it, etc. So, too, Adam and Eve are placed in a paradise, but must not eat of a certain tree. The one who tries to argue them into an "adult" faith has the name of Satan.

The whole point of this, Chesterton argues, is that it is the very existence of things which should excite our wonder and reverence, the wonder of the child. We did not create the world, and it is not for us to question its fundamental rules, but to marvel at the gratuitous fact of our being here at all.

This is the heart of the child, awaking to wonder, as Balthasar was fond of saying, at its mother's smile, so far from today's world where people make and break their own rules ten times a day, re-invent even their own gender if they so decide, and dress in a way that, far from expressing any self-transcendence or even self-enhancement, reduces everyone to an androgynous blur.

Of course, there is another sense in which the child should indeed evolve into an adult, in the realm of faith as well. We must learn to take responsibility for our actions and their consequences; we must face the inconsistency between our sinful dispositions and the holiness of God, and take the medicine, bitter at times; we must face the complexities both of human behaviour and of faith. But if by doing all that we lose the heart of the child, we have lost the plot itself.

### Confronting Reality: A Shock to the System

To return to the recreation of the Catholic imagination today, I would point to the film *The Passion of the Christ* as a prime example. Whatever one's personal feelings about the film, it seems clear that Mel Gibson was trying to deliver a cardiac shock to the imagination, Christian and non-Christian, of our times; saying in effect, "Look in graphic detail at what God's Son did for you. Can you see these images and remain indifferent to his love? This is the very fact on which our civilisation is built: how can you say it is of no significance? Better to spit in his face with the Roman soldiers than ignore him."

Another way of putting this is that the contemporary Church in England and Wales has tended to opt for Martha over Mary. The lives of many of us simply mirror the frenetic business of today's culture rather than standing as a counter-sign to it. Martha is alive and well at countless meetings at which there is no vision, consultations at which there is no passion for an authentic ecclesial life, planning groups in which there is no strategy based on the Gospel.

Where Mary languishes, not encouraged to contemplate with burning heart the abyss of the Saviour's mercy, "is it any wonder that pastoral plans come to nothing and leave us with a disheartening sense of frustration?" (Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 38).

### The Second Source: Recognizing Spiritual Poverty

If rekindling through imagination a sense of Divine Mercy is one side of the task, the other is surely imagining our world in ways that lead to authentic evangelisation. What is the spiritual and cultural equivalent of the picture of starving children that will move us to action? As the founder of Opus Dei said, commenting on the same passage of Matthew, "If we were consistent with our faith when we looked around us and contemplated the world and its history, we would be unable to avoid feeling in our own hearts the same sentiments that filled the heart of Our Lord."

To have a comprehensive picture of our world belongs to God alone: human beings, even with the aid of grace, must be content with snapshots. Such insights are not lacking in the novels, films, and art of our time, but we must create the time and space to reflect on them, both alone before the Lord and with others in the Church. The teaching of Pope John Paul II and his successor are filled with suggestions for such meditation.

How many people, for example, who have seen contemporary films such as *The Matrix* or *The Truman Show* have reflected on the images they provide us with of human beings trapped in the very plethora of images their technology has created? How many who pass an enjoyable hour in our art galleries see mirrored in the art of the last 100-200 years vivid portrayals of the desolation and yearnings of humanity today?

Novels also furnish many images which can stir the heart of a Catholic. One of the most unforgettable for me is the passage in Douglas Coupland's *Life After God*, where three twenty-somethings go to spend time in the desert near Las Vegas simply to tell each other stories, because they have come to realise that it is not healthy "to live life as an isolated succession of cool moments." How much is conjured up about today's culture in that phrase.

## The Courage to Imagine a Pro-Life World

**T**his recreation of a Catholic imagination has many aspects which I will have to leave readers to work out for themselves, but I want to allude particularly to its relevance to issues of life and sexual morality. No treatment of our contemporary Catholic malaise can fail to mention the devastating effect on the coherence of our faith of the related issues of abortion and contraception.

With abortion, as Aidan Nichols has written in his *Christendom Awake*, the problem is that our courage fails in the face of repeated failures to change the law. Our imagination also fails at the thought of the sheer scale of the problem. How can we begin to assess the devastation wrought at the hidden (and not-so-hidden) levels of our society by so much murder disguised as therapy or lifestyle solutions?

Comparisons with the Nazi or Stalinist murders are just indeed, but not unproblematic: they are both similar and different, yet the essential dilemma is surely the judgment of posterity: how will future generations view our inaction in the face of such evil, when we ourselves judge harshly the complicity of previous generations in the evils of their time? If violent protest is not the answer, how can the Catholic imagination be stirred to see this issue and its resolution in the light of Christ's passion and the sufferings of his martyrs?

## Contraception: Daring to Challenge The Erotic Idol

**A**lthough contraception is on a different level of moral gravity than abortion, its widespread acceptance in the western Catholic world has no less devastating effects. Here I am not just thinking of contraception as a practice but as a mentality, a way of thinking about sexuality which severs the affective from the procreational, and the physical from the spiritual.

Sexuality has become a god who must be worshipped in today's society. Enthroned on his altars, whether "straight" or "gay", he must be honoured and served on every possible occasion. Anyone who dares confront him or call his bluff will be treated with fury. This is why any suggestion that *Humanae Vitae* is still valid, or that celibacy for the priesthood still makes sense, or that handing out condoms might not be the best way of combating AIDS, is treated not just with contempt but with thinly disguised rage, not only by self-confessed secularists but by nominally Catholic journals such as *The Tablet*.

Once again, it is not just the head, but the heart and the imagination that will have to provide the answer. Rehearsing the arguments of *Humanae Vitae*, excellent and compelling as they are, is not of itself enough. A new

way of seeing and picturing authentic human sexuality has to be found.

Fortunately we do not have to do this from scratch: the rudiments of it are there in Pope John Paul II's magnificent *Theology of the Body*. But the reception of this teaching in the Catholic Church here has been disappointing, to put it mildly, enamoured as we still seem to be with the same tired slogans about the primacy of individual conscience and the need to adapt to today's mentality.

## Beyond Modernism: A Truly Catholic Renewal

**T**o conclude; the way we picture God's mercy and the way we imagine today's world are closely related. We do not know what sin is until we glimpse God's holiness. We have no idea of human misery unless we know we are destined for glory and communion with God and his saints. The works of Tolkien and Lewis frequently contrast the innocent world of the hobbits or the enchanted planet, with the world of Mordor or "that hideous strength."

But another connection the Catholic imagination needs to make is where the whole enterprise is going for us in England and Wales. The phrase "conversion of England" used to galvanise our energies, admittedly towards a goal that was rather narrowly conceived. We need a post-Vatican Two equivalent, something both truly Catholic and yet usable in our multicultural society, something that will get us out of the ghetto we are still largely in, but not in order to conform to middle-class culture, rather to call it to conversion, alongside Christians of other Churches moved by the same zeal.

We could do worse than begin with the call issued by the American bishops a few years ago to their people, in which they announced the aim of their evangelisation initiative as "to let every American know they are freely invited to join us in the fullness of Catholic faith". Orthodox Catholic belief, as Chesterton and countless others have stressed, is the reverse of boring: it has all the "Splendour of Truth", the excitement and adventure of exploring the countless riches hidden in Christ.

To invite others—all others—in our society to Christ and his Church is not coercion, manipulation, or spin; it is simply to invite them to awaken in heart and mind to what human beings are created for, since, as *Gaudium et Spes* tells us (no. 22), it is only Christ who fully reveals man to himself.

# PRAYER - LIKE IT IS

Delia Smith

*Morning by morning he wakens me to hear,  
to listen like a disciple.  
(Isaiah 50:4)*

There is a much-used modern phrase comprising five words: 'tell it like it is'. What it attempts to do is cut through the complexities of a subject and fast-track to the bare bones of what the truth really is.

The following is a humble attempt to try to tell prayer 'like it is', something that in truth is very simple and straightforward but tends to get sidestepped as somehow being beyond the realm of the ordinary person and something that requires special gifts. This is a subtle—albeit unintentional—evasion of the truth. So it's important to re-examine prayer from time to time and try to rediscover its enormous simplicity.

In the catechism prayer is described as lifting up the heart and mind to God. So in that sense we as Catholics are all praying—and that's good—but there's something that goes beyond this and that is making a strong commitment to spending a substantial amount of time alone in stillness and silence in the presence of God. In this sense it's when a person moves beyond being a committed Christian and a follower of Christ to becoming more of a full-blown disciple.

The dictionary describes a disciple as someone who is a 'personal' follower of Christ and the teaching of Vatican II claims that all are called to this: 'the highest reason for human dignity is our vocation to communion with God'. From the outset we (every human person) are invited to a close familiarity with God.

We only exist because God's love created us and continually sustains us. Nor do we live fully and truly unless we freely acknowledge that love and commit ourselves to Him. The question here is do we as individuals have that close familiarity? One thing is sure: that we were all called to this, to discipleship, to being a personal follower and to have a close familiarity.

We are told in the gospels that the disciple John was closest to Jesus, so it's not surprising that the fourth gospel, which was inspired by him, provides us with a blueprint of what that closeness actually is, not just

specifically during Jesus' lifetime but for 'all who accept him and believe in his name'. The word 'all' means us living here and now. In chapter six we hear the word 'all' again in these words from Jesus himself:

*'It is written in the prophets they will all be taught by God and to hear the teaching of the Father and to learn from it is to come to me'.*

No punches pulled here then. 'All' (us again) will be taught by God himself, and to hear his teaching and to learn is to come closer to Jesus. We may well feel that's a bit tricky 2000 years on, but later on in chapter fourteen Jesus explains that after his death and resurrection, in his risen life he will ascend to the Father but will send us his Spirit to be with us for ever.

The word used is advocate, from the Greek word *parakletos*—but a better modern word for this is counsellor or supporter. So this promise of being taught by God Himself continues for ever, and we can each have access to the Spirit, who not only counsels and supports us in this close familiarity but will himself teach us one-to-one and lead us in the fullness of truth.

Not much complexity here then, pretty simple really. Ours is not to reason how, but simply to believe in the promise 'to hear the teaching of the Father is to come to me' and to set about doing just that.

But first let's look at what's involved. How are we to 'come to him' and be close to him? The simplicity of this, as with everything in relation to God, is mirrored in ordinary human life. Is it possible to have a close familiar relationship with anyone if you don't spend time with that person? Of course not. An intimate relationship requires time and it can't in any way be time given while you are doing other things at the same time. There will have to be exclusive one-to-one time, because that's what being close to someone is all about.

The next very human part of this is that you may well not feel like it. No matter, it's not about how you feel and has

nothing to do with human feelings. You will be distracted because that's what the human mind is all about and you can't just switch it off. You may be bored, the time may drag and, yes, you may even nod off. But the important thing is that you are there for Him with all your human frailty. Which may seem a problem to you but isn't to Him. The important thing is you are doing what he asks over and over in the scriptures: come to me.

**W**hat will be happening in your very deepest being is beyond the mind and the intellect. You may well not be able to believe and trust that God is working, but that actually isn't important. He will be working and your trust will grow and very soon you will know.

Those who say oh, but that kind of prayer is not my thing are actually spot on. It's not anyone's thing—it's totally and utterly God's thing. The way he communicates himself to us in scripture is again very human—the tender loving father who runs out on the road to greet the son who abandoned him, or the besotted husband and lover who lures his unfaithful wife out into the desert to 'speak to her heart'.

God's thing is to give himself to us utterly, gradually and imperceptibly to heal our wounded lives, and through those who will receive him reach out to the broken world—like the leaven in the dough that gradually works its way right through. Of course there's nothing new here, we've all heard it a million and one times before, and it has been written about since time began, but the world is still in dire need of disciples who will 'come away' from the daily grind 'to a lonely place and rest awhile'.

**A**ll you need to do is make a strong commitment to give your time. Start with 20 minutes a day for a year and make a real commitment to this, then move on and give more time to this, the most important relationship you will ever have.

Discipleship involves two other ingredients—being close to the scriptures and receiving the Eucharist as often as possible. As Therese of Lisieux said: "expect nothing of yourself but everything of God" then you will not be disappointed and you will discover that he does indeed keep his promises.

## THE OFFICE OF PETER: THE TRUE VOICE OF PRACTICAL REASON

*Ven. John Henry Newman*

**D**eeply do I feel, ever will I protest, for I can appeal to the ample testimony of history to bear me out, that, in questions of right and wrong, there is nothing really strong in the whole world, nothing decisive and operative, but the voice of him, to whom have been committed the keys of the kingdom and the oversight of Christ's flock.

The voice of Peter is now, as it ever has been, a real authority, infallible when it teaches, prosperous when it commands, ever taking the lead wisely and distinctly in its own province, adding certainty to what is probable, and persuasion to what is certain. Before it speaks, the most saintly may mistake; and after it has spoken, the most gifted must obey.

**P**eter is no recluse, no abstracted student, no dreamer about the past, no doter upon the dead and gone, no projector of the visionary. Peter for eighteen hundred years has lived in the world; he has seen all fortunes, he has encountered all adversaries, he has shaped himself for all emergencies.

If there ever was a power on earth who had an eye for the times, who has confined himself to the practicable, and has been happy in his anticipations, whose words have been deeds, and whose commands prophecies, such is he in the history of ages, who sits from generation to generation in the Chair of the Apostles, as the Vicar of Christ and Doctor of His Church.

*From Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education,  
Discourse I, n. 211-12, 1852*

# THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

## RESPONDING TO PARISHIONERS WHO REQUEST SACRAMENTAL MINISTRY

Hugh MacKenzie

In the previous instalment of this feature Fr David Barrett offered some introductory thoughts about the increasingly frequent phenomenon of lapsed parishioners requesting sacramental reception. He highlighted how orthodoxy and gentle openness naturally go together in a priest's initial encounter with such members of our flock, who are probably innocently confused and genuinely searching. The further question is the conditions under which a priest actually ministers the sacraments to those who request them, but who, perhaps unwittingly, publicly exhibit a serious failure to practise the faith. This might be a failure to come to Sunday Mass, an irregular union or a public stance against definitive Church teaching. For a priest who wants to be faithful to Church teaching this can sometimes create a difficult dilemma.

We are not considering here those who simply present themselves for Holy Communion while in such states of life. This is also an increasingly frequent phenomenon, whether on a Sunday, at a funeral or at a school Mass, but it needs a separate reflection from the current one. Neither will we be discussing here questions about giving sacramental absolution in the confessional.

The sort of challenges for parish priests which we are envisaging include the request for baptism of a baby from parents who come infrequently or hardly at all to Church; for confirmation from baptized teenagers who do not seem to be coming to Mass; for marriage from a couple who give the same address on the pre-nuptial enquiry form; for reception into the Church from those in irregular relationships; for the anointing of the sick from a housebound person whose situation may have been irregular at some point - perhaps well in the past.

As David Barrett highlights, priests are often encouraged by the fact of the person's approaching them in the first place, while at the same time being saddened by any lack of "proper disposition". They hope that their ministrations will provide occasions for the Holy Spirit to strengthen struggling consciences and eventually elicit a wise, grace-filled response. They therefore need to hold together those profoundly complimentary virtues of faithfulness and compassion.

Below we offer some general considerations for responding to such apparent dilemmas. In future columns we will consider in more detail some of the specific sacraments which are touched on in this regard.

### Basic Canonical Principles

Canon 843 states that "Sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them." "Proper disposition" envisages subtly different things for each sacrament, though proper "instruction" is required for all. Candidates for adult baptism "should be tested in the Christian life over the course of the catechumenate" (Can 865). Confirmation of adults who request it should only be deferred for a "grave reason" (Can. 889). Those to receive anointing and holy communion must not be "obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin." (Can. 1007 & 863).

In our tradition, this last phrase seems to encapsulate the minimum condition for sacramental reception which does not publicly undermine incorporation into and building up of the Mystical Body of Christ. The state of "manifest grave sin" involves doing or teaching something seriously wrong in the 'public forum'. "Obstinately persevering" would seem to imply continuing in this state even after having receiving the mandated "proper instruction". This means then that priests should not administer sacraments (save possibly for marriage) to those who, having received a catechesis which has coherently called for appropriate conversion, persevere in a public state of life which seriously contradicts Catholic teaching.

It should be noted here that what is not envisaged in Canon Law is turning a blind eye to the issue of sacramental reception by those without a "proper disposition". The hope for healing and conversion is presumed, as is the priest's responsibility to pass on Christ's call to deeper faith and growth in holiness. For this goes to the heart of our faith and Christ's work for us.

### Basic Pastoral Principles

But what does this mean in parish practice? David Barrett established that this does not involve presenting the lapsed who request a sacrament with an "ultimatum". After all God could treat us that way, but fortunately for all of us, he does not. This surely also applies to those who are in an objective, public state of "grave sin" not because of missing Sunday Mass but because of their marital state or political actions. Clearly such parishioners have a right, often denied them, to integral Catholic catechesis. Their parish priest should do his best to find an appropriate way of convincingly communicating the Church's teaching to them. But once they have received such catechesis, a

manifest failure in conversion of life may be a reason to delay sacramental reception. This would imply a three step generic process, more or less appropriate to a particular parishioner who approaches their priest without being properly disposed.

## 1. Catechesis

**W**e should hope to have a background of parochial preaching and teaching which attempts, over time, to inform parishioners about the obligations of Church teaching and discipline. Beyond this we have immediate sacramental preparation, which may be done in groups or individually, briefly or at length, according to circumstances and the availability of resources.

Those who might appear not to have the required disposition should be advised - as sensitively as possible - of the conversion that is implied by their desire to receive a sacrament. This could be contextualized by some or all of the following considerations, as appropriate:

- by bringing them to this point, God has placed the parishioner in an exciting and important place in his work of healing and giving life. They are on the front line!
- on the other hand, scandal and even sacrilege can result from entering the sacramental life while taking this call lightly.
- we are aware of the confusion and ignorance out there 'on the street', and even 'in the pew' and now want to offer the support and clarity of teaching which God's people have a right to receive as well as a duty to seek.

Sometimes such catechesis are better done in a group, sometimes individually. If resources, time or the ability of a candidate to attend preparation sessions are limited, catechetical preparation may have to be correspondingly limited. But at least a bare minimum should be done to announce the Good News, perhaps with the help of reading material and other suggested follow up. The new Catholic Truth Society leaflets, for instance, cover: "Why we should go to Sunday Mass", "Examination of Conscience" and numerous issues surrounding marriage, such as cohabiting. They are well presented in terms of content and accessibility. Of necessity, the preparation might end up being the barest minimum of one brief meeting. So be it; we must trust in God, but we must also pass on the call of Christ to "repent and believe" as best we can.

## 2. Discernment

**H**aving made such a call, we would hope to be attentive to manifest signs of conversion. However a lack of their immediate appearance cannot necessarily

justify presumption of a failure to change. Such a negative judgment should, at the very least, only follow discernment of the canonical "obstinate perseverance in manifest grave sin". In the case of adult Baptism something more may be hoped for from the "test(ing) ... catechumenate". Intrusive questioning is not usually justified - at least outside the confessional. The discernment called for by canonical requirements does not imply any judgment of personal culpability, nor of private behaviour. It is based on reasonable judgment of objective behaviour in the external forum.

The period between catechesis and sacramental reception ought to allow a person time for conversion. But in practice it may not allow a reasonable period for the manifestation of signs of such conversion. Sacramental celebration is usually envisaged fairly soon after the course of preparation for infant baptism, confirmation and marriage programmes (again it is not necessarily so normal in the case for adult baptism). This short time-scale does not of itself justify delaying reception of the sacrament. Good faith must often be presumed, as we do with most of our congregation most of the time, however in reality, much this might be 'hoping against hope' in our increasingly secularised context. And further down the line more communication and catechesis may well be possible, indeed highly desirable.

In situations such as irregular marriage states, for which objective action on the part of the priest is required, some form of delay will probably be called for. Someone in the process of becoming a Catholic may need to sort out their marital situation. Such would be one of the few binding reasons for delay. Gently encouraging unmarried parents of infant candidates for baptism to "sort things out" is to be hoped for, but delaying the service until this has happened is certainly not called for. It is arguable that if they have received the catechesis outlined above, then it is possible to have a "founded hope" (Canon 868) concerning the promise they make during the baptismal rite: "We clearly understand what we are undertaking". Only obstinate and manifest lack of proper marital, political or ecclesial disposition needs to be respectfully challenged with the threat of delay.

## 3. Decision

**T**HE POSITIVE DECISION to administer a sacrament is always a generous one in any circumstances, for every sacrament is an undeserved gift of God.

In reality there are often disappointments for the pastor. Many *confirmandi* and engaged couples do not start to fulfil their grave obligation to come to Sunday Mass after the actual reception of the sacrament. In effect they maintain some form of private mental reservation, more

or less culpably, about the catechesis received. If such lack of belief during preparation and subsequent lack of practice is public knowledge, then scandal may indeed result. As mentioned above, this can and perhaps should be addressed during catechesis, but the risk of such scandal itself - even if significant - cannot be a reason for denying the right to the sacraments to a Catholic who has not been proved to be Canonically obstinate.

But there will be some who respond. Some will go to confession and try to live in an integrally Catholic life, up to reception of the sacrament. For example some engaged couples will try living as brother and sister up to the time of their marriage. Suddenly starting to live apart may not be realistically practical. If really necessary, in order to avoid scandal, the possibility of holding back from communion in the place where they are well known, even after a good confession, could be proposed as a more practical solution which is less likely to cause friction than asking the couple to live apart.

**THE NEGATIVE DECISION** to delay (i.e. temporarily refuse) a sacrament, including holy communion, always remains an option for the pastor. This should probably be combined with the offer of some form of further

catechesis. The parishioner concerned would be strongly encouraged to keep coming to Mass and to be part of the community in other ways. The venerable tradition of making a spiritual communion would be highlighted. (We plan to have an article on this practice in an upcoming issue).

This option should not be presented as a punishment, but as a way of moving forward, a way of participating in the Cross of Christ for our own good and for the good of our suffering world. None of us are perfect. We are all called to move forward gradually in different ways. It follows from the nature of Holy Communion - and analogously of the other sacraments - as a public manifestation of the union and communion of the Church that sometimes people must hold back from receiving it for varying reasons. This situation should not be seen in wholly negative terms, but as a call from God to begin an important work of conversion for Him, bringing healing to the world. It should always be undertaken in a spirit of trust that God can and will find a way forward for the individual in His - and in the individual's - good time.

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# A MOTHER'S DIARY.....

..... FIORELLA NASH

It is amazing the things one remembers during moments of extreme stress. I must have been about nine years old when our parish priest preached a homily in which he quoted a pregnant parishioner as saying: "Father, you really must be present one day at the birth of a baby" childbirth is the most beautiful experience." I was fairly sceptical about the idea even as a child: as a woman in the early stages of labour I was pretty certain that if anyone had dared suggest to me that childbirth was a beautiful experience, I would have used my remaining strength to drown them in the birth pool.

"Don't worry," said the midwife, as I trembled at the sound of a woman screaming blue murder in the room next door. "It's almost over for her and soon it will be over for you." I knew what she meant, but could have been convinced that this meant the woman was dying. Ten minutes later I was lying on a bed in the labour ward attached to various evil-looking machines; at least I was informed that it was the labour ward but I felt more as though I had been bundled into a torture chamber. As most of my female acquaintances appear to have had no difficulty with labour I feel like a wimp admitting to this, but giving birth was one of the most horrific experiences of my entire life.

I would have to be a masochist to pretend that that agonising, terrifying twenty-four hour nightmare was beautiful. I do not feel a warm glow when I remember sweating profusely, vomiting with the effects of the inadequate pain-killing drugs and screaming with pain so loudly and so often that by the morning I could barely speak. Little Hugh Ambrose had managed to manoeuvre himself into such an awkward position that the back of his head battered against the base of my spine with every contraction, making me feel as though someone was smashing my vertebrae with a hammer whilst some other invisible assailant kicked me in the stomach with hobnailed boots.

I screamed and pleaded with the midwife for pain control but was told first that it was just coming, then that there was no anaesthetist available, then finally that I was too far gone for an epidural and would have to deliver my baby without any pain control at all except for the gas that was making me sick. By the time the obstetrician intervened and began arranging a spinal anaesthesia I was almost in a trance and barely took in the explanation that the baby could not be safely delivered naturally. I signed the consent form for an emergency caesarean without reading a single word, knowing only that it presented the only chance of my baby being born alive.

The messages I received throughout my pregnancy, in literature, at classes and even from friends' anecdotes, was that childbirth should be kept "natural" It's all right to treat pregnancy

like an embarrassing disease, but childbirth has been built up to be some kind of quasi-mystical experience that might be ruined if the naughty men with their machines and drugs are allowed to interfere. Sorry to rain on the parade, but let's hear it for the medicalisation of childbirth.

Yes, it is a natural experience encountered by millions and millions of women throughout history - but it is worth remembering that many have also died for want of the basic medical care that some in the West fondly imagine we can do without. If I had given birth in a developing country where the medicalisation of childbirth is a distant dream, my baby would have died during the delivery and I would have died a few days later from the postnatal infection I contracted, leaving my husband a widower at twenty-four-years-old, less than a year after our marriage. Fortunately, I gave birth in Cambridge in 2006 and the story ended happily. Just after 11pm on 20th April, a 9lb baby boy was dragged into the world and placed in my arms. I knew he was mine when I looked down at him and, in spite of being fast asleep and the picture of innocence, he still managed to look slightly cross. My son. Hugh Ambrose, my son.



Three weeks later, Hugh Ambrose and I felt strong enough to attend a postnatal group recommended by the health visitor. I quite enjoyed the occasion. A nice lady brought me a cup of tea and I sat in smug serenity whilst my baby slept peacefully in my arms and everyone else's created merry hell. No one needed to know that he had kept me and most of Chesterton Road awake the night before wailing his little heart out or that he had spent the previous evening providing the postmodernist soundtrack to Fr Finigan's talk on Atheism and Richard Dawkins. Then we were instructed to jot down words on the subject of sleep and what it means to us, which was rather below the belt as none of us had had a wink of sleep in at least a month. However, we obligingly started writing down words like "rest" and "peace", fondly recalling a time when it was possible to sink one's head into the pillow without having to move it again until daylight. Oh sleep, it is a gentle thing! Either it is the effects of the happy hormone released during breastfeeding or I have finally reached the loopy phase of sleep deprivation, but the broken nights do not feel nearly as nightmarish as I had imagined they would be. Sleep is over rated.

## letters to the editor

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### EFFECTS OF THE DA VINCI CODE

*Dear Father Editor*

Thank you for last month's excellent *Da Vinci Code* editorial. It resonated with some of my own experiences as a teacher of RE in secondary schools. You well bring out how it is that educators in Catholic schools may well unwittingly foster *The Da Vinci Code's* anti-Catholic suggestions. My experience is that this relativising process is indeed far advanced. So many of my pupils seem already thoroughly indoctrinated in the convictions that every historical fact prior to the advent of video cameras and mobile phones is worthy of suspicion. Such minds can dismiss the Gospel as old-fashioned irrational superstition, while simultaneously holding illogical positions presented by a shoddily researched fictional novel.

Many seem to have succumbed to the temptation of C.S. Lewis' diabolical Uncle Screwtape, "Give him a grand general idea that he knows it all and that everything he happens to have picked up in casual talk and reading is 'the results of modern investigation'". As you rightly point out, the Church is no stranger to safeguarding the faithful from attacks on the divinity of Christ, even since the early days of the Gnostics and Arius. "Same heresy, different packaging"—as my former parish priest was fond of saying.

Ah well, at least God can bring good out of evil. The way in which various groups within the Church, the Faith Movement amongst them,

have responded to *The Da Vinci Code* is commendable. Yet, as you well bring out, without a new well-founded apologetic the urgently needed 'new evangelization' is a very uphill task. St. Paul predicted this in his letter to Timothy, "For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths." (2 Timothy 4: 3-4)

*Yours faithfully,*

*Christopher Wotherspoon  
Clark Street,  
Stirling*

### PROBLEMS EXPLAINING THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON THE MARITAL ACT

*Dear Father Editor,*

In your last issue John Gallagher wrote a letter replying to my article on sexual morality and the 'Perverted Faculty' Argument. Mr Gallagher's comments referred to Prof Germain Grisez and the is/ought controversy, a topic that goes to the heart of the contemporary debate about Natural Law. I would like to start by acknowledging that Grisez (and presumably Mr Gallagher) defends the conclusions of the Church's Magisterium. However, I believe Grisez does so using an inadequate and overly legalistic moral system.

Mr Gallagher refers to the is/ought question, ie. the notion that an ethicist cannot start his reasoning from what the world 'is' like (and, in particular, what human nature 'is' like) and deduce what a person 'ought' to do. However, Mr Gallagher does not mention the historical origin of the is/ought divorce: It was a thesis proposed by the sceptic philosopher David Hume. Grisez *et al* therefore have

an unusual ally in siding themselves with Hume. (Mr Gallagher disputes my use of St Thomas, however, I would note that Grisez himself now states that his thought is not St Thomas's.)

Accepting the Humean is/ought divorce has serious and detrimental consequences. If Grisez is correct, and moral reasoning about sexual morality cannot be based on human nature, then moral reasoning can only be based on Grisez's 'goods'. Grisez's 'goods' are said to be self-evident. However, as has been frequently observed by Grisez's critics, the 'goods' on his list seem to have been chosen arbitrarily. The choice is arbitrary because there is no appeal that can be made other than to say that they are self-evident. (This arbitrariness is all the more significant when it is claimed that they can never be sacrificed.) Further, Grisez's list of self-evident goods has increased in number, indicating that what they are is not self-evident even to him. Thus Grisez's system seems inadequate. However, perhaps more significantly, the separation of morality from human nature means that his 'goods' have no clear connection with the human person.

In contrast, the system that Janet Smith (and traditional Natural Law theorists) proposes bases Natural Law (at least in part) on human nature. In addition, traditional Natural Law theorists hold that part of the way human nature is discovered is by examining the processes and purposes of the body. This therefore proposes the 'ought' of the moral law to man as something that is tied to what he 'is'; not just a law outside of him.

Mr Gallagher says that Grisez's approach is 'appealing', and he is certainly entitled to think this. However, in my opinion, the arbitrariness of Grisez's goods makes the moral deductions from them hopelessly legalistic and very un-'appealing'. It seems to me

that this legalism is a necessary consequence of having divorced reason and law from the body, and thus divorced reason and law from the person. In contrast, I find Janet Smith's argumentation 'appealing' because she roots her opposition to contraception in the nature of the body and the person. I'd suggest that this is why she (and not Grisez) is being used by NFP courses across the USA.

Finally, I would note that Edward Holloway's synthesis includes a moral vision that rejects Hume's Law. Evolution clearly manifests a notion of the body that is purposeful and bodily organs that are purposeful (as my article argued). Accepting Hume's Law would deprive the Faith Movement's moral vision of its connection to these truths that science and evolution can demonstrate to us.

Nonetheless, I wish to conclude by re-iterating my opening comment that Grisez's argument is offered to defend the teaching of the Church. If people find his argument convincing, then let them be convinced—what we want is for more people to be convinced!

Fr Dylan James  
Casa Santa Maria,  
Rome

Dear Fr. Editor,

Re: "Confusion Over the Meanings of Marriage" (Editorial, March 06). Unnecessary difficulty will arise in this debate if one fails to distinguish between the meanings of marriage (and of the conjugal act), on the one hand, and the ends of marriage itself on the other. The Church's magisterium (in the Code of 1983, confirmed by the 1994 Catechism) has certainly proposed a new formulation of these ends: "the well being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children" (c. 1055; CCC no. 2363). ["well-being" is not a very

satisfactory rendering of the Latin original, *bonum coniugum*—the good of the spouses]. Certainly nothing in the magisterium countenances interpreting the "good of the spouses" in terms of "getting on well together" and less still of having a subjective experience of love. During my years at the Rota and ever since I have constantly sought to indicate the biblical roots of this new phrase ("it is not good for man—or woman—to be alone": Gen 2:18), and suggested that the true *bonum coniugum*, as an end of marriage, consists in the maturing of the spouses in their objective capacity to live dedicated love; i.e. preparing them for heaven, through the generous and mutual giving of themselves. In essence it has nothing to do with "feelings of love", and can only be the result of committed love.

In a 1999 address, John Paul II stressed that "a vague feeling or even a strong psycho-physical attraction" cannot be confused with "real love for another person, which consists of a sincere desire for his or her welfare and is expressed in a concrete commitment to achieve it". He went on, "This is the clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council, but it is also one of the reasons why the two Codes of Canon Law, Latin and Eastern, promulgated by me, declared and set forth the *bonum coniugum* as also a natural end of marriage" (Address to the Roman Rota of Jan 21, 1999).

In my opinion, to speak of "the unitive end of marriage" is to depart from and obscure the real meaning and intention of the new term introduced by the magisterium. No less importantly, a careless use of terms can equally obscure the application of the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. The central principle laid down there of "the inseparable connection... between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning" (HV 12), has in itself no

bearing on the issue of the ends of marriage or of any possible hierarchy between those ends.

However, just as *Humanae Vitae* insists on the inseparability of the two meanings of the marital act, I think the Church is asking us to grasp and insist on the inseparability or necessary connection between the two ends of marriage itself; in other words how the true good of the spouses is tied up with their openness to children, and cannot be achieved without such openness. I hold that it is not a possible restoration of a hierarchy between the ends of marriage, but a better grasp of their nature and their necessary interconnection, that can provide the most effective arguments against the current denaturalizing of marriage itself and of the marital act.

Contraceptive sex, oral or anal sex, *coitus interruptus*, sex with the use of condoms... do not constitute a true sexual act of union at all. And their intrinsic immorality derives not only from their contraceptive purpose (if that is there), but also from their violation of the essential nature of sexual intercourse as an act of union between the spouses.

An individual spouse may not have an anti-procreative intention if a condom is used for the sole purpose of protection against HIV infection. But the condom renders the act anti-unitive in physical and anthropological fact. The unitive nature of the act is totally nullified, and the "inseparable connection" between the two aspects of the act is broken—if not on the side of procreative intent, certainly on that of unitive nature. By such an act the spouses are not "made one", for it is simply not an act of marital union at all. The mutual dedication and belonging of the spouses, instead of being affirmed by such an act, are denied.

In a brief reply I cannot expound all the reasons for these opinions—which I have maintained in many

publications over the past decades, e.g. "Marriage: a personalist or an institutional understanding?" (*Communio* 19 (1992)); "Procreativity and the Conjugal Self-Gift" (*Studia canonica* 24 (1990)); in chapter seven ("Marriage and Contraception") of *Covenanted Happiness*; "Married Personalism and the 'Good of the Spouses'" (*Angelicum* 75 (1998)); "Marriage: Commitment or Experiment?" (*Linacre Quarterly* 63 (1996)). These and others can be found on my website at [www.cormacburke.or.ke](http://www.cormacburke.or.ke)

Yours Faithfully

Fr Cormac Burke  
Lavington,  
Nairobi, Kenya

#### HUMANAE VITAE INFALLIBLE?

Dear Father Editor,

Fr. Holloway's 1974 view that *Humanae Vitae* was "an *ex cathedra* statement" (May issue) is now obsolete, because Canon 749 para 3 makes it clear that a doctrine may not be "understood to be infallibly defined unless this is manifestly demonstrated". It is exactly because, in spite of the widespread, nearly four decades' opposition to the Encyclical—a "sheer heresy" to use Fr. Holloway's phrase, no bishop or pope came up with a claim that it was an *ex cathedra* statement, that one cannot claim that the doctrine was manifestly defined.

The view is not unique, however: it was held for *Casti Connubii* by some manualists before the Second Vatican Council (Ford and Grisez: "Contraception and Infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium", *Theological Studies*, 1978, 39, 258-312; they examined 41 "most used manuals").

This, of course, doesn't mean that the doctrine has not been infallibly proposed, but only that it was not proposed in the form of definition. Ford and Grisez (*ibid.*)

maintain that "there is an extremely strong case for the position that the received Catholic teaching on the immorality of contraception has been infallibly proposed by the ordinary magisterium." Strangely enough, that was the view put forward before them by Hans Kung in his book *Infallible? An Enquiry*, 1970 (English translation, 1971). They all agree that the doctrine meets criteria laid down by the Second Vatican Council (Lumen Gentium, 25/2); the only difference being that to Kung the latter is the "Roman" doctrine of infallibility, "not necessarily" the "Catholic doctrine" (*ibid.* 51-52).

Fr. Holloway is preoccupied with laying down his own criteria for a definition, but overlooks the key assertion of *Humanae Vitae*, which Küng brings to the reader's attention. Referring to the findings of the Commission the Pope feels obliged to take the matter in his own hands, particularly because:

...certain approaches and criteria... emerged which were at variance with the moral doctrines on marriage constantly taught by the Magisterium of the Church. (6)

Kung comments: "That explains it" (42). The Pope refers to the constant teaching again in sections 10, 11 and 25; thus reiterating similar statements in *Casti Connubii* (56, CTS edition), and Pius XII's address to midwives (24, 25, CTS edition).

Yours Faithfully

M. Skarpa  
Hawes Road, Bromley

#### ANTI-LIFE CULTURE EXPERIENCES

Dear Father Editor,

Might I highlight a grotesque machine currently on display in the London Science Museum

(see below). Called a "Euthanasia Machine", it killed four people in Australia while Euthanasia was legal there. The procedure was for the victims to answer 'Yes' to a sequence of questions on the laptop, after which the kit in the box on the left did the deed.

This is described on the big red board behind the display, which goes on to tell you that while Euthanasia was subsequently made illegal in Australia, it is now being brought in in various countries around the world, the implication being that these are enlightened countries. The display is ideally positioned for children to see (my son's hair is visible at bottom left). The Science Museum doing its bit for the Culture of Death.

Yours sincerely,

Giles Rowe,  
Fernside Rd, London



Dear Father Editor,

I read with interest Fiorella Nash's article on her experience of pregnancy (March issue), and it is one that I empathise with, having just celebrated the birth of 'Benedict Zachary' on 19th March. My husband and I were shocked by the promotion of abortion and

the tests for “abnormalities” that followed the positive pregnancy result. As was the case with Fiorella, the paperwork painted a moribund picture of modern ‘healthcare’, saddled as it is with bureaucracy and the mentality that separates freedom from truth (tests recommended for HIV, leaflets about how a termination can be arranged, the test for Down’s Syndrome etc). Happily the bedside manner has not been totally lost. Our experience of ‘care’ suggested that everyone was quite aware that I had a baby inside me and not a “bundle of cells”.

At the 12 week scan we were astounded by the level of detail that you can see, i.e. a fully formed baby in miniature, and we were able to share our scan pictures with friends and family who were not pro-life. One of my friends was notably shocked when she heard that abortion still has an upper limit of 24 weeks in the UK. Our 20 week scan was even more extraordinary in detail, showing all the chambers of the heart and the flow of blood around major organs. And as Fiorella writes, when you are pregnant it is impossible to ignore the humanity that is growing inside of you.

Now that our baby has arrived I can confirm that the elements of personality that we were aware of when he was *in utero* are very much in evidence. Science is beginning to reveal what the Church has so vehemently taught that life begins at conception and if there is any doubt it is better to err on the side of life.

*Yours faithfully,*

*Marie-Therese and John Gramstadt,  
Lovelace Gardens,  
Surbiton, Surrey*

## EVOLUTION AND CREATION

*Dear Fr Editor,*

Evangelical Creationists, I believe, cannot accept the theory of

evolution because it appears to conflict with Genesis 1. Catholics do not normally take such a literalist approach to the Bible, so I wonder if those of us who do oppose evolution do so because it appears to make us the end product of millions of years of random events? If so, surely they forget that God is in His divine nature completely transcendent to the space-time universe.

Suppose it could be shown from past letters that my father met my mother because he missed his train, and so caught the one on which he found this beautiful young woman sitting; suppose, further, that a super-computer could show that some of my genes can be traced back to a small creature scrabbling about in the Triassic mud. My birth would appear to be the result of pure accident. Yet I am sure that even so, God knew me, loved me, and willed me into being from all eternity.

We get into difficulties, perhaps, if we think of someone whose birth was due, let us say, to rape. Yet even so, God does not will the sin, but he does will and love the baby. Yes, that is difficult to take in; but then, as I said, God is completely beyond creation and his mind cannot be totally fathomed.

To believe that men and women are the end result of a process of evolution is not to deny that at some point God had to endow them with a spiritual soul, although it would be fruitless to discuss, or even to speculate on, how and when this happened.

Incidentally, man cannot have been originally intended to remain on this earth if he had never sinned. The earth is getting overcrowded now—what would it have been like if no one had ever died?

As for original sin, to see that we are a fallen race, one has only to open any newspaper. As to how it started, the new Catechism says that the account of the Fall in

Genesis uses figurative language, but it does affirm a primeval event (309). It also says (388) that we must know Christ as the source of grace in order to know Adam as the source of sin.

Sin is a mystery in the fullest theological meaning of that term, the ‘*mysterium iniquitatis*’, and we cannot expect fully to understand how, so to say, we as humans can stand outside God’s will. That we can and do is a fact of daily experience, in my own life as in that of others. That is where the story of redemption starts—‘*O felix culpa!*’ And it is a story which never ends, until God has gathered all the Redeemed into his heavenly Kingdom.

*Yours faithfully,*

*Dom Aldhelm Cameron-Brown OSB,  
Prinknash Abbey,  
Gloucester*

## THE ROLE OF MEN

*Dear Fr Editor,*

One of the ways in which some clergy are out of touch today is in their attitude to lay men. Far too many have imbibed the modern Feminist canard that women are usually good and men are usually bad.

Your publication of the not terribly inspired poem *Woman in a Church* is, perhaps, an example of such a view. The poem calls her sex “graceful” and her spouse “faithless”. This is an all too typically unfair caricature and yet such caricatures often pass without comment in our increasingly Feminist world.

In my many years of practice in the Family Courts in this country (and it is not very different in other countries) my experience has been that the behaviour of all too many women, Catholics included, has not been graceful but rather disgraceful. On the other hand, the courts

have shown a tendency to oppress men, not least faithful husbands and to reward the often disgraceful conduct of too many thoroughly badly-behaved women. Too many decent men have been crushed and destroyed by a Feminist bias in our family courts. Innocent children and other women have also been left victims of this Feminist bias.

This is the result of years of Feminism and of the support of Feminism by people who ought to know better. That, alas, includes not a few clergy.

Feminism is a scourge that has cut a huge swathe through the lives of millions of families causing damage and lasting wounds, all too often of a most crushing and painful kind. Feminism's violent legacy is also a chief driver behind the abortion holocaust that has deprived so many millions upon millions of unborn children of their tiny, innocent lives. Feminism also harms women: one of its pernicious effects in law and society has been to put a lot of men off marriage to the detriment of many good young women who would like to find a good husband to marry.

Another false assumption is that because one often finds more women than men in church that women must therefore be more holy. This is false logic on a number of heads. First, one may attend a church without necessarily having come even close to following the precepts of the Church, let alone obtaining holiness. Plenty of people attend church regularly whilst dissenting from primary teachings of the Church. Going through the motions of attending a church and even set devotions is no guarantee of holiness: one must participate with the heart not go through the motions.

Secondly, so much of modern liturgy has been "feminised" and the introduction of female altar servers has sometimes had the effect of putting off boys from service at

the altar. Liturgy has often become shallow, mawkish and glib so that it appears more like a children's party than an attempt to worship God with real sincerity and depth. That is more likely to put men off than women who perhaps may enjoy children's parties more than men.

The Feminist sport of deriding and sniping at men seems to have taken on a life of its own and is by no means minimised by the media, by advertisers, by politicians and pundits and even by the clergy. It is a constant backdrop to many a discussion on TV and radio.

None of this must be taken as detracting from the fine example of the many very wonderful and faithful women in the Church today. Nevertheless, the time is long overdue to redress the Feminist bias against men. It is harming us all.

That too many clergy seem unaware of this problem is a classic example of being out of touch. How about a poem to celebrate the unsung heroism of many a hard-working, devout father in our increasingly Feminist world? God is a father. The priest is a father. But the layman who is a father has become a neglected figure in church and society and, in some cases, a derided figure or even, in some really perverse modern representations, a hate-figure. This cannot but be highly destructive.

Please—a little less Feminism, my fathers. Feminism is the enemy of love and we are already saturated enough in its vengeful legacy.

*Yours sincerely,*

*James Bogle  
The Inner Temple*

#### EDITORIAL COMMENT

*Pieces published in the magazine reflect the opinions of the authors, not necessarily the editorial line. We would concur with Mr Bogle about the excesses of feminism, as we expect would the poem's*

*author, given its traditional familial focus. In fairness to the author, the word used to describe the imagined spouse is "faithless" not "unfaithful", with the connotation of non-Christian or non-practising rather than adulterous.*

#### ORATORY SCHOOL'S GEOGRAPHICAL AND ECCLESIAL POSITION

*Dear Father Editor,*

As the Chaplain to the Oratory School, I was both interested and delighted to read Fr Andrew Byrne's review of Paul Shrimpton's book *The Catholic Eton*. Just for the record, I wanted to make it clear that the present location of the school is not the one mentioned in the review. The school left its site in Berkshire in 1941 and that building now serves as the overseas broadcasting HQ of the BBC. The Oratory School is located at Woodcote, in South Oxfordshire—though the postcode is a Reading one! We have been here since 1942.

I am both pleased and proud to be able to report that John Henry Newman's vision still daily inspires the religious and academic inspiration of this school of 400 boys. We have a large percentage of non-Catholics but the ethos and worship of the school remains solidly Catholic. Information also indicates that we are now the only independent, single-sex boys school of Catholic identity anywhere in the country.

*Yours faithfully,*

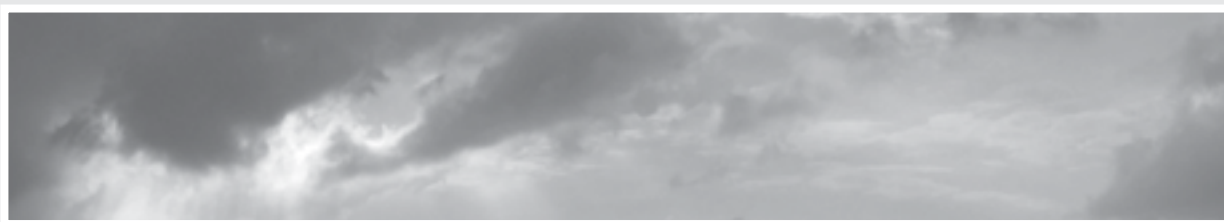
*Fr Antony Conlon  
Chaplain to the Oratory School and  
the Oratory Preparatory School,  
Woodcote, Oxon.*

## BE STILL AND KNOW ...

**W**e have many opportunities to sense the power of God in nature. When the great thunderstorms roll up, and the lightning splits the sky above us, with thunder like the crack of doom, when flash follows flash, and explosion follows explosion, each one mightier than the last, and the wind rises with increasing violence—in our hearts is the whisper, “How much fiercer will it get, how much stronger can it get; is there a limit to this awful display of power?” And we do not know if there is a limit, but we know we are utterly helpless to stop or change it. But God is over all. Here we can feel our smallness and helplessness before God. Here all our illusions of strength and sufficiency wither, wilt, and vanish in the realization of our nothingness. “What is man that Thou shouldst heed him?”

But let us stand also in a field of maize in flower, watching the sheen of sunlight on the leaves and the nodding tassels, remembering how, four days after we planted the grain, the soft green feathers pushed through the soil. Here is life, here is something far beyond our greatest achievements. Here is a mystery we do not understand. The more we know about it, the greater is the mystery. As we stand there we realize how the roots are drawing water and nutrients from the soil; how countless micro-organisms are preparing those nutrients from the tissues of other dead plants; how the leaves are taking carbon from the air and manufacturing starch and sugar and cellulose and vitamins; how tiny things so small that no one has seen them yet, passed on from parent to progeny, are controlling the ability of the plant to do this. The more we realize all this, the more keenly we are aware of this mystery, the deeper we have pursued knowledge of these things, the greater must be our wonder and humility before the mystery of life.

Here all our pride of achievement and understanding dwindles to nothingness in the perception of a vital force, a wisdom that surrounds us, with the unspoken words I AM. “I cannot believe in miracles,” said a young man once to a woman who was preparing vegetables for cooking. She cut a cabbage in half and showed it to him, with all the pattern of the folded leaves, and asked, “Have you ever tried to make a cabbage?”



**A** young child believes in miracles as a natural or normal part of life, because it sees the miracle in everything. And in that seeing, that seeing of miracles, to which our older eyes have become dim, the child is very near to God. Verily, unless we become as a little child, we cannot see the kingdom of God. Let us beware then of doing anything that can pull any child away from its vision, away from God. If ever we find that we have no time for the children, that we are too busy to talk to them, or too tired, let us consider well what is that business we are about—is it really more vital than to share time with a child, is it really more our Father’s business?

It takes much less than a thunderstorm or a field of growing corn to make a child stand in wonder before God. Who has not seen a child transfixed with wonder at a butterfly, a beetle, or a mouse nest in the grass? And a corn plant, or a stalk of kafir, or a tall flowering reed is a thing to be carried aloft and waved in the sky: it is a banner, a torch, a lantern. If we can capture some of this childlike astonishment, we shall learn more of the Kingdom. Let us not make the mistake of capitalist civilization by considering our human business the sum of life. This error is responsible for who knows how much need, how much starvation of soul, how much lack of light.

“It is good to be busy,” writes Silesius, “and better to pray, but far better to stand mute and still before your God.” This the poets have always sung, and this is the task and meaning of poetry: to represent values other than those that can be measured in work done or profit gained. But there must be work, too. Both activity and contemplation are part of true living. Augustine says, “One may not be so given to contemplation that he forgets the good of his neighbor, nor so much in love with action that he forgets divine speculation.”

*Philip Britts*

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# comment

## ON THE c o m m e n t s



by William Oddie

COMMENT ON THE COMMENTS

It had to be the lead story that week. The Catholic Herald reported it fairly straight, giving the bare facts with what seemed at first (and still seems to most) the inevitable conclusion: 'Pope Benedict XVI has told the 86 year old founder of the Legionaries of Christ, one of the Church's most dynamic new orders, to stop saying Mass in public following an investigation into charges of sexual abuse. Fr Marcial Maciel Degollado—who is regarded by his conservative followers as a living saint—will now spend his twilight years in disgrace.' The next paragraph drove home the agonising dilemma facing the followers of a movement which has always been profoundly loyal to the papacy, most of whom were undoubtedly hoping for the election of Joseph Ratzinger as Pope John Paul's successor: 'The Vatican ruling, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, indicates that the Pope accepts that there is substance to the charges against Fr Maciel, some of which date back to the 1940s.'

There is, of course, an undertow to this story, which has to do with that word 'conservative'; in some Catholic papers, though not, these days, *The Catholic Herald*, it has been over recent years almost a term of abuse. One very holy old *Opus Dei* priest told me he never used it. 'What do you say instead?' I asked; 'Oh, just "faithful".' I know what he meant; but it does not avoid the polemical problem, merely moves it around.

There can be little doubt that in the Degollado case, the cause of 'conservatism' and of faithfulness to the Church's Magisterium has sustained a major blow, though not

one from which it will not already have recovered by the time you read these words. But papers like the *American National Catholic Reporter* (which has been on the warpath against Fr Degollado for years) have undoubtedly seen this not simply as a vindication of their stance in that particular battle, but as a victory in their general campaign against the way authority is exercised in the Church, and in particular against Pope John Paul II and his legacy.

Their very long editorial on the Vatican's announcement about the future of Fr Degollado began, almost ostentatiously, more in sadness than in anger, professing the paper's 'sincere sorrow to members of the Legion.' The paper continued: 'We know all too well how we have pressed for judicial proceedings against Maciel on these pages, convinced that the truth would not be served unless the victims were given full and fair hearing at the highest levels of the Church... That said, we know that those differences notwithstanding, we all profess the same faith, and we love and claim membership in the same Catholic community. No division, then, is deep or wide enough to prevent a sincere expression of our concern for those who have dedicated their lives to the mission of the church and who now have to deal with the news of the Vatican finding.' The paper even seems to express some understanding of Fr Maciel's (still, strictly speaking, only alleged) actions, in its reference to 'the growing understanding that the abuse is most likely the result of illness, not criminal intent.'

So, if the *National Catholic Reporter* was not gunning for Fr Maciel or the Legionaries of Christ, who was it gunning for? It takes little ingenuity to work it out. As so often in American perceptions, it was not the alleged offences themselves but the cover-up that was the real crime. That allowed the NCR's guns to be turned on to an even larger target: 'The cover-up is the product of secrecy, privilege

and a lack of accountability that are major elements of the clerical culture in which the sex abuse scandal flourished... It was made worse because officials either ignored or downplayed the claims of victims and went to great lengths in many cases to protect the abusers.'

What followed had by now become all too wearily predictable: this case was nothing if not an irresistible opportunity for something which these days is more difficult to pull off than it used to be, without unacceptable levels of adverse reaction: a full frontal attack on the late Pope. 'For all of the commendable achievements of Pope John Paul II', the NCR continues, 'his blindness to this cancer within the church and his unwillingness until the last years of his long reign to understand the urgency of the problem will be seen as serious flaws of his tenure. His inaction sent signals that he both tolerated and encouraged the debilitating culture of deceit... Vatican officials today explain that John Paul did not have the information with which to judge the case. That's the very point, however. One can only conclude he failed to listen to the victims and believed for far too long that the scandal was the malicious work of those who opposed the Legion because of its loyalty to him.'

This attack on the late Pope continues unabated for several paragraphs; it is worth breaking off at this point, however, to ask a question: if it is true that the late Pope did believe that those loyal to him laid themselves open to attack from certain quarters simply for their loyalty, was there not very good reason for him to believe it? Certainly, it is true, looking back over the battle of the last decade, that those who took up positions for and against Fr Maciel tended to be those who also took up positions for and against Pope John Paul II, and it was Fr Maciel's attackers who led the way in this. There was also the undoubted fact that the 'new movements' which

the Pope supported—of which the *Legion of Christ*, with its lay wing *Regnum Christi*, was one of the most effective—were themselves deeply distrusted by those ‘liberals’ who preferred, rather than living lives of holiness and self-denial, to live out their apostolates in the more congenial ways of the national and diocesan bureaucracies, the groves of academe and the haunts of the *bien-pensant* media.

In such circles, the *Legion of Christ* was a natural target—just as *Opus Dei* had been, just as the *Neo-catechumenate* had been, the list is endless—whatever its founder had or had not done; it seemed natural to suppose that that was what really lay behind the campaign against Fr Maciel. As Fr Richard John Neuhaus put it in *First Things* in 2002, ‘Forty and fifty years after the alleged misdeeds, there is no question of criminal action. Even were there any merit to the charges, which I am convinced there is not, the statute of limitations has long since run out. And what can you do to an eighty-two-year-old priest who has been so successful in building a movement of renewal and is strongly supported and repeatedly praised by, among many others, Pope John Paul II? What you can try to do is to filch from him his good name. And by destroying the reputation of the order’s founder you can try to discredit what Catholics call the founding “charism” of the movement, thus undermining support for the Legionaries of Christ... Nobody would dispute that Legionaries are theologically orthodox and loyal to the Pope. Some of us take the perhaps eccentric view that that is a virtue.’ Fr Neuhaus was expressing his scepticism over the allegations of a recent book, *Vows of Silence*, by two journalists, Jason Berry and Gerald Renner, whose agenda was clear enough, and whose evidence was therefore discounted in advance by many ‘faithful’ Catholics who ought, arguably at least, to have taken it more seriously. As Michael

S. Rose put it in the generally anti-liberal *New Oxford Review*, *Vows of Silence* should be one of the most important books in more than a decade for conservative Catholics in the U.S. and beyond. Alas, it will not be. [The authors]... undermine their own effort with their openly stated liberal Catholic agenda. Moreover, the subtitle of the book, “The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II” gives a pretty good indication of the authors’ bias.’

*The Tablet* could scarcely contain its glee over this apparent “abuse” publishing a piece by Gerald Renner, co-author of *Vows of Silence*, under the cover headline “Scandal of Father Maciel”, and concluding its editorial “For too long the Vatican has been taken in by appearances, over-impressed by power and influence. There may indeed be libertines on the Left. But there are certainly dangerous men on the Right, and Maciel was one of them. And the very closed-mindedness that characterizes that type of Catholicism was one of his most formidable defences.”

Now the “type of Catholicism” labelled “Right” is what our *Opus Dei* priest above would call “faithful”. We should then remember a generic point concerning a certain human tendency to gloat over those whose faithfulness is sometimes seriously undermined by their actions. Sin does not undermine the case for orthodoxy—that is what the Protestant propaganda at the Reformation tried to argue. But neither does being orthodox make you automatically immune from failure.


*The Tablet* tends naturally to the former Reformation position. The Legionaries of Christ might now be risking the latter emphasis. The movement has substantially built itself on the cult of its founder. Most of its members believe fervently that he is a living saint. The wording of the CDF’s announcement, that it has decided ‘to invite the father to a reserved life of penitence and prayer, relinquishing any form of public ministry’, leaves it open to

the movement to continue to believe that he has been unjustly accused. Perhaps he has. But what if he has not? To flourish, any movement has to be based on truth. The Legionaries are already making the CDF judgment part of Fr Maciel’s cultus: ‘Father Maciel’, they have announced ‘with the spirit of obedience to the Church that has always characterized him, has accepted this *communiqué* with faith, complete serenity and tranquillity of conscience, knowing that it is a new cross that God, the Father of Mercy, has allowed him to suffer and that will obtain many graces for the Legion of Christ and the *Regnum Christi* Movement.’

I wish the movement nothing but good, and hope that it will find a way to emerge from this truly terrible dark night, substantially unimpaired. I may be wrong, and hope that I am: but I have an uneasy feeling that they will not achieve this by seeing current events as further evidence of their founder’s special closeness to God.



# sunday



b y s u n d a y

13<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME  
Mk 5, 21-43

- “And he told them to give her something to eat” (Mk 5, 43). This ‘throw away’ remark is one of those unique features of Mark’s gospel that gives his account a true note of authenticity. Only someone present could notice such a detail, and only Mark’s gospel includes Our Lord’s closing command to the parents of the restored child. Accurate reporting is always true to its sources, and Mark here becomes transparent as a writer, as he lets Jesus’ miracle speak for itself. Mark’s style is terse and brief, but in these miracles the words and works of Jesus radiate.

- Touch is the most important sense in today’s gospel. Flesh on flesh, as when Jesus takes the dead girl by the hand (Mk 5, 41), or even touching the clothes of Our Lord, as when the woman with a haemorrhage presses through the crowd (Mk 5, 33) communicate divine healing and power. It is a perfect demonstration of the sacramental principle, whereby material things actually effect the grace that they signify. The woman was full of faith and courage, but she needed to reach out and touch the hem of Jesus’ garment to be saved and made well again.

- If we accept the reality of the flesh of Christ, then we accept the reality of the Church. Jesus is the sole mediator between God and man, but we need him to communicate to us through the flesh if his salvation is to mean anything to us. No human being could see God face to face and live. Only when God stoops down to us by becoming one like us can we become fitted for heaven. If the body

of Christ is a vital part of him for our sakes, then the Church cannot either be an optional extra.

14<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME  
Mk 6, 1-6

- “He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mk 6, 6). Miracles are not magic. Just as a gift given cannot be given unless it is received, so Our Lord’s healing attention cannot be effected if it is not received by faith. This is not to diminish the power of God, who holds both believers and unbelievers in being every moment of their lives, but it does underline humanity’s vital need to accept Jesus as God. Our heavenly Father respects human ways of doing things, and will not compel us to join him in paradise. He awaits our response.

- How Jesus must have changed. No account of the hidden years of Christ survives, but this text tells us how utterly normal Jesus would have been. Learning a trade from Joseph (Tiberius Caesar was building the town of Sephoris next to Nazareth at the time, and would have needed carpenters), leading the life of a devout Jew in the midst of an extended family (Mk 6, 3), Jesus would have learnt to know and love his neighbours, and vice-versa. His amazement was the shock of rejection by his nearest and dearest. His honour would have been forged among them.

- The Nazarenes had seen Jesus’ miracles and experienced his wisdom, yet they refused to believe the evidence of their own eyes (Mk 6, 2). Jesus is not expecting too much of them, steeped as they were in the Law and the Prophets, but his actions are thrown back in his face. We too, as Catholics called to walk in the true Faith, must not become intimates of the Lord, who then reject him out of hand through faint faith and scandalous lives. It is quite possible

to come to Mass regularly and be lapsed. Where does our heart lie?

15<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME  
Mk 6, 7-13

- Jesus’ principal battle in Mark’s gospel is with the spiritual forces of darkness. In this moment of joyful apostolic activity, only one aspect of it is emphasized: “giving them authority over unclean spirits” (Mk 6, 7). The devil and his angels are active and potent enemies of humanity. Their malice never sleeps and their hatred of humanity knows no bounds. Yet their kingdom is in ruins through the advent of the Messiah who, as a man, breaks their hold over the weakness of men. This divine power can be bequeathed to those apostles chosen for this vital ministry.

- It is through apostolic succession that the power to exorcise demons finds its proper place in the Church. Bishops share the fullness of the priestly character of Christ, and it is the Divine Master who conveys this power. Thus, every bishop has the power to exorcise, and is required to appoint a diocesan exorcist to act in his name. Faint faith, sinful lives, structures of sin embedded in society, have all made this ministry more important than ever. Recent studies, especially by Fr Gabriele Amorth, have highlighted a clear, urgent pastoral need for exorcisms in our modern secular culture, as manifested in a wide range of phenomena.

- We can make two mistakes about the devil. The first is to believe he does not exist, and the second is to believe he is more powerful than he is. Satan can work much more easily in those who have no strong shield in Jesus Christ. Recourse to soothsaying, tarot cards, new age therapies and the like only use our God-given free will to invite a personal force for evil more powerful than we are to take charge of our lives. But

Jesus Christ is in charge of our lives. In baptism all evil influence was exorcised from us. So if we take our baptismal promises seriously, we need not fear and we do not need any other source of spiritual security.

## 16<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME

*Mk 6, 30-34*

- There is real poignancy in this scene. The joy of the apostles at the first fruits of their ministry is matched by the care and concern of Jesus: "You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest a while" (Mk 6, 31). Yet Jesus must have felt searing grief and heartbreak at the death of John the Baptist, just reported in the gospel (Mk 6, 17-29). The human need of the apostles to rest after their labours is matched by Jesus' human need to grieve in quiet for his cousin. Prudence dictates a time apart.
- But Our Lord and the apostles are victims of their own success. Divine goodness and healing have only highlighted in people's hearts their aching need of Jesus. They may not understand who he is fully, or even catch every nuance of his teaching, but the poverty of their hard lives has been matched now by a raging spiritual thirst. All concerns are immediately subordinated to the need to be with Jesus, and they guess through their local knowledge where Jesus' boat will land in the Galilean wilderness. Not just a few, but whole towns waited for him in anticipation (Mk 6, 33).
- This is why Jesus takes pity on them, and puts himself out to teach them at some length (Mk 6, 34). Not because they are hungry and thirsty, poor and needy, but because they long to be with him and he longs for them to be with him. He thirsts for their faith, which will transform them into eternal companions, and he teaches them so that their hearts might thrill and be converted to the

truth that will set them free. We need to learn that no time is inconvenient to approach the Lord. Go to him, be refreshed.

## 17<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME

*Jn 6, 1-15*

- A desert location with no food, and no human means of finding or even affording any is a desperate situation – though one not unknown in Israelite history. Multiplying loaves in the time of Elisha (2Kgs 4, 42-44) was a sign of the divine origin of his gift of prophecy, and Jesus' repeating and bettering Elisha's feat would have been instantly recognized by the more devout members of his audience. "This really is the prophet who is to come into the world" (Jn 6, 14) is the cry of one who sees fulfilment of prophecy, but does he see the sign?
- The irony here is that Jesus is the prophet who is to come into the world, though he is much more. A human prophet can be a human king, or lead an earth-bound rebellion against the Romans, but Jesus is not just human: he is God the Son. His kingdom is not of this world, and only those who believe through seeing the signs he works can receive the life that he gives (cf. Jn 18, 36; 20, 30-31). The people pointedly misunderstand Jesus, and he slips quietly away from them. His divinity shows also in his escape.
- We have the Mass, we have the sacraments, we have the Church and the witness of the saints, but still we miss what the poet Francis Thompson calls "the many-splendour'd thing", which is the action and life of God in our souls. We look to the furthest ends of the earth and into the most thrilling sensations, but we miss the tender knock of the Master at the doors of our own hearts, craving audience. He will go away if through our sins we tell him to, but he will never give up: "Heap me over

from this tremendous Lover!" (Francis Thompson in *The Hound of Heaven*).

## 19<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME

*Jn 6, 41-51*

- This is the most shocking saying of Jesus in the whole gospel: "the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6, 51). John could have used the more abstract Greek term, 'soma', when referring to 'flesh', but he pointedly uses the most physical expression available, 'sarx'. This means flesh and blood reality. Giving human flesh to eat is offensive to practically every human culture, let alone to the Jews, whose concern for ritual purity in the preparation of food occupies much of the Torah (Lv 11, 1-47). If this speech were a mere marketing ploy for a new religion, Jesus could not have said anything more fatal to his own interests. Most of his hearers will stop following him after this, and even the apostles are only clinging on to him by the skin of their teeth (Jn 6, 66; Jn 6, 68).
- But Jesus is unrepentant and uncompromising. The manna that will sustain and preserve the new Israel in her desert wanderings from one generation of the Church to the next "is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6, 51). This is not cannibalism, which is the eating of dead human flesh, but rather the consuming of the living flesh of the Lord Jesus. Unlike normal food, which we absorb into our systems and which becomes part of us, this heavenly manna will absorb us and allow us to become living parts of the Body of Christ. Like a mother who feeds her child on her own milk, God feeds his people on his own living flesh, so that through physical means divine life might be communicated to us. Only God could think of this: for man it is too controversial.
- The point of the Incarnation is to enable human nature to enter heaven.

God becomes everything that we are in order that we may in our turn become everything that he is, as co-sharers of the divine nature (2Pet 1, 4). Thus the flesh of Christ becomes the principle of God's loving action in the world, fitting us for heaven from within. So we must make every effort to receive Holy Communion reverently, constantly reminding ourselves of a reality vastly deeper than ourselves and our limited human understanding. Not even God can give more than himself. It is therefore the least we can do to give ourselves entirely to him.

## 20<sup>TH</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME *Jn 6, 51-58*

- The Catholic Eucharistic teaching of transubstantiation draws richly on this text, as Jesus repeatedly and unashamedly insists, "my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (Jn 6, 55). Because I am flesh and blood, Jesus needs to become flesh and blood if he is to communicate divine life to me. The Eucharist needs to be the living flesh of the Lord Jesus if like is to communicate with like. Otherwise, our faith is just make-believe, and any communication between God and man ideal rather than real. The flesh of Jesus grounds our faith in human reality without compromising the fullness of his divinity.

- One good way of teaching transubstantiation to kids is through Chinese whispers. With such an unusual word, the version that comes out at the end of the line of whisperers is invariably a comic version of the original. Confusion is rife to begin with, but once the Thomistic principle is explained, the children never forget it. Questions never stop in such an environment, as the child experiences a real thirst for knowledge of the love of God. If we do not know God, we cannot love him. But once the truth, as handed down to us in the Church, is

made wholly and faithfully available to the children, then learning and loving begin to go hand in hand. This is the complete opposite of stale catechesis.

It is rather a fulfilment of Jesus' promise, "As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me" (Jn 6, 57). Of course, knowing about the truth and receiving him in Holy Communion are two different things, but the one leads on to the other. In fact, Jesus goes out on a limb here to teach the truth, despite an increasingly hostile crowd, just so that the truth might be made known before the gift of his body was to be given up on the cross for the life of the world (Jn 19, 17). The principle of life that we receive in the eucharist is thus a life that has been given up for us and proved victorious over sin and death.

- Jesus stood out for us that day in Capernaum (Jn 6, 59), and we too must be bold in standing up for the truth that he handed on to us as food for a heavenly journey.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME *Jn 6, 60-69*

- "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer" (Jn 6, 63). Jesus is trying to help his audience understand the "intolerable language" (Jn 6, 60) he has been using. The key to understanding is not that Jesus offers us any human flesh, but rather that he offers us his own flesh – animated and transformed by his divine spirit. The flesh of itself has nothing to offer, but united to his divine person it becomes the vehicle for our salvation.

- Jesus' authority to teach in this way is also established, as he asserts a personal reality which pre-dates and is beyond the reality of flesh: "What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?"

(Jn 6, 62). Only Peter, groping in the dark as all around him are losing faith in the Lord, is given the grace to perceive the reality of who it is that is teaching such shocking doctrine: "You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6, 68-69).

- Clearly, Jesus is either God the Son or he's mad. There can be no intermediate position, so graphic and all embracing are his claims. Any chink of unbelief or compromise with the Good News in any of his followers is utterly exposed by Jesus' words. It all becomes too much for Judas, and John clearly locates his fellow apostle's loss of faith in Jesus from this moment on: "Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him" (Jn 6, 64). Such teaching takes no prisoners.

- So why does Judas lose faith and Peter not? Were they not both called to sublime intimacy with God in their separate apostolic callings? Those eyewitnesses to the words and works of the Lord do not tell us, and we can never know for sure. Suffice it to say that Peter never took his eyes off Jesus in the midst of this most challenging of all Jesus' teachings, whereas it seems that Judas did. Perhaps he thought he knew a better way of bringing in the kingdom of God – more political and away from the vagaries of a mad Rabbi. We may speculate, but we shall never know. May God give us all the grace to follow Jesus wherever he may go.





WISDOM FROM ABOVE. A PRIMER IN  
THE THEOLOGY OF FATHER SERGEI  
BULGAKOV

by Aidan Nichols OP, Gracewing,  
317pp, £17.99

A Greek monk of Mount Athos once told me that Russians were incapable of being truly Orthodox, "they believe that once we get to heaven we'll find a fourth person of the Trinity called Sophia". Behind this prejudice there is a garbled version of the theology of Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), in particular of his sophiology: a theological meditation on divine wisdom (in Greek, *sophia*). Bulgakov was indeed charged with heresy by some of his fellow Russian exiles, but he strenuously defended his orthodoxy and died in communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople.

This book began life as the author's lectures to Ethiopian theological students and it begins with warm commendations from the Archbishop of Canterbury (himself an expert on the theology of the Russian diaspora) and the Orthodox Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia. This gives some idea of the wide interest in Bulgakov's writings, which is bound to increase as more are translated into English. Aidan Nichols compares Bulgakov to Hans Urs von Balthasar and this seems to be valid. Both were men of wide erudition which ranged far beyond the theological, both left extensive writings, both combined a commitment to orthodoxy with daring theological speculation, and both were influenced by modern German philosophy. Bulgakov nearly became a Catholic and retained an openness to the Catholic Church which is unusual among Orthodox. *Wisdom from Above* opens with an

overview of Bulgakov's life, which is of interest in itself. A Marxist economist, he returned to the Church and, after the 1917 revolution, he settled in Paris where he taught at the Institut Saint-Serge. Nichols' presentation of his theology broadly follows the shape of the creed: God, creation, incarnation, redemption, the Holy Spirit, Church and eschatology. These chapters are followed by three on the subjects of Bulgakov's 'little trilogy': Our Lady, John the Baptist and the angels. Finally, his thoughts on iconography are discussed. The problematic aspects of his theology are not avoided, sophiology, his high doctrine of John the Baptist, and his universalism (all will be saved), but Nichols gives a 'benign reading' of these theories which shows that while Bulgakov may sometimes push ideas beyond their limits, he was fundamentally orthodox. Theology is about truth not safety, and each chapter is an invitation to a Catholic to look again at his own faith from a different angle. To note only one fruitful aspect, Bulgakov's theology is rooted in worship, constantly referring to icons and the Byzantine liturgy. If we listen to the teaching of the Magisterium, Catholic theology, catechetics and faith should likewise be rooted in our liturgical worship, but is this so?

As the Eastern Orthodox lack a coherent understanding of the development of doctrine, their theology is often ahistorical. The contemporary Greek Bishop, John Zizioulas, claims his theology of the person is drawn from the early Fathers, but a recent study has shown that it actually owes much more to modern Western philosophy than he would admit. Bulgakov is not entirely free from this, but he has engaged with the concerns of the modern Western world in a way few Orthodox have done. One of the few good things to come out of the horrors of the Russian revolution was that the *émigrés* could present the riches of the Christian East to Western Christians. Like

this historical movement, and like other studies of the Christian East by Aidan Nichols, Rowan Williams and others, this book aids a true ecumenism. Real ecumenism is not about compromise but about looking together at the mystery of faith in the context of prayer and Christian tradition. *Wisdom from Above* presents a theologian from whom Western Catholics can learn if they wish to heed the desire of Pope John Paul II for the Church to 'breathe with both lungs', to assimilate, like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the riches of Christian East and West. It is, however, a book for those who have some basic grounding in theology, but it is also a book which can feed prayer and meditation. In this it is like the writings of Sergei Bulgakov himself, and it inspires one to turn to these writings such as the parts of his 'great trilogy' *The Bride of the Lamb* (2002) and *The Comforter* (2004).

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OPENING UP. SPEAKING OUT IN THE  
CHURCH

edited by Julian Filochowski and Peter  
Stanford, DLT, 284pp, £14.95

Opening Up is a collection of twenty articles and two poems. It 'speaks out in the Church' numerous profoundly heterodox opinions. It is published to mark the 60th birthday of Martin Pendergast, the partner of one of the editors, Julian Filochowski, director of CAFOD from 1982-2003. In 2001, a special Mass was celebrated by the Rector of Ushaw seminary to celebrate the 25 years of their partnership, with two prominent Bishops in attendance. Not surprisingly the Church's teaching on homosexuality is the main focus of some of the articles and several others use the question to illustrate various supposed ills in the Church:

discrimination (Sobrinho, Heymann), confusion in the priesthood (Loftus), the unfairness of Vatican procedures (Gramick) and the recasting of moral theology (Kelly).

However, the collection covers a range of topics. Clague proposes the thesis that the prohibition of women priests runs counter to the value of inclusion that the Church elsewhere defends; Filochowski writes on the option for the poor; O'Neill attacks the idea of Rome requiring that Catholic politicians act and vote to uphold the natural law; Flessati and Kent offer a defence of Christian pacifism, and Gearty proposes a new model of obedience and conscience.

My own candidate for the worst article in the book is Jane Fraser's "Teenage Pregnancy: Are the Churches to blame?" She is an Anglican priest and has worked with Brook Advisory Centres for 30 years. In the first paragraph, she claims that pregnant teenagers who abort their baby face "fewer long-term consequences" than those who continue with their pregnancy. She asserts that the Teenage Pregnancy Unit has been successful in reducing social exclusion (though not, of course, teenage pregnancy). She makes the conventional (and mistaken) claim that prior to the 20th century, people believed that life began at "quickening" and (again mistakenly) claims that abortion was almost as common prior to 1967 as after. She approves the Brook approach to counselling in contrast to that of SPUC which was "based on a desire to turn people away from abortion". She also attacks abstinence programmes and favours sex-education which "encourages [young people] to use contraception if they do have sex."

It is no surprise that these views and attitudes should be espoused by someone who has worked with the Brook for much of her life. What does prompt a raised eyebrow at least is that prominent British Catholics—

even those who dissent from the Magisterium in other ways – should find it acceptable to be associated with such a position.

Fr Timothy Radcliffe's article "Kneading the Dough of the Eucharist" includes some characteristic paradoxes ("One cannot imagine a more solid and, in some ways, traditional Catholic than Martin") and original imagery. The thesis is that there is a dichotomy in the Church between the centre and the margins and that our work must be like kneading dough which takes the margin and puts it back in the centre. This is helped out by the image of God "whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere".

Enda McDonagh is the preferred moral theologian in CAFOD's justification for accepting that condoms are part of the solution to the AIDS problem. His article in this collection makes the astonishing (and false) claim that the manuals of moral theology from 1600-1960 "completely ignored love/friendship". He suggests that the Church's recognition of the legitimacy of using the infertile period persuaded moral theologians that contraception was acceptable "and, in a further step, that sexual loving may not be confined to just heterosexual relationships". Therefore, he proposes that it would be appropriate to give a Christian blessing of the "love and justice" involved in a homosexual union. Conversely, it is against "love and justice" to exclude pro-abortion politicians from communion.

One recurring theme of the articles is what might be called "homosexual ontology". James Alison makes a heartfelt case for the acceptance of homosexuality in the Church. He asks that his proposal be accepted in the Vatican as a "cry for help". Basing his argument on Trent's decree on justification, he argues that the homosexual inclination is not intrinsically evil because that would "fall into the heresy of claiming that

there is some part of being human which is intrinsically depraved". He accepts that one side or the other in this argument must be wrong "Either being gay is a defective form of being heterosexual or it is simply a thing that just is that way." The answer of the Magisterium has been to speak of disorder, rather than defect, referring to the whole person, rather than accepting that a person could rightly define themselves as "gay".

Regarding the teaching of the Magisterium, Jordan, defending the principles of *Dignity*, claims that *Persona Humana* (1975) "admitted a permanent and unchangeable homosexuality – that is, homosexuality much like nature" and that this was "corrected" in *Homosexualitatis Problema* (2005). There may be some justification in this. *Persona Humana* did speak of "homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable." whereas *Homosexualitatis Problema* spoke instead of "deep-seated homosexual tendencies", avoiding any concession to the idea that homosexuality is "who I am". In fact, *Persona Humana* based its fundamental reasoning on the natural law and the "kind of" (*specie*) qualification saves what might, with hindsight, be considered a loose expression.

The discussion of this point is perhaps the most important challenge to the Magisterium on the question of homosexuality. It is linked with the discussion of 'gender'. Homosexual ontology proposes that it is erotic 'orientation' and not gender which is inherent to 'the way we are made'. In this brave new world view you can change your gender, or even as in modern Spain self-define whether you are male, female or trans-gender, whereas your very human nature determines whether you are heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual—it's 'in the genes'. This would be effectively to re-write

Genesis as 'in the image of God he created him, gay and straight he created them'. It is necessary for the Church to elaborate clearly that 'nothing was homosexual in the beginning' (apologies to Tolkein) and that homosexual tendencies and temptations are a contingent aspect of fallen human nature. The distinction between acts and condition was fine as a guide for pastors before the political and theological advance of the gay lobby. Now, it is necessary to tackle the question of the homosexual condition itself as a doctrinal matter. In *Faith* movement we believe that Edward Holloway has provided a good basis from which to do this for modern culture. Perhaps Fr Editor might consider commissioning something on this ever more crucial subject.

Although I believe that this is the most important question raised in the book, a review would be incomplete without mentioning two other articles which touch on other aspects of the debate. Fuller and Keenan take on the question of condoms and AIDS, promoting the use of condoms, attacking abstinence programmes, and praising the CAFOD policy. The best approach to this debate in my opinion, is to look at the statistics from those countries which have promoted condoms (e.g. Botswana, Thailand), those countries which have refused to do so (e.g. the Philippines, Senegal), and those countries which have had a mixed approach (e.g. Uganda). The figures speak for themselves. Moreover, the statistics published by the Department of Health in the UK show enormous increases from 1995-2004 in those STIs that are supposedly protected against by condoms.

Sr Heymann's article is one of the most irritating of the collection. We are treated to the story of how she was prejudiced against people who were gay or HIV-positive but learned to overcome her prejudices. She tells us of "pious churchgoers" pointing a

finger at a minority and eschews the title "Ten commandments" for her list of "Dreams" because "I know such a title would be counterproductive, especially if suggested by a woman". She suggests that someone with AIDS should be invited to preach the homily at Sunday Mass. She tells the story of a lady in Crawley who was helped to overcome her prejudices after she was hesitant about helping those with HIV/AIDS, saying "I have never spoken to a gay man in my life". Sunlight burst through the clouds of her sheltered existence in Crawley, of course, when her interlocutor told her "Well you are doing so right now".

Close behind was the piece by Ann Smith. This is a poem where the "not simple solution" (i.e. not abstinence or condoms alone) is life-giving. "Roman purse-strings tighten" when the prophetically brave leaders speak out (to promote condoms). The poor people at risk of AIDS are threatened by the "soutaned Goliaths" (who oppose condoms) and the grey-suited Goliaths (who sell condoms): both offer "simple solutions". The people have colluded with them and kept too quiet and now it is time to speak out in terms of "The Spirit-crafted hymn for life / - A hymn they labelled death". Is this meant to imply that what Pope John Paul called "the culture of death" is in fact a gift of the Holy Spirit? It would be in keeping with the tenor of much of this book.

Sr Jeannine Gramick makes an appearance. After numerous complaints about her opposition to the teaching of Magisterium on the morality of homosexual acts, she was asked to assent to the teaching of the Church, which she refused to do. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith then prohibited her from pastoral work with homosexuals. Her article largely focuses on justifying her subsequent disobedience to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. She offers a variety of possible models of disobedience

(creative circumvention, prophetic disobedience, discernment) and effectively compares the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the Nazis by suggesting that obedience is like the Eichmann principle ("I was only obeying orders") and that a person not wishing to follow such a command should meditate on the holocaust.

Worth notice is O'Neill's attack on Rome's guidance to Catholics in public life. A QC, he argues that it would be difficult to follow such guidance and be a loyal citizen of one's country. He characterises Pope John Paul's position in *Memory and Identity* to mean that Catholics are "free only to do what the Pope says." Interestingly, his vision of the democratic society includes people having different views on moral and political questions and "having the right and opportunity to express, publicise and proselytise for those views". Sir Iqbal Sacranie or Helen and Joe Roberts might have a perspective on that after being investigated by police for their allegedly "homophobic" views.

The quality of the articles varies quite a bit. Clague's defence of feminism and McGreal's article on ecumenism and intercommunion are well-written expositions of what might now be indeed called "traditional" heterodox positions. I would not personally go along with the views of Alan Griffiths on the Liturgy, but his article is thought-provoking and intelligent. However, Kaggwa's article on the Spirit shows how easily poor theology can lead astray: "The Spirit is the point of contact where the Father and the Son touch history. Maybe we can say that the Spirit is the 'how' and Christ is the 'what'." Or maybe we can't since it is heresy.

Also included in the collection is an article by Diarmuid O'Murchu. He believes that "Jesus was a cultural, mystical subversive who was not too worried about his inherited religion", which makes me wonder if he has

read St Matthew's gospel. He also thinks that it is a "scholastic principle" that action follows thought. Actually, this is a new-age principle of, for example, Hattie Warner's "Healing Therapy Garden". The scholastic principle is *agere sequitur esse*. The article has little to commend it, rehashing various commonplaces such as Trent's affirmation of "clerical monopoly", the discovery by the *Jesus Seminar* of the meaning of the Kingdom which has eluded Christians for 2000 years and the idea that the spirit is plunging the patriarchal priesthood into terminal decline.

What is interesting is that a previous book by O'Murchu called "Reframing Religious Life" was recently the subject of a doctrinal note by the Spanish Bishops. Published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the note concluded that the book is "an efficient formula for the progressive distortion and destruction of religious and consecrated life, separating it little by little from the Church, divorcing it from the service of mankind and dissolving it in a world that does not know Christ." The book had been circulating in the English-speaking world for eight years before the Spanish Bishops responded to its translation. Perhaps we should encourage DLT that there is a big Spanish audience for "Opening Up".

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PRAYING TO OUR LORD  
JESUS CHRIST. PRAYERS AND  
MEDITATIONS THROUGH THE  
CENTURIES

by Fr Benedict Groeschel CFR,  
Ignatius Press, 159pp, £8.95

This is a powerful collection of prayers that presents a cohesive and chronological narrative of the experience of Christian prayer. It is to be read as a devotional and faith educating tool. Fr Groeschel is aware

that it may not always be helpful to pray in someone else's words, but he encourages us to share the experience of those that have gone before us to the benefit of our faith, and specifically to developing a personal relationship with Christ.

We are introduced to some prayers of the early Martyrs, of Church Fathers, and of great medieval and Catholic Reformation theologians, prayers, or styles of prayer which we may not have otherwise had contact with. Further on, we are exposed to prayers from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which Fr Groeschel selects to illustrate the spiritual and theological mood of these periods. Many of these sub-sections are briefly contextualised by Fr Groeschel and accompanied occasionally by various artistic impressions of Christ specific to the period or its subject. All this again draws our attention to contemplating the face of Christ.

For those unfamiliar with terms such as "The Dark Ages", and "The Early Middle Ages", Fr Groeschel provides helpful explanations which detail historical situations and the implications these events had for Catholic spiritual culture. These brief commentaries set the scene for the prayers that follow, and introduce the main figures that formed the prayer characteristic to that period. This shows an organic development towards a more personal, more sense engaging encounter with Christ.

This book is fascinating factually and a helpful companion to prayer. The snippets of devotional material hand picked by Fr Groeschel allow us to engage personally with Christ. This is an encouragement to delve deeper into the works of those founders and promulgators of our beautiful faith. Having always felt fairly intimidated by figures such as St Augustine, I found that Fr Groeschel's section on this great figure provided me with a welcome window into his work. In a most beautiful way, St Augustine calls us to focus on Christ for our growth

in faith; "He has accepted what was not his, but he remains what he was. Look, we have the infant Christ; let us grow with him."

Within this work, Fr Groeschel's main purpose is to address the internal yearning for Christ that all of humanity has, whether or not it can decipher this yearning amid such a chaotic world. He attempts to re-awaken this desire by once again employing divinely inspired gifts which include mystical experiences and the arts to redeem, within our fallen nature, that ability to walk with Christ in the Garden. As Fr Groeschel points out, in the over psychologised world in which we live we are encouraged only to think of ourselves and the implications which an event may have for us. As a timely response Fr Groeschel points us towards Christ as opposed to self. He intends to wet our lips as it were, with the vast treasure trove of Christian experience and emotion that has inspired ordinary people to become great theologians and saints. All this is done in order to foster in us ordinary Christians a similar hunger for a personal and meaningful relationship with Christ.

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notes from across the

Atlantic

by Richard John Neuhaus

**SILENCE ON ISRAEL**

Discussion of the Israel lobby is largely verboten, critics of Israel complain, because anybody who raises serious questions is in danger of being dismissed as an anti-Semite. Entering right on cue to confirm what he intends to deny is Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League: "Mr. Judt's contention that 'fear' has caused a 'continued silence' on the subject in the Jewish community is just wrong. The Anti-Defamation League, for one, has called the Walt-Mearsheimer essay exactly what it is—shabby scholarship and a classical conspiratorial anti-Semitic analysis invoking the canards of Jewish power and Jewish control." Critics are intimidated by the fear of being called anti-Semites. QED. To be fair, ADL's routinised charge of anti-Semitism against anyone with whom it disagrees has by now lost much of its power to intimidate.

**TODAY'S FIDELITY A BITTER PILL**

Patty Crowley has died at age ninety-two. She and her husband Pat were once very major figures in American Catholicism. The Christian Family Movement, which they led, was a powerful force of renewal for Catholic family life and lay leadership in the Church. Then came 1968, the concerted attack on the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and the shattering of, among many other things, the Christian Family Movement. Peter Steinfels reflects in the *New York Times* on the death of Patty Crowley: "She was, in other words, representative of a large segment of American Catholics who have come to enjoy material security, good educations and confidence in their own initiatives. If, like her, they reached maturity before the crisis

over Church authority that began with the birth control controversy, they often have a kind of bred-in-the-bones Catholicism... Patty Crowley and her peers never doubted that the Church had something to say, but after 1968 they began to wonder whether it was interested in listening." That puts the matter very nicely, I think. The Chicago funeral of Patty Crowley was, writes Steinfels, "a kind of last hurrah" for a certain kind of Catholic. A half-century ago, they were often called "*Commonweal* Catholics", referring to a magazine of which Peter Steinfels was once the editor, being succeeded by his wife Peggy Steinfels. They were "American Catholics" rather than "Catholic Americans", a distinction that I develop in *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth*, published in March by Basic Books. They thought they were pioneering an American way of being Catholic, rather than being called to model a Catholic way of being American. They were bred-in-the-bone Catholics who felt betrayed by a Church that did not accommodate itself to their having "arrived" in America. But of course, the Church is universal, not just American, and is obliged by truths that are eternal and not limited to the Camelot moment of *Commonweal* Catholics. With the dramatic expansion of the Church on other continents, it became evident that American Catholicism, while not exactly a sideshow, is certainly not front stage centre. This is a bitter pill for nostalgists who gathered for the last hurrah in Chicago. Steinfels' recent book, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, looks back longingly to what he views as the inspiring leadership of such figures as Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago and Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, and laments the era of John Paul II and Ratzinger, now become Benedict XVI. What he laments as the derailing of the American Catholic "coming of age" a younger generation of

Catholics is discovering as the high adventure of fidelity. Peter Steinfels is right. We are witnessing the long last hurrah of an older generation who believed that liberation from Catholic teaching, epitomised by the insurrection of 1968, was the future. There will be many more funerals at which mourners of like mind will reminisce about the revolution that was not to be. Meanwhile, a new era of vibrant orthodoxy is, please God, aborning.

**LATEST PERSONALITY FASHION**

Marian Salzman is connected with an advertising agency called JWT Worldwide and got considerable attention by inventing the term metrosexual. In her new book, *The Future of Men*, she's going for her full fifteen minutes by announcing that this year's man is the ubersexual. Ubersexuals are "men who embrace the positive aspects of their masculinity, such as confidence, leadership, passion and compassion". But they do so "without giving in to negative Neanderthal stereotypes". "The ubersexual has a passion for principles. The metrosexual has a passion for fashion", and so forth. The ubersexual does not "turn up his nose at any cultural pursuit that doesn't involve sports, beer or burgers". Who knows, he might even subscribe to *First Things*. Before signing up for this season's personality remake, however, you might check out whether the woman in your life is comfortable with the *über* implied in being an ubersexual.

**AFFIRMING THE MEANING OF LIFE**

On 17<sup>th</sup> January, the U.S. Supreme Court let stand Oregon's law permitting doctor-assisted suicide. The issues were, as is often the case, tangled, with the relation between federal and state jurisdiction very much in play. A deeply troubling aspect is that the court majority accepted assisted suicide as a form of medical care, while those in the minority vigorously protested that

caring can never mean killing. Bishop Robert Vasa of Baker, Oregon, wrote a moving reflection on the Court's decision, which included this: "For the victims of Oregon's assisted-suicide law the world has become a place that they feel is not worth living in. In the past, we would have seen this as a desperate cry for help, a sign of depression, a sign that the person needs help not to die but to live better. The Oregon Solution, however, removes any glimmer of hope and assures the person that their feelings of hopelessness, perhaps uselessness, feelings of being a burden are all exactly right. So when the depressed person says, 'I don't feel like I have any reason to continue living,' Oregon says, 'You know, you're right! There really is no reason for you to continue living.' What a horrible thing to do to depressed, distressed, suffering and even terminally ill persons. The human spirit seeks meaning, grasps at hope, and Oregon takes these away. Clearly, sick and suffering people feel that their lives are meaningless. We can either affirm or deny meaning for them. One leads to life the other to suicide. Life is meaningful and valuable. Suicide affirms hopelessness. In the past when someone complained of the intolerable burdens of life, someone might propose calling the doctor. Now if someone complains of the intolerable burdens of life, someone might propose that if they truly feel that way then maybe they should call the 'Doctor'. Instead of affirming the person's worth and value as a person, as a family member and as a member of the human family, the feelings of despair are ratified as valid and acceptable. Then there is no genuine attempt to treat and terminate 'the patient's attitude toward his unchangeable fate' but rather a termination of the patient. I often tell people in distress, 'Trust what you know, not what you feel.' The terminally ill patients need assurances of what they know from

experience. They need to know that their lives are valuable and worth living. They need to know that they are loved and esteemed and even needed. Every suicide, and especially an assisted suicide, represents a failure of the human community to affirm the meaning of a person's life. Ask not for whom the bells toll."

#### A SLIP OF THE PEN

A sloppy censor at the *New York Times* is possibly out looking for a job. Here is a story by Carl Zimmer about medical research on pregnancy. It is noted that the heart and the kidney work fine for years and years, but pregnancy is associated with all sorts of medical problems. Then this: "The difference is that the heart and kidney belong to a single individual, while pregnancy is a two-person operation. And this operation does not run in perfect harmony. ... A mother and her unborn child engage in an unconscious struggle over the nutrients she will provide it." Two persons? Unborn child? So far the slips have not been noted in the "Corrections" section of the paper.

#### LEST WE FORGET

The first anniversary is not long past, and I expect it's one story that, after hundreds of news cycles, has not disappeared down the memory hole. Say "Terri Schiavo" and everybody knows what you're talking about. We must not forget what happened then. Paul Greenberg, one of the most thoughtful of public voices, has not forgotten. "When Terri Schiavo was denied food and water by order of the court, it took her thirteen long, slow, agonizing days to die of dehydration. Thirteen days. It would have been kinder to shoot her. But that would have been against the law, and we know the law is just." There was a seemingly little thing that Paul Greenberg says keeps coming back. "Funny how, long after you've forgotten everything else about some big story, one detail will stick in

your mind. Have you ever sat by the bedside of a dying patient—a father or mother, perhaps, or someone else you loved—and given the patient a little chipped ice? And seen the relief and inaudible *thank you* in the drug-dimmed eyes? After all the futile treatments and the succession of helpless doctors, when grief has come even before the death, you sit there with a little cracked ice for the patient's parched mouth and throat, and think... *At last I can do this one little thing right. I'm not totally useless.* However much a little ice might help your patient, it does wonders for the caregiver. You suddenly realize why people go into nursing. Can there be any greater satisfaction than this? But when the law decreed that Terri Schiavo was to be given no food or water, it *meant* no food or water. That's what the court, the sheriff's deputies, the whole clanking machinery of the law was there for—to see that the severe decree was carried out. That's what the new art and science of bioethics at the dawn of the 21st century had come down to in the end: *No cracked ice for Terri Schiavo.*" We must never let Terri Schiavo, and all the other Terri Schiavos, be forgotten. The truth that is written on our hearts—the truth that the culture of death is determined to erase—is really quite simple: always to care, never to kill.



## cutting/edge

A special feature keeping us up to date with issues of science and religion

### VIENNA CATECHESSES

Cardinal Schönborn's Vienna-Cathedral catecheses continue their monthly pattern, and he has now delivered eight substantial lectures on his theme "Creation and Evolution." His fourth and fifth catecheses are now available in English on-line at [www.stephanscom.at/evolution](http://www.stephanscom.at/evolution), and are worth a close reading.

In his fourth catechetical lecture, entitled "He upholds the Universe by His Word and Power," the Cardinal discusses our understanding of God's action in the world, the Providence by which He rules the universe. He continues to take the argument, begun last July, to those who see 'Darwinism' not only as a scientific theory but, ideologically, as a system of thought that rules out the presence of the Creator. He makes the preliminary point very robustly, that there is no room in Catholic theology for any hiatus at all between our scientific understanding of the world, and our faith.

"I too think that theology and science need not contradict each other, but not because their subject-matters are so different that they practically never come into contact. I am convinced that they must come into contact without contradicting each other... Why this fear of coming into contact? If it is true that the creator constantly supports, preserves, and renews His world, if everything new that appears in the world has come and continuously comes from His plan for creation and from His creative power, then in some way it has to come into contact with the reality that forms the object of the sciences."

In considering the Providence of God alongside the workings of the

natural laws he goes on to explain: "It is crystal clear that the Christian faith presupposes that God's providence is not just general but is very concrete, reaching down to the smallest and most unlikely details, even to the point that "all the hairs of our head" are numbered. Even the death of a sparrow does not fall outside of the care of the Creator. Is He not also concerned with atoms, molecules, and matter? These are questions that we cannot evade if the proclamation of Jesus and rational investigation are not going to break entirely apart."

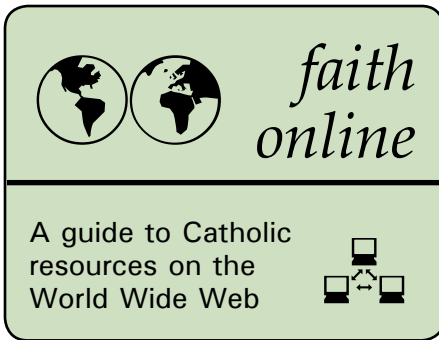
Schönborn is willing, then, to explain in detail how we might understand the interplay of God's creative action and the conditions and causes within nature. He shows first how the material universe is manifestly 'contingent' (i.e. does not exist of necessity) and therefore how it requires an ultimate explanation which cannot itself be a part of that material reality. Only God can provide that explanation, the power that holds all things in being at all. Schönborn says: "It is this power that we call the *creatio continua*, the ongoing creation. This is what 'holds the world together from within.' If God were to 'let go' of creation, it would back into the nothingness from which it came. It does not exist through itself, it is held in being." God's creative activity exists, then, first and foremost in the underpinning of reality's very existence, its being held in being. God is not a 'god of the gaps,' reduced to being the explanation for the inexplicable; instead He is the very reason for there being explanations at all. Schönborn is very firm about this:

"This is why it is important to remember that faith in the Creator does not start at the point at which our knowledge stops, but rather starts just where we do indeed have knowledge. The right approach is to consider all that we do know today... We should not look towards that which remains inexplicable, trying to leave there some place for God, but

we should look towards what we do know. And we should ask: what is the ultimate basis of this?"

The Cardinal's main point, is that God is the ultimate cause of what is and what occurs in the material universe. The whole of the natural universe operates according to its laws as the conditions and the co-causes of what occurs, but behind and beyond it all is the reason for any causality. Science does not 'find' God as such, because it is always and only investigating these secondary causes, their interrelation and unity. One has indeed to take a step back from the science to see the bigger picture, to see that there is something else going on above and beyond, which is the context for the working-out of the scientific principles. Schönborn again:

"Within this perspective of divine causality God does not act as a *deus ex machina*, as someone who plugs holes, who is invoked to explain that which is "not yet" explained. We do not think of His acting as an occasional intervention coming from the outside, but rather as the transcendent creative activity of God who alone makes it possible for our world to "hold together" and to rise, in accordance with His plan, step by step higher, so that really new things appear in it and finally man appears in it. Whoever wants to replace the Creator's realization of this plan by a totally autonomous evolution, inevitably either ascribes some mythic creative power to evolution, or else abandons any attempt at rational understanding and explains everything as the blind play of arbitrary chance. This is what I called the 'abdication of reason' in my *New York Times* article of July 7th, 2005."



*The links to all the websites mentioned in Faith Online are included in the Faith Website at [www.faith.org.uk](http://www.faith.org.uk)*

### PARISH WORK ONLINE

Fr Tim Finigan has honed his parish website over the years, winning awards in the process and surely proving the value of the internet. The site is a model of uncluttered presentation, with clear and helpful pastoral catechesis on the sacraments, on how to become a Catholic and the basics of the faith. You can download sheets for confirmation groups and for school Masses. There is also a short question and answer section on aspects of faith that often crop up. To this, Fr Tim has added his own blog—no mere personal narrative, but the useful and amusing insights of an experienced pastor.

[www.rosary.freeuk.com](http://www.rosary.freeuk.com)  
[www.the-hermeneutic-of-continuity.com](http://www.the-hermeneutic-of-continuity.com)

### THE VATICAN OBSERVATORY

This is one of the oldest astronomical research institutions in the world. The headquarters are at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, but with increasing light pollution, it also uses a telescope in Arizona. The site provides a short history of the observatory and information on each of the telescopes. Find out about VATT and VORG (not Dr Who villains). The observatory hosts a biennial summer school for some of the great young minds of the world. Pages of particular interest include Frequently Asked Questions and a gallery of images—from nebulae to asteroids.

<http://clavius.as.arizona.edu/vo/R1024/VO.html>  
[http://clavius.as.arizona.edu/vo/R1024/Vatt\\_img.html](http://clavius.as.arizona.edu/vo/R1024/Vatt_img.html)

### THE FATHERS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

From Justin Martyr to Tertullian and from Athanasius to Hilary of Poitiers: their writings can all be freely copied here. You can't help feeling St Justin himself would have rejoiced in using the world wide web.

[www.ccel.org/fathers2](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2)

### PRAYING PARENTS

In 1995 two grandmothers in England formed this apostolate to help mothers who wished to pray for their children and grandchildren and to find the support they needed. It has grown since. There are now contacts in over 70 countries. The answers to prayer have been many: from children coming off drugs or returning after absences, to improvements in health and relationships. The format for the prayer meeting is provided, with access to the dedicated prayer booklet ('Rejoice In Motherhood'). The husband and brother of the two founders have also started an equivalent site for fathers.

[www.mothersprayers.org](http://www.mothersprayers.org)  
[www.fathersprayers.co.uk](http://www.fathersprayers.co.uk)

### A GRAND TOUR OF ST PETER'S

April 18th marked 500 years since Pope Julius II laid the foundation stone of the new basilica. The biggest church in the world has an appropriately sized site of its own.

The interactive floor plan is quite fascinating, with access to information on all the artwork. There are also floor plans of the underground chapels and the colonnades with their 140 saints' statues.

[www.stpetersbasilica.org](http://www.stpetersbasilica.org)

### THE SHROUD OF TURIN

Of the many hundred sites for budding sindonologists, this seems to be the ultimate on "the single most studied artefact in human history". You can examine an image of the shroud and check the news on the latest research.

[www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com)

### SHINE JESUS SHINE?

Fr Nicholas Schofield's own fascinating blog provides this amusing alternative to the famous song.

<http://romanmiscellany.blogspot.com/2006/05/trite-worship-song.html>