

**Servant of God, John Paul II:
Both Charisma and Doctrine**
Editorial

**Pope John Paul II's Teaching On
Existential Dignity**
Luke Gormally

**John Paul II: Champion And
Theologian of Freedom**
Michael McDermott SJ

John Paul II and the Femininity of Holiness
David Meconi SJ

The Election of Pope Benedict XVI
James Hitchcock

A New Version Of God Bless Our Pope
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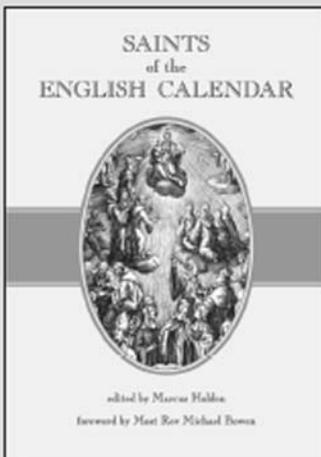
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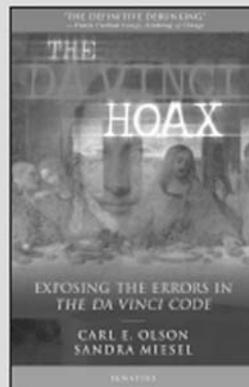
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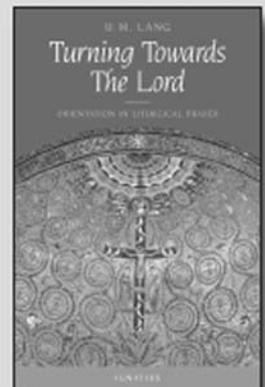
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Servant of God John Paul II: Both Charisma and Doctrine	2
<i>Editorial</i>	
Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Existential Dignity	6
<i>Luke Gormally</i>	
John Paul II: Champion and Theologian of Freedom	16
<i>Michael McDermott SJ</i>	
John Paul II and the Femininity of Holiness	26
<i>David Meconi SJ</i>	
The Election of Pope Benedict XVI	32
<i>James Hitchcock</i>	
A Revised Version of "God Bless Our Pope"	33
<i>Joanna Bogle and Fiorella Sultana de Maria</i>	
Letters	34
<i>To the editor</i>	
Sunday by Sunday	40
<i>Our regular guide to the Word of God in the Sunday Liturgy</i>	
Book Reviews	43
<i>Fr William Massie on Cardinal Ratzinger's last book, a study of religious relativism and defence of religious truth; Marisa March on an anatomist whose science brought him closer to the Creator and into the Catholic Church; Cyprian Blamires on the restoration of Our Lady's shrines in England and the growth of Marian devotion..</i>	
Notes From Across The Atlantic	48
<i>A survey of religious and public life in America by Richard Neuhaus</i>	
Cutting Edge	51
<i>A special feature keeping us up to date with issues of science and religion</i>	
Faith Online	52
<i>Highlighting Catholic resources on the World Wide Web</i>	

Editor

Patrick Burke
Our Lady & St. Ninian's
52 Quakerfield, Bannockburn
STIRLING FK7 8HZ
01786 812249
fax 01786 489531
editor@faith.org.uk

Editorial Board

David Barrett, Timothy
Finigan, Hugh MacKenzie,
Roger Nesbitt, Christina
Read, Dominic Rolls, Luiz
Ruscillo

Book Reviews

William Massie
187 Pickering Road
Baxtergate,
HULL HU4 6TD
reviews@faith.org.uk

Advertising Manager

Luiz Ruscillo
St. Bernadette's,
26 All Hallows Road,
Bispham
BLACKPOOL FY2 0AS
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Subscriptions Office

Paul Butcher
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subscriptions@faith.org.uk

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Servant of God, John Paul II: Both Charisma and Doctrine

"The Lord brought forth a man of mercy who found favour in the sight of all flesh and was beloved by God and man."

(Sirach 44:1).

"While it is true that the Church must constantly learn to speak in a language the world understands, this does not mean she must say everything that the world wants to hear."

Popular Acclaim And Voices of Doubt

The wealth of teaching and spirituality which the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II left as a legacy to the Church will take many years to appreciate in full. Yet his stature as one of the great teachers of God's people was already recognised by millions during his lifetime and has given rise to widespread enthusiasm for him to be declared a saint after his remarkable and exemplary death.

The announcement by Benedict XVI that the process of investigation with a view to his beatification and eventual canonisation is to begin immediately is the response of the Magisterium to the manifest spiritual desire of the People of God, the *sensus fidelium*. Nothing could be more in keeping with the true spirit of Vatican II, with the Pope clearly acting as the Servant of the Servants of God.

Sadly, but predictably, the usual worn out voices of dissent have been raised in objection to this. They worry that there is unseemly haste in wanting to canonise the late Pope so quickly. They still seem to cling to the misplaced hope that eventually they will get a Pope after their own heart, one who will conform the Church to the world and change the Law of God to suit the weakness and confusion of humanity. So deeply ingrained is their presumption that the course of history is an inevitable progress towards intellectual liberalism, that they are convinced that the secular litany of doctrinal changes they campaign for simply must come about one day.

And so they counsel caution about canonising the late Pope, because they think that the judgment of posterity will sooner or later tell against John Paul II and the renewed direction he gave to the Church. What really worries them is that in John Paul II and Benedict XVI they have come up against no mere reactionaries, but men who have studied very deeply the principles behind the arguments of modern philosophy and theology and who are committed to developing a convincing and modern alternative to the pervasive relativism that has all but destroyed Western civilisation.

Vatican II: The Programme Of His Life

This is nothing to do with "undoing Vatican II" - another alarmist complaint that we hear from these quarters. Both Karol Wojtila and Joseph Ratzinger were among the theological advisors to the authors of Vatican II. Bishop Wojtila later wrote one of the definitive commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes* and ran programmes of lay spiritual formation and pastoral engagement in his diocese of Krakow.

His whole life was about implementing the real Vatican II, which called for universal holiness and a new evangelisation. All his words and actions can be understood in this light: returning to the sources, refreshing the vision of Christ and spiritually equipping the whole People of God for the renewed mission of the Church in the Third Millennium. The critics even intimate that there is something unseemly and untoward about one Pope declaring his predecessor a saint. The suggestion seems

to be that the Papacy is a private club of self-serving autocrats that must be viewed with suspicion by the rest of God's people.

Such sentiments can only spring from a completely jaundiced and dislocated view of the Church. The Kingdom of God is yet again being interpreted according to categories of secular political wrangling - of left and right, progressive and conservative, rather than truth and goodness, faithfulness and holiness.

Beyond Left and Right

In truth it was always difficult to fit John Paul II into the straight jacket of theological "left" and "right". He was too rounded, too authentic, too fully imbued with the Gospel to conform to these narrow and time-dated categories, which owe more to the conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than to the renewal of the Church in the third millennium. The words and deeds of John Paul II cut across these preconceptions of an outmoded ideological warfare, much to the perplexity of secular commentators.

His emphasis on care for the poor was regarded as refreshingly liberal, but when he emphasised other moral principles and their consequences, he was regarded as disgracefully reactionary. In fact his teaching was all of a piece, even in terms of his private philosophical views, but as we have remarked before, when he spoke as Pope, he was doing no more than expounding the teaching of the Church.

Admire The Man, But Not His Teaching?

Those who wish to rewrite the Church's teaching to fit the age - an age that is fast passing, we might add - are still trying to portray the man himself as contradictory: a narrow minded Polish cleric with a happy knack for populist appeal, perhaps? Or an articulate and charismatic priest/poet with some unfortunate authoritarian instincts and Victorian views?

They are prepared to concede that he held the world's attention in remarkable ways, attracting the young in droves, a born communicator, a prophetic figure of spiritual depth and profound interiority born from rich and often painful experience, a man of courage and heroic endurance, a celebrity of the religious sphere.

How could they not recognise all this, since even the secular media saw it and honoured it too? It is impossible to dismiss someone of such evident spiritual stature out of hand, so the fall back position for the dwindling cabal of liberal dissent is to try to make a division between his personality and his doctrine.

The deep devotion and admiration evoked by Pope John Paul II is dismissed as a passing wave of popular sentimentality, perhaps to be compared to that surrounding the death of Princess Diana. The enthusiasm he elicited among young people is explained away as the exuberance of youth, the immature adulation of a hero or pop idol.

All this shows is how utterly out of touch the "progressive/liberal" mindset really is. It was precisely the doctrine that attracted the young to the Pope in such phenomenal numbers. Do the young not have minds? Are they not hungry for truth and purpose in their lives? Does it not occur to these people that the rising generations actually accept Catholic orthodoxy and welcome it with joy as the answer they are looking for? Then again, perhaps they do realise this and it scares them, because it challenges all their assumptions about the credibility of Catholic doctrine and where the future of the world really lies.

Young People Love Being Taught The Truth

John Paul II understood that to teach young adults the truth with clarity, conviction and pastoral warmth is an act of love, and that it is received as such by the youth of today. He knew this from his experience as a pastor and bishop with youth groups in Poland and he simply continued this ministry on a worldwide scale.

Very much on the model of our own Faith groups in this country, he taught and explained the full richness and mystery of Catholic doctrine and spirituality, encouraging regular confession, Eucharistic adoration, Marian devotion and a personal life of prayer, together with the warmth of honest friendship and social solidarity. He never ducked the difficult issues of chastity and personal relationships, just as he never ducked the challenges of social justice either.

Young people flocked to listen to him because they knew he told them the truth. Why should they bother turning to the Church for watered down hedonism, when they can get the full blown reality of it in our sin-sick cities any night of the week? What the young are looking for is a credible alternative to all that. They want to hear a voice that speaks with the courage of its own convictions.

Of course they want compassion and understanding too, as we all do; but that does not mean compromise. It is no compassion to tell a sick person that they do not need to get well, that they are fine "just as you are". What they need is someone to hold their hand as they get well, someone to stay with them through the setbacks and the struggles on the journey to recovery, but also someone to

keep urging them to take the right medicine and listen to the doctor.

Truth And Compassion Not Mutually Exclusive

John Paul II never merely stated the truth coldly and harshly. He tirelessly explained the vision of Man in Christ, always looking for new and vibrant ways to express the unchanging Truth of God that meet both the insights and objections of the modern world. He fully acknowledged the difficulties that human beings experience in trying to live up to the standards of Jesus, but he was never ashamed of the Lord and his message. He never trimmed the truth for fear of being rejected or criticised.

Instead he always urged us to be generous in our response to Christ, pointing out the joy of discipleship, the peace of true conversion and the strength that comes from integrity and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It was also plainly evident to all that he spoke from personal experience, he practiced what he preached. You simply cannot separate the man from his doctrine. People loved him and listened to him because he taught them with authority.

Indeed how very like Jesus he was in this. The crowds hung on the Lord's words too, because he taught them with certainty, unlike their own scribes. It was the theological liberals of the day - the Sadducees - who opposed him most bitterly for his doctrine. They too made a snide and specious distinction between the undoubtedly magnetic personality of the prophet from Nazareth, which of course they admired most sincerely, and his unpalatable doctrines which they loathed heartily.

The Contradiction In Our Own Hearts

His disciples, on the other hand, knew that he told them the truth, even when they found it hard to listen to and harder to live. The apostles themselves were dismayed at some of what he said, but they were humble enough to admit that the contradiction was in their own hearts, not in the psyche of the Teacher. It has been the same time and again down the ages with all the saints of Christ too. We admire their deeds and their personalities, but we balk at their teachings, especially about personal holiness.

It is true that there was also a party of religious self righteousness and rigidity - the Pharisees - in the Lord's day too. They in their turn were shocked by his warnings about wealth and worldly power, his great concern for the lapsed, his reaching out to people of other faiths, his love for the little ones. The modern Sadducees - the alternative magisterium of theological dissent - do their best to

portray Pope John Paul II and, of course, his successor in this Pharisaic guise. They lament the return of sound doctrine and good discipline in the Church as a sign that we are returning to the bad old days.

This is nonsense. That there were some negative aspects about the not so distant past, we do not deny: fear of modernity, cold legalism and lifeless uniformity. Yes, it is right that all this should be left behind, but it is absurd to tar Pope John Paul II with this brush.

For example, his criticism of Liberation Theology is now cited as evidence that he opposed social action and supported oppressive dictators against the interests of the poor. This is either stunning ignorance and prejudice or wilful mischief making, for you only have to read his social encyclicals - he wrote more than any other Pope in history - to know differently.

What he warned sharply against was priests holding political office and an exclusive emphasis on political and social effort as the road to redemption at the expense of personal conversion through grace and prayer. He was also deeply concerned about theologians adopting the Marxist worldview as the framework for their thought and actions. When it came to Marxism, he knew what he was talking about, both in theory and in practice.

The same can be said of his views on the role of women in the Church and the world. The definitive pronouncement that the Church does not have authority to ordain women cannot honestly be used to portray him as a misogynist. Nor does it mean that he banned all further reflection on the deep and important mystery of the relationship of the sexes in God's plan of salvation. John Paul II did much, said much and wrote much to honour the dignity of women and to encourage respect and partnership between men and women in the service of Christ.

The intellectual blindness of doctrinal dissent

Just because the dissenters have not got what they wanted, they presume that those in authority are motivated by either ignorance or prejudice or both. Again there seems to be a presumption underneath all liberalism that if someone really thought about things with any clarity, they would come to the same liberal conclusions.

It is tacitly assumed that anyone who accepts orthodox Catholicism has either suspended their intellect or that their faith is childish, uncritical and superstitious. This reeks of intellectual snobbery and also of a blind inability to contemplate the validity of any thoughts other than their own. Actually both John Paul II and Benedict XVI

very obviously give the lie to this, because of their undeniably towering intellectual abilities.

No Embargo On Discussion And Debate

There has always been a ferment of debate among theological schools in the Church and long may it continue. But this is something quite different from dissent against already defined doctrines and basic moral teachings. Discussions have to come to conclusions at times, which means that not everything can be constantly called into question, although this does not mean that there is an embargo on asking questions. As Cardinal Newman famously remarked: "A thousand questions do not make a doubt". Authoritative pronouncements may close some doors, but they also open up new vistas of exploration and adventure.

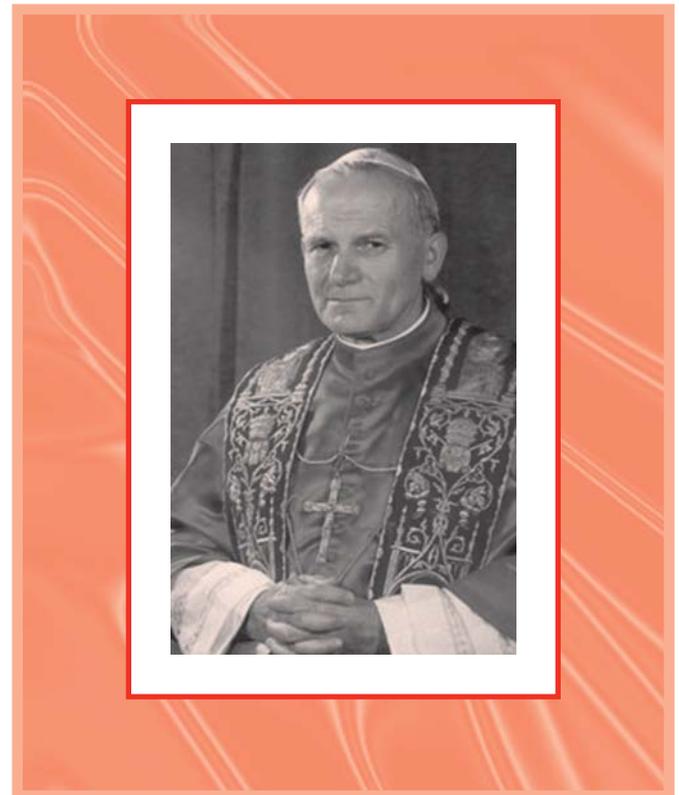
There are many legitimate areas of discussion and there is always a need to ponder, discuss and further develop our understanding of Catholic doctrine. This magazine is dedicated to that task too. But the fact is that Christianity is a religion of revelation, of light shed on the world from above; it is the religion of the Word who is Truth and Life. It is therefore a religion of Magisterium - of the Master's Voice. And while it is true that the Church must constantly learn to speak in a language the world understands, this does not mean she must say everything that the world wants to hear.

John Paul II: Doctor Of The Church?

The fact is that the vast majority of God's people rejoiced at the ministry of Pope John Paul II, not just for his radiant and engaging personality, but for his tireless work of explaining and exploring Catholic doctrine. For the publication of the new *Catechism of the*

Catholic Church alone, he will be remembered with undying honour and affection for centuries to come.

His encyclicals, apostolic letters and papal allocutions are a treasure trove of wisdom and insight, which far from closing the door on theological discussion, have set the stage for a great new development of doctrine which is still to come. Not all these sources are of the same level of authority, it is true, but if, and most likely when, Pope John Paul II is canonised, he must surely be declared a Doctor of the Church as well as a great modern saint.



On the evening of 2 April 2005 ... as it was already the day of the Lord, the octave of Easter, and Divine Mercy Sunday ... the Lord called the Holy Father, John Paul II, from the Vatican Apostolic Palace to Himself. The Servant of God, a man of an intense life of prayer, an untiring Pastor of the universal Church, and a courageous witness of the Gospel of Christ, entrusting himself totally to the will of God and to the Virgin Mary, had reaffirmed in his vast and rich Magisterium the centrality of the Eucharistic Mystery in the life of the Church, pointing out to every baptised person the primary goal of holiness, which he defined as "the lofty measure of the Christian life."

from the edict of the Vicariate of Rome, declaring the opening of the cause for the beatification of the Servant of God, John Paul II.

EDITORIAL

Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Existential Dignity

Luke Gormally

Luke Gormally is a Senior Research Fellow of The Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics, London, England (of which he was Director from 1981 to 2000), and a Research Professor of Ave Maria School of Law, Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A. In this essay, originally given as a lecture at Ave Maria School of Law in honour of the 25th anniversary of the election of John Paul II, he examines the Pope's unique contribution to the modern debate about human dignity.

"Conscience is determinative of existential dignity precisely in so far as the concrete judgments of conscience on what to do and what to avoid are grounded in the objective truth about man, and in particular objective moral truth."

1. Introduction

You will not find the phrase 'existential dignity' in the writings of Pope John Paul II, at least not in the major teaching documents of his pontificate. Nonetheless, the phrase 'existential dignity' is useful in highlighting a distinct concept of human dignity, understanding of which should certainly influence the way we think of what is required from us to promote human dignity and the common good in our society.

The phrase 'existential dignity' has its place in a threefold distinction we find in Christian tradition, stated with characteristic conciseness by St Thomas Aquinas. "Dignity", Aquinas wrote, "signifies something's goodness on account of itself (*propter seipsum*)". Human beings may be said to possess dignity firstly in virtue of their nature and destiny, secondly in virtue of the manner in which they live, and thirdly in virtue of their achievement of complete fulfilment in heavenly glory.

The first kind of dignity we could call *connatural dignity* – the sort that comes with being the kind of creatures we are; the second I am calling *existential dignity* – the kind that can be acquired if we live upright lives (what St Thomas calls the dignity of the *just*); the third we could call *definitive dignity* – the dignity of those who have made it to the glory of the beatific vision, the *beati*.

It will be important to bear in mind that the first kind of dignity, which I am calling *connatural dignity*, refers not simply to our basic constitution as human beings, but includes reference to the fact that we are made for a particular fulfilment or perfection. Just as you cannot say what a capacity is a capacity *for* without discovering what counts as the proper fulfilment of that capacity so you cannot say what the nature of something is without knowing what is the proper fulfilment of that nature.

Philosophy At The Service Of Revelation

As I have already noted, the Pope does not use the nomenclature I have introduced to mark this threefold distinction of types of human dignity, but most of what he has to say about the topic of dignity relates either to connatural or to existential dignity.

One further preliminary remark: Pope John Paul II's understanding of human dignity is unambiguously theological in character; it is, in other words, based on divine revelation. Philosophy plays an ancillary role in the understanding of revelation, both by helping to make explicit what is implicit in revelation and also by articulating and defending the presuppositions of revealed truth. John Paul II advances claims about human dignity which can certainly be given a purely philosophical defence, but were one to confine oneself to those claims the resulting account of human dignity would fall well short of what the Holy Father has to say about the subject.

I shall first of all outline what Pope John Paul has to say about connatural dignity as indispensable background to what he has to say about existential dignity. I shall

then say something briefly about the dominant secularist understanding of human dignity, and about the Pope's diagnosis of the roots of this understanding. That diagnosis will then lead us into an analysis of his understanding of authentic existential dignity. Finally, by way of conclusion I shall highlight the main practical implication, as it seems to me, of the Pope's teaching on existential dignity.

2. Connatural Dignity

Fundamental to our connatural dignity is the truth that man is made "in God's image".¹ In the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* the Pope writes: "In procreation ... through the communication of life from parents to child, God's own image and likeness is transmitted, thanks to the creation of the immortal soul."² And in a footnote to this statement he quotes the important doctrinal statement of Pope Pius XII that "The Catholic faith requires us to maintain that souls are directly created by God."³

This fundamental truth about the origin of each of us "as a special gift from the Creator" contains, the Pope says, "not only the foundation and source of the essential dignity of the human being – man and woman – in the created world, but also the beginning of the call to both of them to share in the intimate life of God himself."⁴

There are six key points to the Pope's teaching about man's creation in the image of God:

First: the doctrine of the 'image' means that human life is a distinctive kind of life involving an "intimate bond" between human being to his Creator, in virtue of which we have a fundamental orientation to God as our 'end'.

Second: our creation means that *each* human life is a gift from God.

Third: human beings are 'ends in themselves', not subordinate to things but rather with a vocation to dominion over things, and not reducible to the level of a mere means in relation to other human beings.

Fourth: our creation in the image of God means that we are endowed with fundamental capacities in virtue of which we come to know the truth and achieve true freedom. The transcendent fulfilment of these capacities, for which we are destined, is union with God in knowledge and love.

Fifth: a correct understanding of the soul/body relationship implies that the body shares in the intrinsic dignity of the person.

Sixth: reflection on the statement in *Genesis* that "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" suggests that the complementarity of man and woman is significant in human imaging of God's life. Pope John Paul holds that this complementarity involves distinctive ways in which men and women exhibit the human dignity of sharing in the Trinitarian life of God, of living in what he calls "the order of love".

This sixth point I shall explore when we turn to a consideration of existential dignity. Let me now say a little more about the other five points.

An Intimate Bond With The Creator

First, then, the proposition that our being made in the image of God means that we have an "intimate bond" with our Creator. The Pope follows St Thomas Aquinas, who in turn reflects a Patristic tradition, in distinguishing between man who is "*in* (or *to*) the image of God" and Christ, the Incarnate Word, who *is* the Image of the Father. And so, the Pope says: "Man created in the image of God acquires, in God's plan, a special relationship with the Word, the Father's Eternal Image, who in the fullness of time will become flesh."⁵

Man's being made "*to* the image of God" implies a fundamental orientation of his being "towards full openness to the truth"⁶ – to the One who is Truth in his very Person. Since the Word who is the Image is the *Son*, our orientation to the Truth is an orientation to a *filial* relationship to the Father.

The proper connatural orientation of our being is one of obedience to the One who is the source of the truth of our being. This point is quite fundamental to the Pope's understanding of human dignity but one, as we shall see, which is radically counter-cultural.

The Trinitarian Order As The Template Of Being

We are so constituted that this orientation to the Truth is to be realised in communion with others in self-giving love, for the God '*to*' whose image we are made is a Trinity of Persons. "In his intimate life", the Pope writes, God '*is* love' (1 *Jn* 4: 8, 16), the essential love shared by the three divine Persons: personal love is the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and the Son".⁷

Our human life of self-giving love is meant to be a sharing in what John Paul speaks of as 'the order of love' which properly "belongs to the intimate life of God himself, the life of the Trinity. In the intimate life of God", he writes, "the Holy Spirit is the personal hypostasis of love. Through the Spirit, Uncreated Gift, love becomes a gift

for created persons. *Love, which is of God*, communicates itself to creatures: ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.’ (Rm 5: 5)⁸

The *capacity* for a sincere gift of self – the very capacity which is actuated by the work of the Holy Spirit – John Paul II regards as belonging to the very definition of a person. In *Mulieris Dignitatem* he wrote:

*“The human being is a person, a subject who decides for himself. At the same time, man ‘cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self’ [that last phrase is one of the Pope’s favourite quotations from Gaudium et Spes, Vatican Council II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World] ... this description [he continues], indeed this definition of the person, corresponds to the fundamental biblical truth about the creation of the human being – man and woman – in the image and likeness of God. This is not a purely theoretical interpretation, nor an abstract definition, for it gives an essential indication of what it means to be human ...”*⁹

We can summarise the first point the Pope makes about the created image of God in us which constitutes our connatural dignity, by saying that it involves an orientation of our being to the Truth, which is to be realised in a relationship of filial obedience to the source of the truth of our being, in virtue of which we share in *the order of love* through the sincere gift of self which is made possible by the Holy Spirit.

Personal Existence As Divine Gift

The second key point I mentioned about our dignity in being created in the image of God through the direct creation of each human soul is that our creation means that each human life is a **gift from God**. As we ordinarily use the word (as in “Jack gave Jill a gift for her birthday”) the act of giving a gift standardly involves a recipient in a position to receive. But the recipient of the gift of life is not prior to the gift.

It is the gift of life which brings a person into existence: his or her very existence is freely bestowed by God and sustained by God. We human beings are fundamentally gift: it belongs to our very nature to be free gift of God. So we live in a relationship of radical dependence on God. Our very dignity is intimately related to the fact that we properly enjoy life on God’s terms.

The third key point about our dignity in being made in the image of God is that human beings are ‘ends in themselves’. God has created us with a view to our

fulfilment as human persons, but this fulfilment is not meant to be an individualistic or egocentric affair. Each of us is called to a fulfilment in that final state of beatitude in which the integrity of each will be most fully realised in a communion of self-giving and receiving through which we share in the interpersonal communion of the Trinity.

Truth Informs Love

The fourth key point about our dignity in being made in the image of God is that our creation endows us with the capacities to ‘do the truth in love’, in other words we are endowed with reason and will. Love assumes freedom. But the exercise of our capacity for free choice, if it is to be consistent with our destiny of sharing in the life of God, must be informed by reason’s grasp of truth.

In *Fides et Ratio* Pope John Paul wrote:

*“It is the nature of the human being to seek the truth. This search looks not only to the attainment of truths which are partial, empirical or scientific; nor is it only in individual acts of decision-making that people seek the true good. Their search looks towards an ulterior truth which would explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search which can reach its end only in reaching the absolute. Thanks to the inherent capacities of thought, man is able to encounter and recognise a truth of this kind.”*¹⁰ As we have already noted, our proper connatural orientation to the truth is one of obedience to the source of truth – the Triune God.

*“The realisation in our lives of a fully adequate relation to the truth is ‘in the Holy Spirit through the Son’, whereby we come to share in the Son’s own filial relationship to the Father. Human freedom is not compromised by such obedience, precisely because it is obedience to the truth. As the Pope says: “Patterned on God’s freedom, man’s freedom is not negated by his obedience to the divine law; indeed, only through his obedience does it abide in the truth and conform to human dignity.”*¹¹

Human Freedom And Bodily Dignity

The fifth and, for the present, the final key point about our dignity in being created in the image of God is that a correct understanding of the soul implies that the body shares in the connatural dignity of the human person. In the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* Pope John Paul traced a characteristic pattern of error in contemporary moral theology to the denial that fundamental aspects of the human good are to be identified by reference to what properly fulfils certain

basic human, including bodily, tendencies. The denial is motivated by the belief that human freedom should not be bound by such limits; rather the body, it is proposed, is at the disposal of human freedom. In face of this pattern of error the Pope pointed out that: "It contradicts the *Church's teachings on the unity of the human person*, whose rational soul is *per se et essentialiter* the form of his body. The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole – *corpore et anima unus* – as a person."¹²

So the existence of a human person is a unified *bodily* existence whose life is essentially rational. Since the human body is integral to the human person it shares in the dignity proper to the human person. Basic tendencies, including basic bodily tendencies, point to those goods of the person the realisation of which are integral to human fulfilment. Thus, for example, the tendency to sexual union finds its proper fulfilment in the good of marriage.

The Divine Image In Man As The Foundation Of Human Dignity

Since certain basic goods are integral to human fulfilment, respect for human dignity entails respect for those goods. That moral truth is the basis of the exceptionless prohibition of certain types of act which are contrary to the good of persons and therefore contrary to human dignity.

The fundamental features of our connatural dignity as created in the image of God are clear. Ours is the dignity of bodily persons made for an intimate relationship of knowledge and love with the Triune God who has given us life, and wills to give us the fulfilment of our lives through our acceptance of the knowledge – natural and revealed – which guides us into a way of self-giving love. We are under the authority of truth because all that is good – and therefore truly lovable – in human life has its source in the One Who is Truth itself.

3. The Contemporary Secularist Understanding of Human Dignity

When I speak of a secularist understanding I have in mind an understanding of human life which rejects belief in the existence of God or, while professing belief in his existence nonetheless considers it of little practical significance. So societies in which a majority in some sense profess belief in God may nonetheless be secularist. Most Western European societies with which I am familiar seem to me secularist.

Central to a secularist understanding of human dignity is the notion of autonomy. The word 'autonomy' has an ancient pedigree; it was used in antiquity of those city

states which devised their own laws, to distinguish them from city states which had laws imposed upon them by other city states to which they were subject.

This original usage brings out neatly the two key ideas which the notion of autonomy combines: the freedom of independence and the rationality of law. In the modern period it was the vastly influential eighteenth century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who employed the idea of autonomy in regard to individual human agency.

Human dignity for Kant was to be found in the fact that the law which guided our conduct was a self-imposed law (thus exhibiting our independence) and the law-like character of the maxims which guided our conduct derived from the fact that they were recognisably maxims of a kind that we should guide the conduct of anyone else who found himself confronted with the kind of choice which confronted us. So our role as legislators of morality should pass a consistency test for rationality, namely that our 'maxim of action' (our proposed law) should be consistent with respect for any other agent regarded as an end in himself.

The two striking features of the Kantian understanding of human dignity are first the idea that morality is something that we impose on ourselves, and second the idea that the content of the moral law is not something we can reason to by consideration of the goods of human bodily life but rather by reference to considerations of rational consistency.

Lying behind this second feature of Kant's position is, I believe, the mechanistic understanding of the human body which has dominated so much modern philosophy since the time of Descartes. Since the human body is not intrinsic to personal life bodily inclinations are not intrinsically significant in determining the human good.

The Subjectivisation Of Morality

The cultural history of the concept of autonomy since the time of Kant has been strongly influenced by the mechanistic view of the human body. This view has been compounded since the nineteenth century by the increasingly widespread belief that human beings are chance products of an evolutionary process. In consequence, those values which christian tradition particularly associates with bodily life (such as life itself, and the transmission of human life as a value governing sexual activity) are increasingly thought of as lacking an objective basis and so are assigned to the sphere of private autonomous choice.

The *subjectivisation* of certain areas of value is one factor in the scope given by a significant number of modern

authors to the idea of autonomy: the autonomous person determines not simply what is to count as the moral law but what he or she is to count as valuable. The background to much contemporary reflection on what makes a human life valuable is widespread agnosticism or scepticism about whether there is a range of diverse, basic values which are integral components, so to speak, of human well being.

Given such agnosticism and scepticism, one influential answer to the question about the value of human lives runs as follows: your life has value in so far as you are in a position to value things and you regard things as valuable. This means that if you do not possess the mental abilities which make it possible for things to *seem* valuable to you then there is no account one can give of the value of your life.

Modern Restrictions On Recognising Personhood

On this account there is no such thing as the *connatural* dignity which belongs to every living human being. Only a limited range of human beings are recognised as having human dignity and worth along with the basic rights which go with recognition of human dignity. They are those human beings who possess *presently exercisable abilities* of the kind characteristic of developed human beings: abilities to understand, choose and engage in rational communication.

In Anglo-American circles, philosophers who advance this position have taken to reserving the term ‘person’ for those human beings with these developed and exercisable abilities. It is clear that on this secularist view of human dignity it has not been difficult to rationalise abortion, embryo experimentation, infanticide, voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia and other practices.¹³

4. Pope John Paul II’s identification of the roots of the secularist understanding of human dignity

Pope John Paul is emphatic in identifying original sin as the deepest root of the widespread tendency in the modern world to locate human dignity exclusively in the exercise of autonomy and to deny inherent value to bodily existence.

At the outset of human history, by a free choice man lost his “original link with the divine source of Wisdom and Love”¹⁴ (*peccatum originans*), so that the condition in which we are born is one of alienation from God (*peccatum originatum*). In his Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* of 1986 the Pope provides a profound analysis of original sin and its consequences. He presents it as involving the loss of our original orientation to a *filial* relationship to God, an orientation disposing us to *receive*

the truth of our being from the loving source of our being and making possible an authentic exercise of freedom in self-giving love.

Alienation From God

This orientation ceased to be secure in human life because we succumbed to the lie that God, far from being the source of all that is good in our lives and of true freedom, is the enemy of man. We have been led to reject God’s paternity and have fallen for the deception that our freedom – and our dignity – depend on asserting our independence of and opposition to God.

“For in spite of all the witnesses of creation”, the Pope writes, “and of the salvific economy inherent in it, the spirit of darkness is capable of showing God as an enemy of his own creature, and in the first place as an enemy of man, as a source of danger and threat to man. In this way, Satan manages to sow in man’s soul the seed of opposition to the one who ‘from the beginning’ would be considered as man’s enemy – and not as Father. Man is challenged to become the adversary of God! The analysis of sin in its original dimension indicates”, the Pope continues, “that, through the influence of the ‘father of lies’, throughout the history of humanity there will be constant pressure on man to reject God, even to the point of hating him: ‘Love for self to the point of contempt for God’, as St Augustine puts it. Man will be inclined to see in God primarily a limitation of himself, and not the source of his own freedom and the fullness of good.”¹⁵ The loss of a right relationship to God means, John Paul says, that “the truth about man becomes falsified: who man is and what are the impassable limits of his being and freedom.”¹⁶

Alienation from God finds its ideological expression in the *modern age* in the proclamation of the ‘death of God’. But the ideology of the death of God brings with it a reductionist view of human life, manifest in contemporary anthropologies and moral theories. Human beings are seen as purely physical entities without any transcendent dimension to their existence.¹⁷

The physicalist anthropology is matched, according to the analysis of the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, by epistemologies – relativist and pragmatist¹⁸ – which deny the possibility of knowing objective truth. The fundamental capacity, which lies at the root of our *connatural* dignity – our capacity to know the truth – is denied; hence the debasing nihilism widespread in our culture.¹⁹ According to the Pope, contemporary nihilism, and the abandonment of the search for truth among philosophers have “obscured the true dignity of reason,

which is no longer equipped to know the truth and to seek the absolute”.

Original Sin And The Loss Of Human Dignity

In a culture in which there is a widespread tendency to deny the objectivity of value it is not surprising that the concept of human dignity is cashed out in terms of the autonomous assertion of subjective value. This is the contemporary version of that ‘blindness of the mind’, *caecitas mentis*, which is a characteristic consequence of original sin and which, along with the associated distortion of the will and disorder of sensuous desire, are so profoundly destructive of the possibility of love, of authentic human community, and thus of existential human dignity.

For the achievement of existential dignity depends on our living in *the order of love* in accordance with the truth of our being – the truth about our calling as human beings. And we acknowledge what the truth of our being is in so far as we recognise God as the creator whose purpose for us is an expression of his love, and whose love can alone make us truly free.

For Pope John Paul II, then, the fundamental problem of achieving existential dignity is set by the reality of original sin and its consequences. For existential dignity is nothing more nor less than the achievement in our lives of that goodness for which we were made; it is living in accordance with our connatural dignity. But of ourselves we are impotent to achieve that goodness. So the only reasonable account to give of what is required of us in order to live well is an account which makes clear what is necessary to overcome our moral impotence.

5. The Achievement Of Existential Dignity

At the beginning of his pontificate, in his first Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), the Pope spoke of “the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption” as the revelation to human beings of their true worth and dignity, a revelation through the manifestation of God’s self-giving love for us, a love that we must allow to transform us so that the ‘image of God’ is restored in us and we ourselves are made free to enter into relationships of self-giving love.

The image of God is restored in us through our being conformed to Christ, the Son who is the image of the unseen God, and who makes possible in us again a right relationship to God and to each other. In order to find again “the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity”, man must, the Pope says, “appropriate and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption”.²⁰

It is clear, then, that for John Paul II existential dignity – living well in accordance with our connatural dignity – is possible only through our transformation in Christ, which makes possible our living ‘in the order of love’. In the history of salvation the normative way to transformation is through our response in faith to the proclamation of the Word of God by the Church and through her sacraments, in which Christ effects the radical transformation which is to be lived out in our lives through the help of grace.

The entry into this process of transformation is what is called conversion, what the Pope calls “the rebuilding of goodness in the subject”²¹, of which Baptism is the sacrament. Conversion, he explains in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, “is expressed in faith which is total and radical, and which neither limits nor hinders God’s gift. At the same time it gives rise to a dynamic and lifelong process which demands a continual turning away from ‘life according to the flesh’ to ‘life according to the Spirit’ (cf. *Rom* 8: 3-13).

Conversion, Being Conformed To Christ

Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.²² And in *Veritatis Splendor* the Pope explains something of what acceptance of the sovereignty of Christ means: “Following Christ is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to him* who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross (cf. *Phil* 2: 5-8). Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (cf. *Eph* 3: 17), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord. This is the *effect of grace*, of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.”²³

The Pope’s emphasis on the fact that “Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to him* who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross” is central to understanding what is required for the achievement of life ‘in the order of love’ – the achievement therefore of existential dignity – for human beings profoundly marked by sin. For we are deeply resistant to living lives of self-giving love, and therefore have to be led into a profound transformation of a kind which cannot be had without suffering. Precisely how it can be that human dignity may shine through suffering is something to consider when I come to the Holy Father’s treatment of that topic.

Since our transformation is from a condition profoundly marked by sin, the initial ‘moment’ of conversion is the recognition of our sinfulness – our alienation from the Truth and the slavery of our wills.²⁴ The deep recognition of our sinfulness occurs in “the interior judgment of the conscience, and this”, the Pope writes, “being a proof of

the action of the Spirit of truth in man's inmost being, becomes at the same time a new beginning of the bestowal of grace and love ... in this 'convincing concerning sin' we discover a *double gift*: the gift of the truth of conscience and the gift of the certainty of Redemption."

The "gift of the truth of conscience", central to the Pope's understanding of conversion, is central also to his understanding of existential dignity. In the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* he wrote: "The Second Vatican Council mentioned the Catholic teaching on conscience when it spoke about man's vocation and in particular about the dignity of the human person. It is precisely the *conscience* in particular which determines this dignity ... This capacity to command what is good and to forbid evil, placed in man by the Creator, is the *main characteristic of the personal subject*. But at the same time, 'in the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience.'²⁵

The conscience therefore is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a *principle of obedience* vis-a-vis the *objective norm* which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behaviour."²⁶

Conscience Must Be Grounded In Objective Truth

Conscience is determinative of existential dignity precisely in so far as the concrete judgments of conscience on what to do and what to avoid are grounded in the objective truth about man, and in particular objective moral truth. And in acknowledging the implications of objective moral truth for one's own life one is in process of being restored to that obediential relationship to God, the source of all truth, in which he intended us to flourish.

The Father's definitive Word of Truth is Jesus Christ "and him crucified". It is through the Spirit's action in conforming us to Christ that conscience is rectified. Rectification leads to the recognition of certain truths about man and the human condition, including those foundational features of our connatural dignity of which we have already spoken.

Among these is the reality of those goods of the human person (such as life, truth, friendship, justice, marriage, a right relationship to God) which respect for human dignity requires us to respect. Respect for those fundamental goods in turn requires observance of exceptionless

prohibitions on the choice of certain types of act which are contrary to the good of persons and therefore contrary to human dignity.

In the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* the Pope wrote: "Reason attests that there are objects of the human act [that is, *types of choice*] which are by their nature 'incapable of being ordered to God', *because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image*. These are the acts which, in the Church's moral tradition, have been termed 'intrinsically evil' (*intrinsic malum*): they are such *always and per se*'²⁷ – in other words, because of the nature of what the moral agent is precisely aiming to do.

Morality Inseparable From Faith

Because we can fully live the demands of moral truth only through being conformed to Christ, the Pope regards the separation of morality from faith as a "more serious and destructive dichotomy" than the separation of freedom from truth.²⁸ In *Veritatis Splendor* he identifies faithful respect for moral absolutes as exhibiting the vital importance to morality of faith, understood as "a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a *truth to be lived out*."²⁹

Respect for the absolute prohibitions of the moral law secures that we exclude choices which could not possibly count as loving behaviour. But we are called to something more radical than that – we are called to a self-giving love which positively exhibits – existentially images, you might say – our sharing in the life of the Trinity. We can see something of the basic importance of that if we turn our attention now to what the Pope has to say about the significance of the complementarity of man and woman in imaging the life of God, an imaging in which something distinctive about the dignity of each appears.

The sixth key element that I highlighted earlier in the Pope's understanding of human connatural dignity he presents as an implication of the statement in the *Book of Genesis* that "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them". In this statement it seems clear that the very idea of our creation 'in the image of God' is elucidated by the statement 'male and female he created them'.

The complementarity of man and woman in marriage is meant to reflect the Triune God's own life of self-giving love. The inseparably unitive and procreative meanings of this relationship are a central manifestation of the truth that the fulfilment of the human person is to be found in the gift of self that is open to the other.

The relationship between husband and wife, both in its self-giving character and in its fruitfulness, is an image of Trinitarian life. In undertaking to treat each other as irreplaceable, husband and wife affirm their equality in dignity. In their distinctive roles as husband and wife they manifest something distinctive about the dignity of being a man and being a woman.

The Distinctive Dignity Of Woman

Pope John Paul, in face of the distorted understandings of the dignity of woman to be found in a variety of versions of feminism, has devoted a significant part of his papal teaching to clarifying the distinctive dignity of woman. What he has to say about woman's existential dignity is best approached by reference to what he has to say about woman's prophetic vocation, for it is the living of that prophetic vocation which exhibits woman's distinctive dignity. Women, the Holy Father says, are called to witness to 'the order of love'.

The phrase 'the order of love', which is a key to understanding what the Pope has to say about existential dignity, refers, as we have seen, primarily to the Trinitarian life of God himself, and secondarily to our participation in that life to which we are called and which is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus and the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. *Existentially*, human persons image God in the communion of reciprocal giving and receiving which reflects that communion of love which is the Trinity.

Women give a distinctive witness to the order of love, according to the Pope, by making visible acceptance of the gift of love – fundamentally God's love – which enables them to love in return. Of course all of us need to accept the love of God – men as well as women – otherwise we have no roots, so to speak, in the order of love. But what is at issue here is the distinctive witness women give both to the need for acceptance of love and, through wholehearted acceptance, to the rooting of human life in the order of love.

Marriage And The Language Of The Body

This witness is perhaps most readily seen in the marital relationship. At this point we need to take seriously the Pope's idea that what he calls 'the language of the body' is a clue to God's intentions in the order of creation. And in doing so, it is relevant to reflect that what is distinctive of the role of the woman in marital intercourse is that she *receives* the central physical expression of her husband's love.

In so far as she is able wholeheartedly to say 'Yes' to her husband's self-giving, she is able to give herself in love

and, further, accept as gift any coming-to-be of a child in her womb which may result from intercourse.

That it falls to the woman to engage in a distinctive act of *receptivity* follows from the created bodily constitution of woman. So that bodily constitution itself points to what is distinctive about the *connatural* dignity of woman: as the Pope states it, "she is the one who receives love in order to love in return".³⁰ And because the return of love by her establishes reciprocity, "woman", the Pope says, "is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons first takes root".³¹

Since genuine reciprocity requires the woman's wholehearted 'Yes' to the love offered, and since authentic self-giving in marriage depends on 'God's love poured abroad in our hearts', what makes possible the woman's wholehearted 'Yes' is fundamentally her acceptance of God's love. Her 'Yes' is therefore a witness both to the rootedness of the human 'order of love' in the love of God and to woman's existential dignity.

Since man is complementary to woman in 'the order of love'³², we can see most perspicuously in the marital relationship the distinctive dignity of man in his generative and fatherly role³³, the dignity of *the one who loves so that the other may love*. "In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God [cf. Eph 3: 15]," the Pope wrote, "a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family ..."³⁴

Married Love And Openness To Human Dignity

Marriage provides us with a central case of the importance of existential dignity – of the importance of our lives being rooted and lived in the order of love. For without the marriage relationship itself being so lived there is no secure foundation for the disposition to honour the *connatural dignity* of the child.

Husband and wife need to be unreservedly self-giving in order to have the disposition of openness to the child as gift, equal to themselves in *connatural dignity*. At the root of the tendency to treat the unborn child as manipulable product that we find in the standard practices of reproductive technology is a fundamental failure to live 'in the order of love'.

The secularist understanding of dignity as autonomy is frequently invoked nowadays to justify euthanasia as the proper response to the perceived indignities of suffering, debility and dependency. Can the Christian understanding of existential dignity expounded by the Pope accommodate suffering, debility and dependency? Not merely can it accommodate these experiences, he claims,

but these very experiences can be the occasion for the profoundest realisation of existential dignity in our lives.

Sacrificial Love Restores Lost Dignity

It is the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus which make this possible: through these events human suffering is linked to the order of love.³⁵ Just as Christ’s Cross was the path to glory (Resurrection), so human suffering lived in union with Christ can become a manifestation of human dignity. Union with Christ means being united in our suffering with the love for and obedience to the Father Christ showed in his suffering.

The distinctive dignity of the believing Christian whose sufferings are united with those of Christ is that of a certain proleptic participation in the power of the Resurrection: the human person is not crushed and defeated by suffering, but can continue to live in the order of love. This truth leads John Paul to say that “Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity, the powers of the Redemption.”³⁶

In making his power known in the “weakness and emptying of self” which suffering involve³⁷, God may allow us to glimpse human existential dignity pointing to definitive dignity.

“Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace. To this grace many saints ... owe their profound conversion. A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of his entire life and vocation.

“This discovery is a particular confirmation of the spiritual greatness which in man surpasses the body in a way that is completely beyond compare. When this body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior maturity and spiritual greatness become evident ... This maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the result of a particular conversion and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer.

“It is he himself who acts at the heart of human suffering through his Spirit of truth, through the consoling Spirit. It is he who transforms, in a certain sense, the very substance of the spiritual life, indicating for the person who suffers a place close to himself. It is he – as the interior Master and Guide –

who reveals to the suffering brother and sister this wonderful interchange, situated at the very heart of the mystery of the Redemption.

“Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation. By his suffering on the Cross, Christ reached the very roots of evil, sin and death. He conquered the author of evil, Satan, and his permanent rebellion against the Creator. To the suffering brother or sister Christ discloses and gradually reveals the horizons of the Kingdom of God: the horizons of a world converted to the Creator, of a world free from sin, a world being built on the saving power of love. And slowly but effectively, Christ leads into this world, into this Kingdom of the Father, suffering man, in a certain sense through the very heart of his suffering.”³⁸

True Freedom Only Realised By Grace

This long quotation from the Pope’s Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* serves to bring into its clearest focus what is at the heart of the Holy Father’s thought about the achievement of existential dignity at any time in our lives. For all of us have been left weakened by original sin; human nature, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin”.³⁹

We remain free to accept the grace of God, the grace of conversion. At any time in our lives the achievement of existential dignity depends on our accepting the grace of God which can make manifest the power of God precisely in our weakness. That power is the power of the Risen Christ who overcame suffering and death and who in the Holy Spirit unites us more closely to himself.

In face of secular modernity’s vision of human dignity as exemplified in the autonomous individual who determines what is to count as valuable, the alternative vision of John Paul II is that of Christian holiness: of the individual who lives the truth about man in love precisely through being united to his Risen Lord. True existential dignity is the dignity of holiness. It is the dignity that we are all called to realise.

6. Conclusion

Our desire to influence legislation and public policy in the pluralistic societies in which we live easily leads us to emphasise those elements in the understanding of human dignity, in particular connatural dignity, which admit of a philosophical defence. Philosophical defences can be advanced, for example, of the unity of the human

being, body and soul, of God's creation of the human soul, of the objectivity of moral values and of the norms which protect and promote those values, and of the exceptionless character of certain negative norms.

The Common Good, A Civilisation Of Trinitarian Love

Sometimes the Pope is himself perceived as excessively reliant on purely philosophical considerations for the defence of human dignity and of seeking to promote the common good by appeal to such considerations. But the Pope's understanding of the common good is that it requires nothing less than the realisation of a civilization of love. And he is completely clear about the massive obstacles to the realisation of such a civilization and about the fact that they have their roots in original and personal sin. And sin can clothe itself in rationalizations which shore up a deep resistance to truth.

A rather telling example of such resistance can be found in the final chapter of the philosopher Thomas Nagel's book *The Last Word*, where he explains what he calls his fear of religion as a fear of the existence of a "cosmic authority". It is the voice of autonomous man.

He writes: "I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."⁴⁰

Transformation, Rebuilding The Moral Person

Philosophy is unequal to the resistance sin can inspire. There needs to be Christian conversion, which begins by bringing home to us the extent to which we are – both in our intellects and our wills – the slaves of sin. There can then begin what the Pope calls "the rebuilding of goodness in the subject" through the love of God which transforms our hearts through the active presence in us of the Holy Spirit. When moral transformation begins to occur, people are on the way to achieving existential dignity. There then exist the conditions for the often difficult assimilation of philosophical truth.

It should be clear, then, why the most insistent point the Holy Father makes in his concern for the common good of humanity is not the need for well conducted philosophical polemic against the enemies of truth but the fundamental need for evangelization in order to bring people to conversion so that they can know the transforming power of the love of God in their own lives.

All the baptised are called to share in that fundamental task. If we want a world in which people live in ways consistent with their connatural dignity we can't aspire to anything less than holiness in our own lives and the proclamation to others of the Good News about what makes existential dignity possible. That I take to be the main practical import of Pope John Paul II's teaching about existential human dignity.⁴¹

- 1 See, among others, *Familiaris Consortio* 22; *Veritatis Splendor* 92; *Evangelium Vitae* 95.
- 2 *Evangelium Vitae* 43.
- 3 Pius XII, *Humani Generis*: "Animas enim a Deo immediate creati catholica fides nos retinere iubet". 42 (1950) *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*: 575.
- 4 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 9.
- 5 Discourse, 9 April 1986.
- 6 Discourse, 25 January 1984.
- 7 *Dominum et Vivificantem* 10.
- 8 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 29.
- 9 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 18.
- 10 *Fides et Ratio* 33.
- 11 *Veritatis Splendor* 42.
- 12 *Veritatis Splendor* 48.
- 13 This and the previous paragraph draw verbatim on three paragraphs of my paper 'Human dignity: the Christian view and the secularist view', in J Vial Correa and E Sgreccia (eds) *The Culture of Life: Foundations and Dimensions* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2002): 52-66, at 63-64. In that paper I offer a more detailed sketch of the roots of the Kantian understanding of human dignity in Cartesian dualism and the loss of a teleological understanding of human life.
- 14 *Redemptor Hominis* 8.
- 15 *Dominum et Vivificantem* 38.
- 16 *Dominum et Vivificantem* 37.
- 17 See *Evangelium Vitae* 22.
- 18 On pragmatism see *Fides et Ratio* 89.
- 19 On nihilism see *Fides et Ratio* 90.
- 20 *Redemptor Hominis* 10. See, from 16 years later, *Evangelium Vitae* 25.
- 21 *Salvifici Doloris* 12.
- 22 *Redemptoris Missio* 46.
- 23 *Veritatis Splendor* 21.
- 24 *Dominum et Vivificantem* 31.
- 25 Internal quotation from Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* 16.
- 26 *Dominum et Vivificantem* 43.
- 27 *Veritatis Splendor* 80.
- 28 *Veritatis Splendor* 88.
- 29 *Veritatis Splendor* 88.
- 30 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 29.
- 31 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 29.
- 32 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 25.
- 33 General Audience Address, 12 March 1980, reprinted in John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body. Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media 1997, pp.80-83, at p.81.
- 34 *Familiaris Consortio* 25.
- 35 *Salvifici Doloris* 18.
- 36 *Salvifici Doloris* 27.
- 37 *Salvifici Doloris* 23.
- 38 *Salvifici Doloris* 26.
- 39 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 405.
- 40 Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997): 130.
- 41 The text of this lecture draws heavily on a much longer paper I have written on "Pope John Paul II's teaching on human dignity and its implications for bioethics" which is to appear in a volume on *Pope John Paul II's Contributions to Catholic Bioethics* edited by Christopher Tollefsen and to be published by Kluwer in 2004. That paper provides fuller documentation for many of the assertions in the above lecture.



John Paul II: Champion and Theologian of Freedom

Michael McDermott SJ

In a profound analysis of the contemporary world, Professor McDermott, of the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus Ohio, shows how John Paul II consistently defended human dignity and freedom from those forces in society which seek to destroy the integrity of man.

"Precisely because freedom is understood as a gift to which a response is implied, human freedom cannot be the arbitrary selection of personal preferences".

The Post-Modern Predicament

When John Paul II first addressed the world from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in 1978 he invited all to come to Jesus with the proclamation, "Be not afraid!" It might seem strange that he considered this exhortation necessary in a world that prided itself on its accomplishments and progress. The dogma of evolution assured everyone that things are improving. Yet it was a world that had seen in the twentieth century alone countless victims sacrificed to assorted totalitarian ideologies and still stood on the threshold of a nuclear catastrophe, a world in which many barely survived in poverty and oppression while others lived lavishly. The world's imagination was captivated by technology even while heedless consumerism pandered to its enslaving needs. Most of all it was a world which daringly proclaimed its freedom and feared to submit itself to an external power. That world John Paul II challenged, echoing Jesus Christ's call to everyone to deny oneself and follow Him.

After the Protestant Revolt and the consequent wars of religion left Europe exhausted and religiously confused, the European Enlightenment sought a peace that did not depend upon an ambiguous divine revelation. Indeed, any divine revelation was deemed ambiguous precisely because it transcended man's mind. Instead of theological subtleties, the philosophes preferred the clarity and power of Newtonian physics as the principal tool for confronting and improving their world. Eighteenth century secular thinkers limited their speculations to the material world, assigned religion to a tolerated interior region of subjectivity, and proclaimed that they had come of age, no longer subjected to the domination of any authoritarian principle, be it divine or human.

The Age of Ideologies

Unfortunately limiting one's vision to the material world ignores all the meaningful questions of human existence. In their very revolt against tradition and religion, the *philosophes* parasitically sucked a derived life from the transcendental questions and desires whose significance they were denying. But once the interior spiritual life of the *ancien regime* had been desiccated and no reason could be found for its continued subsistence, the French Revolution quickly overthrew the traditional unity of throne and altar. As their previous *Weltanschauung* collapsed in ruins, men were forced to examine a wider horizon for their plans and dreams.

Without an all-encompassing vision of reality, humans lose their moorings and drift aimlessly, unsure of the context in which particular issues have to be judged, incapable of acting decisively. Hence they cannot long resist posing the deeper, wider questions about life's meaning. Not surprisingly, nineteenth century thinkers sought to supplement the Enlightenment's myopia, rushing into the breach and constructing romantic visions of reality, to which they expected others to dedicate their lives. Their speculative visions, from Schelling to Hegel, from Fichte to Marx, generated the swollen nationalist, racist, and internationalist ideologies, which would convulse Europe, the Americas, and finally the world. Men fought, killed, and

died in the name of ideologies which human minds had constructed and wished to impose on others. If the God of battles had not emerged clearly from the carnage of the religious wars, a much chastened humanity barely crawled away from twentieth century conflicts. Exchanging God for man did not improve humanity but left some men without limits in their desire to dominate others. When the corpses were counted, the worship of the idol humanity in Nazi, Fascist, or Communist uniforms seemed to have far outstripped the worship of God in wreaking havoc.

Existentialism: A Revolt Against Ideologies

Already by the middle of the twentieth century in Western Europe philosophers were so suspicious of ideologies that a relativistic, existential humanism was gaining favour. Camus set the individual in revolt against all ideologies and institutions, and Sartre, denying that objectivity could ever be attained, much less serve as a norm for moral action, proclaimed that whatever the individual chose was *ipso facto* the better choice. Man creates value by his very choice.¹ Although the idealistic upheaval of the late 1960s gave a momentary spurt to Marxist ideologies in Europe – Sartre even attempted to synthesize his existentialism with Marxism – the Chinese tyranny and the collapse of the Soviet block left the world without an ideology.

Capitalism, proclaiming itself the victor, attempted to fill the void with a cornucopia of consumer goods. The Enlightenment dream of humanism seemed to be conquering. The new European Constitution deliberately omits all reference to God. Man is allegedly master of all that he surveys. But John Paul II knew that material goods cannot fill man's inner hunger for meaning; they only distract him for a time even as they subjugate him to his passions. Western culture has manifested ever more clearly the sign of meaningless dissipation as sex became recreational, abortion, therapeutic cloning, and euthanasia undermined respect for life's sanctity, marriages dissolved, children were exploited, the drug culture burgeoned, suicides increased especially among the young, heroism and sacrifice were mocked, and the quest for pleasure introduced bizarre excesses.

A Cry For Meaning

Man kind cries out for meaning, yet the intellectual centres of culture dissipate the time by playing philosophical word games, writing solipsistic poetry of self-referential symbols, composing dramas of frustrated rage, and questioning the very possibility of knowing. The medieval universities, a product of Christian trust in the Logos who made the universe, were granted their charters of freedom by the papacy because they were

dedicated to truth. But post-modern occupants of ancient professorial chairs no longer believe in truth: since objectivity cannot be reached, truth has become whatever the individual decides it is. Taking its cue from the professors, the Supreme Court of the United States wrote, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."²

That argument served to justify the "right" to abortion, but it can be extended to every area of human existence. Thus tolerance is proclaimed the supreme virtue, and all absurdities are tolerated except those challenging the supremacy of the arbitrarily established, politically correct code of thought and conduct, that the unseen arbiters of opinion impose upon the university and the half-educated quasi-intelligentsia subservient to it, ever fearful of being out of date. "Spin" rules and the mind reels. As the university declines its traditional role of speaking truth to power and individuals are ever more isolated in cocoons of their own construction, with the breakdown of intermediate institutions the state assumes the role of Leviathan, the allegedly omniscient mortal god. No individual can alone resist or restrict its claims. Woe betide the little ones whose existence is not recognized as meaningful.

John Paul's Challenge to Freedom

Such a world John Paul II challenged to respond to Christ in freedom and for freedom. Yet the post-modern world hesitates because it fears losing its greatest good, its freedom. Submitting oneself to an unseen God beyond the world, whose will is allegedly mediated and interpreted by fallible humans, seems a pure loss of what is most precious to man, a loss which leads to the perpetration of inhumanities upon oneself and others because it escapes all rational control. Because the spectre of the Enlightenment still haunts it, the secular world refuses to see the paradox that freedom is gained only when it is sacrificed.

As one must lose his life in order to find it and the seed must die in order to bring forth fruit (cf. Mk. 8:35; Jn. 12:24f.), so freedom must be surrendered if it is to be won. Of course a paradox resists the Enlightenment's simplistic rationalism. The Enlightenment was always demanding freedom for itself from tradition, authority, and God in order to build a more human world but it constantly shied away from contemplating or even analyzing the mystery of freedom.³

Freedom must be a mystery, for it cannot submit itself to human reason. Human reason seeks reasons why things are as they are or, in the moral realm, why they should be

otherwise. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle a “reason” indicates a cause, why things are such as they are and not otherwise. A cause implies a necessity; if there were no necessary connection between the cause and its effect, the “reason” discovered would at most be a necessary condition for the state of affairs (a *conditio sine qua non* in Scholastic terminology), not a real cause. For human reason operates according to laws of thought; it does not function arbitrarily. Otherwise it could neither understand reality coherently nor persuade others with an argument.

Classical Philosophy: Objectivity Found In Nature

Classical philosophy, presupposing that the mind can attain reality, discovered in “natures” the objective necessity corresponding to the necessary laws of thought. A nature is a principle of activity and rest which develops according to its inherent laws. So an acorn develops naturally into an oak, not into a vine, and a chicken’s egg becomes by nature a chicken, not a horse. An intelligibility pervades such natural processes of change as each nature strives to attain the end, or goal, inherent in its being and operation. In Aquinas’ doctrine human nature has an end and the will as a natural faculty is necessarily ordered to its end; since man’s nature is rational his end consists in the possession of universal good or God (S.T. I, 82, 1; I-II, 1, 4.5, 2; 2, 2.7. 8; 3, 1.8).

Even though the axiom, “nature tends to a single end,” holds strictly for non-rational natures, intellectual natures enjoy the possibility of choosing various means to their necessary end, which is infinite, and in this respect man’s rational choice is not determined to a single end: “free will holds itself indifferent for choosing well or badly” in the face of contingent realities (I, 82, 1-3; 83, 1.2; I-II, 1, 5, 3). The poor use of his freedom may deprive man of his natural end.

There is also the paradox that the attainment of his end, the beatifying vision of God, surpasses man’s natural capacities (I-II, 5, 5); it is a supernatural gift.⁴ Thus man, while being part of the natural world, also surpasses it in his freedom; though the freedom is rooted in the will, a natural faculty, the operation in which it actuates itself and by which it attains its end, the election, surpasses the limits of nature.

The “Enlightenment”: The Splitting Of Nature and Morality

The mysterious tension between nature and freedom intensified when the Enlightenment accepted as foundational Newtonian physics.⁵ Whereas ancient and Scholastic thinkers considered “nature” a whole composed of dynamic self-moving parts, i.e., individual

natures harmoniously oriented to an end, the new mechanistic science considered “nature” (Greek: *physis*) to be dead. It consisted of inertial masses moved from without by efficient causes and subject to universally binding laws, like that of gravity and the commutation of motion. But if all reality had to obey such mechanistic laws, what room was left for freedom and morality? Some Enlightenment moralists like Francis Hutchesins and Adam Smith relegated morality to the feelings, especially benevolence and sympathy, and considered moral education to consist in the proper training of emotional responses.⁶

Kant: Man A Law Unto Himself

Besides leaving unanswered the question how man could be free in the world when all physical motion was determined by mechanistic laws, such a position stripped away the intellectual foundations of moral action. Kant saw the absurdity and tried to reestablish the rational foundations of moral action. Because he was influenced by Hobbes’ scepticism about knowledge of the external world he claimed that just as reason creates universal, necessary laws in the objective science of physics, reason prescribes the content of universal, necessary laws in morality. To discover correct norms of conduct one only has to ask oneself if one’s subjective principle for action could be extended to all men. For example, if all men could lie in order to obtain a bank loan, no bank would extend credit.

Therefore lying to obtain credit is prohibited for everyone. In Kant’s system God no longer prescribes rules, but man becomes the ultimate moral legislator. “What else, then, can the freedom of the will be but autonomy, i.e., the property of the will to be a law to itself?”⁷ Kant’s system ultimately collapsed because it failed to reconcile the phenomenal realm of physics with its finite, necessary laws (objective science) with an unknowable, infinite realm (the *noumenon*), in which he located human freedom, God, material reality (source of sense impressions), and subjective self-consciousness. But, as we noted above, his successors in the nineteenth century also failed to explain reality despite their wide-reaching efforts to reconcile the finite with the infinite.

Hence despite acknowledged insufficiencies Kant’s formulation of basic epistemological, ontological, and moral questions still dominates current philosophical thought. Even though Einstein overturned Newton’s absolute three-dimensional space and time, molecular science has rejected the necessary laws of mechanistic physics, cultural anthropology has undermined universal moral norms, and philosophical relativism has scorned the universal claims of Kant’s finite reason, contemporary

academics follow Kant in excluding God from intellectual discourse and see man's freedom as the ultimate norm of morality.⁸

Such a position easily explains why modern intellectuals feel themselves alienated. Their freedom is not only outside of but also opposed to nature; their reason fails to discover any common truth that is shared with other rational creatures; and their limited experience leads only to the grave. Since Christ has conquered the grave, one might think that His message would be most appealing to the conundrum of the people of our time. Yet the intellectual inheritance of the Enlightenment weighs heavily on us, augmenting the already massive load of pride that prevents us from surrendering our autonomy.

Seeing freedom as mankind's greatest good, intellectuals refuse to submit to anyone outside themselves. Unfortunately freedom, being a mystery, does not lend itself easily to definition and practice. There are many strange and contradictory definitions of freedom that fight for supremacy in our world. They are worth studying.

Various Accounts Of Freedom

One principal notion of freedom, borrowed from the political realm, understands freedom as independence. Teen-agers have also been known to long for independence from the restrictions laid on them by their parents and schools. The insufficiency of such an understanding, however, should be obvious upon slight reflection.

A finite creature can never be totally independent. His finitude means that he is limited by other finite creatures. We all depend upon others for our food and shelter, not to mention the many conveniences which they provide. Indeed we are dependent upon the air we breathe and the earth we walk upon for life, orientation, and stability. Teenagers, once set up by themselves, usually find that new restrictions are placed upon them by their bosses, neighbours and friends. Usually the bosses are not so concerned with their well being as their parents were. In the ultimate analysis only God is capable of being totally independent, yet the Christian God chose to make a world susceptible to rebellion and redeem it through suffering.

A related notion of freedom, again tinged by adolescent fancies, imagines it as doing what one feels like. That certainly avoids the inconveniences of having someone shout into one's ear orders which must be obeyed. It leaves room for spontaneity. But again reflection reveals that doing what one feels like hardly distinguishes men from beasts. Cows and pigs do what they feel like,

following their natural impulses. They are hardly free. "Spontaneity" more often than not involves submitting to the unconscious tendencies of one's nature.

Thus necessary instincts and needs determine actions that one would like to call free. The spontaneity that accompanies true freedom does not consist in doing merely what one feels like doing. Christ freely went to the cross though such obedience did not accord with His feelings.

Since reason distinguishes man from the beasts, some define freedom in terms of reason. It means following reason, which grants man a certain distance from his feelings, allowing him to see the implications of his actions and purposely plan his future. That seemed to be the Enlightenment ideal, but, as we noted, its reason was objectively realized in Newtonian science, which prescribed an iron determinism. Reason works according to inalterable laws and allows no exceptions. Even in the reaction against the Enlightenment Hegel and Marx both insisted that the world had to develop according to their theories.

Their reason, understood dynamically, controlled not just physics but also history, and all individual instances which sought to resist those laws were deemed irrelevant. Today, however, when scientific laws are considered abstractions from reality and multiple perspectives on every conceivable question are allowed and encouraged, reason has been relativized. Whose reason should be followed, yours or mine?

Why should anyone else's perspective or opinion count more than mine? Yet once reason is denied the possibility of attaining objective reality, the choices allegedly based on reason appear arbitrary and freedom is reduced to following one's feelings. Certainly the infinite God did not follow the laws of human reason in deciding to create the world, yet His decision was not arbitrary since creation was accomplished through the Logos.

Another view, which traces its origin at least to Augustine, sees freedom accomplished only when one chooses the good, what one should choose. Since the will was created to choose the good, the will is free only insofar as it attains its purpose. The choice of evil or a lesser good frustrates the will's purpose and enslaves it to the attraction of a reality beneath it.

This happens all too often in a fallen world where concupiscent human beings are subjugated to passions and inculcated desires. Unfortunately such an idea of freedom has inspired all sorts of ideological or personal

tyrannies, whereby the party, the state, or its *Führer* prescribes what the good is and forces everyone else to freedom by imposing the correct demands: *Arbeit macht frei!* So millions were enslaved under Communism and Fascism in the name of freedom. Yet Christians proclaim that only in choosing God, who alone is Good (Mk. 10:18), can man become free.

Free Will And The Light Of Reason

A final view may be traced to the Scholastics but has become generalized. Freedom is traced to the mutual interaction, or causality, of intellect and will. Man often deliberates before he chooses, especially in matters of great moment. His intellect, after careful analysis, offers several possibilities of action to the will. Since none of these possibilities exhausts the unlimited goodness to which the will is oriented – were the will oriented to some finite good, it would not be free, but determined to and by that good – none of them forces the will to choose it.

The ultimate choice of a course of action depends upon the will. Yet precisely because the intellect informs the will with rational possibilities for its choice, the will's choice is guided by reason. Thus intellect and will cooperate in making the choice which is neither irrational nor compelled. However psychologically astute such an analysis of freedom seems to be, there is a fatal flaw. Insofar as none of the possible finite choices exhausts the goodness naturally sought by the will, none of the reasons compels the will.

Hence reason comes up short in the ultimate analysis and the choice seems to be arbitrary. For example, if someone is deciding on his or her vocation in life, whether married or religious or single, all those states of life manifest advantages and disadvantages; reason alone cannot decide. There is a real risk involved. Yet the challenge of the risk must be accepted. For to remain unendingly indifferent or hesitant before all the choices abolishes the actuality of choice; indeed, to refuse to choose is itself a choice since human beings live in a world demanding choices. We cannot dally forever in the consideration of possible worlds, the real world has been given to us and we have to respond or die.

The Drama of Karol Wojtyla

Karol Wojtyla surely had to accept the world as it was thrust upon him, and if anyone ever had the right to lament his fate, Wojtyla might have claimed it. Deprived of his mother in early youth, then losing his brother and father, by the age of twenty-one he found himself without a family yet doomed to face the double scourges of Nazism and Communism, implacable enemies of God and man, for the next thirty-eight years of his life. But he

realized that exterior events do not determine one's fate. Destiny is also freedom for man.

In the face of tyranny Wojtyla affirmed man's inherent freedom as God's greatest gift. Man cannot be reduced to the simple sum of his parts and influences. A conscience tells him of his moral responsibilities and, in case of failure, punishes him with guilt. Despite the efforts of various psychologists to explain guilt away as the result of social pressure or infantile training, basic to man is his sense of moral responsibility.⁹ Unless man were open to responsibility for his actions, external pressures could never give rise to the guilt which plagues human life, marking its grandeur and tragedy. "Drama" has to do with man's "doing," and the great literature of all ages bears witness to man's responsibility and guilt.

No one plumbed the depths of the Slavic soul so penetratingly as Dostoevsky, and his worldwide success shows that the Slav stands for everyman. Indeed Homer's Achilles, Sophocles' Oedipus and Antigone, Euripide's Electra, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and Lear, Corneille's Cid, Racine's Phaedre and Athalie alike bear witness to the fearful majesty of conscience, whether heeded or rejected to one's cost. The very beginning of our race was marked by the crime in which Adam and Eve, instead of serving conscience and the objective order of value, sought to become masters of good and evil, displacing God and destroying all harmony.

The Acting Person

Actor, playwright, poet, and priest, Karol Wojtyla was also called to teach moral philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin. There by skillfully combining Scholastic precision with phenomenological method, he laid the ontological and epistemological foundations of a moral philosophy that undergirded his great papal writings. His major work, *The Acting Person*, already indicates the creativity of his thought. He accepts the Scholastic ontology of nature and being but places it in a new context. Instead of starting with natures as principles of activity, he identifies the person as the one who acts.

By "action" he intends primarily moral action, for in moral action the meaning of human existence becomes manifest. Whereas the Scholastics started with a philosophy of nature, studying the necessary structures of reality, and made room for freedom by appealing to the contingency of individual existence, Wojtyla makes it clear that freedom is located in the person, not in the natural will. For the nature is only the necessary precondition of human action. Because human

abstractions only approximate the mystery of freedom, the “natures” which the mind attempts to grasp are surely centres of activity, but they are not ultimately determinate of freedom.¹⁰ They give a certain structure to human existence and thought, orienting its needs to various means of fulfillment. The nature needs food, rest, and intellectual nourishment, the choice of time, place, and type of fulfillment is not determined in particulars. The ultimate decision and choice depend upon the individual person. That is especially true in moral choices that engage the whole person.

Person as Freedom

The notion of person was invented by Christian theologians in the great Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the first seven centuries. They needed a word to express the final unity in Jesus that allowed for Him to be both God and man. Since divine and human natures were clearly distinct, the unity had to be something that was not natural, but neither could it depend upon a fusion or choice subsequent to the creation of Jesus’ human nature. Latin *persona* and Greek *hypostasis* served that unifying function at the Council of Chalcedon. What exactly the word meant was left undetermined by the Council Fathers.

They considered their task accomplished when the promulgated dogma allowed for a unity in Christ that transcended the diversity of natures. It would be up to later theologians to work out the exact relation of person to nature. That task was somewhat complicated by another usage: the word *persona* or *hypostasis* was employed to indicate the distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the unity of the divine nature. While St. Maximus the Confessor would provide a brilliant synthesis of orthodox Christology around the notion of person, his theology was lost to the West, due as much to the complexity of his argument as to the breakdown of the Roman Empire under the attack from Arabs, Germans, and Slavs.¹¹

The medieval Scholastic revival of high, speculative theology, employing as handmaiden a philosophy of nature, would wrestle with the various notions of person: in Aquinas’ great synthesis person in Trinitarian thought was a subsistent relation, in Christology an individual substance, or subsistence, of a rational nature.

I Am Therefore I Act

Much subtlety was employed by later Scholastics to define the notion of person more exactly, but their starting point in natures restricted their efforts.¹² Wojtyla cut the Gordian knot of speculation by starting with the person conscious of his moral freedom. Intellectual

abstractions and judgments can discover a certain order in created reality, but abstractions always fall short of the individual’s vocation, the one called here and now to a choice and commitment (RH 21).¹³

Man is free, and in *Dominum et Vivificantem* John Paul II identified man’s image and likeness to God not just with his reason or spirit, but explicitly with his freedom (DV 43), the gift given and the vocation to be accepted (DV 13; RH 21). For God speaks to every individual in the depths of his being; conscience is called the “voice of God” echoing in man’s “secret sanctuary” (DV 43). “God is present in the intimacy of man’s being, in his mind, conscience and heart: an ontological and psychological reality” (DV 54).

Man In Need Of Self Revelation

This theme was already sounded in the Pope’s first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*. Since God is love, man, the image of God, is called to love (RH 9). “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible to himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it” (RH 10). Indeed, the truth revealed by Christ is a truth that grounds man’s freedom. There is an objective order of justice and love to which freedom must respond (RH 16f.).

Love has as its object not just God but also God’s image, “man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being” (RH 14, 17). Our age is filled with false notions of freedom: it is “confused with the instinct for individual or collective self-interest or for combat and domination,” thus leading to its abuse, especially in consumerism, the desire to “have more” rather than to “be more,” which leads to the limitation of the freedom of others (RH 12, 16).

Before entrusting himself and the Church to the prayer of the Mother of God, the Pope concludes his encyclical with a rejection of the Enlightenment’s idea of freedom as autonomy. It deserves quoting:

Nowadays it is sometimes held, though wrongly, that freedom is an end in itself, that each human being is free when he makes use of freedom as he wishes, and that this must be our aim in the lives of individuals and societies. In reality, freedom is a great gift only when we know how to use it consciously for everything that is our true good. Christ teaches us that the best use of freedom is charity, which takes concrete form in self-giving and in service. For this ‘freedom Christ has set us free’ (Gal. 5:1) and ever continues to set us free.

John Paul II just previously has spelled that that freedom:

"Mature humanity means full use of the gift of freedom received from the Creator when He called to existence the man made 'in His image, after His likeness.' This gift finds its full realization in the unreserved giving of the whole of one's human person, in the spirit of the love of a spouse, to Christ and, with Christ, to all those whom He sends, men and women totally consecrated to Him in accordance with the evangelical counsels. This is the ideal of the religious life". (RH 21)

Precisely because freedom is understood as a gift to which a response is implied, human freedom cannot be the arbitrary selection of personal preferences. Ultimately the individual person in the depths of his conscience knows that he has to choose absolutely between altruism and selfishness and act consistently and faithfully in accordance with that choice, giving himself fully to find himself. For it is the paradox of love that when one's attention is most concentrated on the beloved, one feels that one first begins really to live. To the defense and promulgation of that basic Christian truth John Paul II dedicated his life.

The Necessity of Christ's Liberation

Sometimes such is the high opinion that John Paul II has of man and his freedom that one might almost think that it suffices to love God in man, God's image. John Paul himself says that the Church is "for man" and that "[man] is the primary and fundamental way for the Church" (RH 14, 21).

Many humanists would applaud if the Church were to restrict herself to humanitarian services without raising any universal claim to a particular truth. But the Church cannot cease calling men to accept the Christ who lived at a particular time in history. *Redemptor Hominis* opens with the bold affirmation, "The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history." Man is the way of the Church because previously "Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church" (RH 13).

Because Jesus gave His life for all men, the Church, His Bride and Body, knows that she has to care for and defend the freedom of all men. Certainly man's life without Christ would be tormented by despair arising from life's enigmas. If man is made for love, how do we, who live in a fallen world, alienated from ourselves and nature, know that love is a reality?

"In men and 'in man's world,' which in itself is a world of moral good and evil, does good prevail over evil?" (RH 15, 18; DM 10) How can anyone speak of "the primacy of

person over things... the superiority of spirit over matter" (RH 16) in a world where so many suffer exploitation and all human endeavour ends with the grave?

God, The Definitive Word Of Love

From just his own experience of himself and the world, no mortal can assure the rest of us that love is stronger than hatred, sin, and death. Someone has to tell us with conviction of love's reality. Only God can speak a definitive word about love because God alone *is* love. Yet that word had to be spoken in a way intelligible to fallen men.

So the Word became flesh and spoke to us in human words. More than that, Jesus did not just impart a teaching about love. As Love incarnate, He died for our sins and rose for our justification (cf. Rom. 4:25). In Him we know the truth that "above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the 'futility of creation'; it is stronger than death; it is a love always ready to raise up and forgive" (RH 9).

The truth of love is not an abstract theory but the concrete truth of human life since Christ became our "way, truth, and life" (Jn. 14:6). "This revelation of love is also described as mercy; and in man's history this revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ" (RH 9). Since Christ said, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free," He is "the one who brings man freedom based on truth" (RH 12, citing Jn. 8:32).

Man Created In Christ, The Perfect Image Of God

In this way it is clear how the revelation of Christ "fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling" (RH 8, 10, citing GS 22). If man was created in the image of God, St. Paul now more truly calls Christ "the image of God" (II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). As man's "original link with the divine source of Wisdom and Love ... was broken in the man Adam, so in the Man Christ it was reforged" (RH 8).

Now men cannot understand themselves apart from the "image of God" who created, restored, and elevated them to the dignity of divine sonship. To accept Christ's revelation of truth, which is identically the fidelity of love, means not just to affirm a proposition but primarily to accept and unite oneself to a person, a divine person, in faith and love.

This union initiated by Christ effects the Church, Christ's Body in space and time, and shows how Christ is the new Adam (RH 8) and the Church is "a sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God and of the unity of all

mankind" (RH 18, citing LG 1). This sharing of life commissions the Church to continue Christ's self-giving service of mankind, and central to that service is the defense of truth and human freedom (RH 12, 14, 16, 19, 21).

Redemptor Hominis showed how the Church's mission defends human freedom, and its themes were reiterated in John Paul's subsequent encyclicals. *Dives in Misericordia* not only traced the redemption back to the Father's intention at creation but insists that justice cannot be attained unless carried by love.

The Cross, An Answer Beyond Mere Reason

The rational attempts to create and impose justice cause the greatest injury unless they are supported by selfless, forgiving love. This transcendence of merely rational order reappeared clearly in *Fides et Ratio* since philosophy, understood as the rational inquiry, cannot be sustained without a deeper wisdom, especially when confronted with the reality of evil and apparently undeserved, unrequited suffering.

There the cross's divine wisdom is necessary to resolve the rational conundrums of human life by providing a wider vision of reality.¹⁴ *Salvifici Doloris* correspondingly showed how suffering can be transformed into glory, into an active participation in the redemption of oneself and others through the joining of one's own suffering to Christ's in love. *Dominum et Vivificantem* emphasized the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and consciences of men from creation, since the Father wants every man to return His love, which is fully revealed in Christ.

Because John Paul considered marriage the "sacrament of creation" and "the primordial sacrament,"¹⁵ in which love is to be lived and communicated to children, he has resolutely upheld the sacred indissolubility of marriage and defended sexuality and the dignity of the human body against all the trivializing, desecralizing tendencies of technology, pornography, and eroticism in *Familiaris Consortio*. Similarly because in God's original plan love and life were one – just as God's life is love – *Evangelium Vitae* defended human life from the moment of conception to natural death.

Only after sin destroyed the primordial unity of life and love, did the horrors of abortion, artificial contraception, and euthanasia arise to dull man's perception of life as a divine gift. Against those who would relativize moral absolutes, letting all depend upon the subjective conscience, so vulnerable to concupiscence, *Veritatis Splendor* recalled the objectivity of moral norms which are implied in the total following of Christ.

Despite the unique, privileged position of the Catholic Church which mediates and witnesses the life and truth of Christ to humanity, John Paul recognized with St. Thomas that God did not limit His power to the sacraments (S.T. III, 64, 7; 66, 6; 27, 1, 2) – otherwise no pagan would be moved by grace to receive baptism. Hence *Redemptoris Missio* acknowledged the goodness found in non-Christian religions even while insisting upon the need for conversion to Jesus Christ, the unique mediator between God and man, and to the Catholic Church where the fullness of His truth and life is maintained by God's faithful grace.

Love, Union Without Annihilation

Since love unites while recognizing differences, the witness of believers to love and the freedom which love implies looks to unanimity in love and faith. Thus *Slavorum Apostoli* and *Oriente Lumen* called for unity between East and West. Similarly *Ut Unum Sint* supported ecumenism's efforts to gather all Christians into one Church around the one table of the Lord, but with full respect for God's truth, not ignoring nor minimizing the real dividing differences that remain.

Love is more fundamental than justice, faith in love is deeper than the profession of dogmas, wisdom is wider than rational explications. Yet just as the Word of God communicated Himself through the message of human words, love cannot do without justice (DM 14) nor faith without dogma (FR 84, 95f., 99) nor wisdom without reason (FR 64, 75, 79). The deeper commitment of freedom, in which the mystery of God's love encounters man's heart, has to be mediated through finite intelligible structures as Christ's humanity, the sacraments, the Scriptures.

Bringing Love Down To Earth

Without these structures, love remains vague, incomprehensible, and irrelevant. Love's unlimited demand for conversion and self-giving has to find concrete application in the real world of flesh and spirit. That is why John Paul insisted so strongly on the finite structures mediating love: marriage, the family, the unique role of women in *Familiaris Consortio* and *Mulieris Dignitatem*; then, in the order of grace, Church and the sacraments, especially penance in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* and the Eucharist in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.

That is also why he had to address broader issues of social justice in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus* and the meaning of human activity in *Laborem Exercens*. For Christ's salvation embraces and illuminates all aspects of human life. Men are who they are in relation to others. They are made in the image of love for love,

and that love has to be incarnated in finite structures. Although the social encyclicals do not contain dogmatic pronouncements, they are grounded in the fundamental truths of Christian life and hence can shed light upon the changing structure of the world. For wherever human freedom is at work, there the love of God is calling to men to express the figure of Christ, who serves His fellow men as He gives glory to the Father.

Freedom To Be In Relationship

Through all his labours, John Paul the Great was explaining, defending, and saving human freedom, because only free men can receive the revelation of the God who is Love in Jesus Christ. Freedom is not a possession that a creature hugs to himself, jealously hoarding his autonomy; it is a gift to be returned with gratitude so that it may attain the true freedom of God without limit, a final freedom that fulfills human nature while divinizing it.

Like the kingdom of God, it exists in the tension between present and future, indicative and imperative. Human persons are who they are because they are in relation: most themselves when most one with others. For such also is God, endless Love, the mutual exchange of selves as subsistent relations. The Father is who He is, Father, only because the Son is Son, both in relation, communicating in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The struggle of the third millennium has commenced. The neopagan secular state, which claims to serve man and protect his rights, ultimately forces men to conform to its narrow vision of reality because it recognizes no power outside itself. It relativizes all values and laws in the swells of history in order to impose its own arbitrary order. But arbitrary imposition is not freedom and fosters no order.¹⁶

The Church must always appear as its foe since the Church has a norm of human action revealed from beyond man. Human law at most can insist upon justice, but justice cannot be easily defined; it always wavers between the simple equality of commutative justice, "tit-for-tat," "equal pay for equal work," and distributive justice, or equity, that recognizes differences among men and apportions rewards and punishment accordingly. Only self-sacrificial love can recognize the correct standard to be applied and hope for the acceptance of its judgment.

That is why the state needs a foundation deeper than itself in order to subsist. If it does not recognize a norm beyond itself, it becomes tyranny. The Roman Empire

sought to abolish the Christian Church because she refused to worship human power as right.

The Church today is attacked by secularists on all sides because she refuses to recognize any human society as absolute. For the Church knows that there is a truth greater than man, a truth that, appearing in history, is nonetheless not relativized by the undulations of time and cultures. Freedom needs a Truth that transcends the world even while it is found in the world.

Such is Christ who has committed Himself to mankind forever in His Church because He wants men to be free.¹⁷ Christ's freedom overcame the world and despite all the advantages of its technology and propaganda secularism shall collapse upon itself because it cannot assure man the freedom that he is and desires. We Catholics can thank God for the gift of John Paul II, who not only resisted the forces of dissolution within the Church but also renewed the vision and championed the cause of Christ, crucified and risen, who has "set us free for freedom" (Gal. 5:1). Love has overcome sin and death. We have nothing to fear.

- i1. A. Camus, *The Rebel*, tr. A. Bower (New York: Vintage, 1956), esp. pp. 285-290, 301-306.; J. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, tr. P. Mairet (London: Methuen: 1948), esp. pp. 20f.
- i2. In *Casey vs. Planned Parenthood* (1992): printed in *Origins* 22:8 (July 9, 1992), sect. 3, p. 117. This was the opinion of Justice Kennedy, supported by Justices O'Connor and Souter.
- i3. In his apologia P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1967-69), never considers the meaning of freedom except as the setting aside of tradition, authority, and God (mythopoeic thinking) in favor of science and human autonomy. He even subtitled the second volume: *The Science of Freedom*, though he was aware of the difficulties facing the philosophes in reconciling their views of freedom and nature with Newtonian physics (cf. II, pp. 126-128, 158-162, 289f.). A book praised by Gay, H. Muller, *Freedom in the Western World* (New York: Harper, 1963) simply identifies freedom with secular, scientific, technological modern democracy and depicts a one-sided history of "good guys and bad guys" without hardly a philosophical reflection on the meaning of freedom. Few ages ever expounded such a superficial philosophy as the Enlightenment, and the conduct of many philosophes, even in Gay's retelling, reveals them as sensuous, adulterous, incestuous, manipulating historical studies, distorting their adversaries' positions, often hypocritically employing tergiversation and simple lying to advance "truth," despising the uneducated rabble, yet claiming to be moral men unaffected by original sin. Were it not for mechanistic physics, which leaves no room for freedom, they would have been laughed off the stage. But the wind which they sowed the world has been reaping since the French Revolution. Cf. C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard U., 1989), pp. 321-340.
4. Thomas' paradoxical doctrine of the natural desire for supernatural beatitude (cf. S.T. I, 12, 1; II, 3, 8) has provided the axis of dispute not only between Catholic and Protestant theologies but also in the twentieth century among various schools of Thomism. The distinction between natural and supernatural orders was posited to preserve human and divine freedoms for the novelty of historical revelation. But because freedom was located in the will various insoluble conundrums arose
5. E. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, 2nd ed. (1932; rpt. Garden City: Doubleday, 1954) gives a good presentation of the issues involved in the transition from the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian physics to mechanistic physics. Cf. also H. Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*, rev. ed (New York: Collier, 1962).
6. Taylor, pp. 259-265; A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; rpt. Indianapolis: Liberty, 1969).
7. I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. L. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 65.

- 8 So, e.g., in the wake of Kant, Sartre, p. 46f., identified man's "free being" with "absolute being," and Freud's psyche is tormented because the Super-Ego imposes moral imperatives upon the Ego.
- 9 K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, tr. A. Potocki with A. Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Riedel, 1979), pp. 11-13 and throughout, concentrates on moral action as the preeminently free action.
- 10 Wojtyła, pp. 44f., 71-74, 78-85, 116f., 119f., 136, 147, 173, 180-186, 210f., 217f., 258, 299f.; more specifically on the relation of person and will: pp. 118, 125-128, 134-143, 147.
- 11 Cf. A. Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, I, 2nd ed., tr. J. Bowden (Atlanta: Knox, 1975) for the dramatic issues leading to the Council of Chalcedon. The best introduction to Maximus' thought remains H. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, tr. B. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003); for his analysis of personal action cf. G. Bausenhardt, "In allen us gleich ausser der Sünde" (Mainz: Grünewald, 1992), pp. 110-182, esp. 147-182.
- 12 A. Grillmeier, S.J., "The Figure of Christ in Catholic Theology Today," in *Theology Today*, I, ed. J. Feiner, J. Trütsch, and F. Böckle, tr. P. White and R. Kelly (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965), 78-108, offers a good overview of some modern Scholastic attempts, which repeat much of Baroque Scholasticism.
- 13 The following abbreviations for papal and Vatican II documents are used: DM *Dives in Misericordia*; DV *Dominum et Vivificantem*; FR *Fides et Ratio*; GS *Gaudium et Spes*; LG *Lumen Gentium*; RH *Redemptor Hominis*. In retrospect one can affirm that almost all the major themes of John Paul's teachings are anticipated in *Redemptor Hominis*.
- 14 Cf. our "Faith, Reason, and Freedom," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002), 307-332, which attempts a brief metaphysical grounding for the John Paul's understanding of freedom; cf. 325f. for the relation of reason to wisdom-faith in *Fides et Ratio*.
- 15 John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), pp. 76, 333-336, 341-354.
- 16 Not only have secular humanitarian democracies often been transformed into totalitarian tyrannies in recent history from the French Terror on, but such acclaimed works as J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard U., 1971), demonstrate how from egalitarian principle one arrives ultimately at a tyranny imposing its equality of all before the State.
- 17 C. Cochrane's classic *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940; rpt. New York: Oxford U., 1957) deserves rereading. In its day it reminded totalitarian states of the Roman Empire's totalitarian ideology that failed to perpetuate the State and had to be revived by Christian freedom, divine and human.

HUMILITY AND OPENNESS THE WAY OF REAL FREEDOM

To penetrate into Jesus' sentiments means not to consider power, wealth and prestige as the highest values in life, as in the end, they do not respond to the deepest thirst of our spirit, but to open our heart to the Other, to bear with the Other the burden of life and to open ourselves to the Heavenly Father with a sense of obedience and trust, knowing, precisely, that if we are obedient to the Father, we will be free. To penetrate into Jesus' sentiments -- this should be the daily exercise of our life as Christians. Theodoret, a great witness of the Eastern tradition who was bishop of Cyrus, in Syria, in the fifth century reflected that:

"The Incarnation of our Saviour represents the highest fulfilment of the divine solicitude for men. In fact, neither heaven, nor earth, nor the sea, nor the air, nor the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the whole visible and invisible universe, created only by his Word or rather brought to the light by his Word, according to his will, indicate his incommensurable goodness as does the fact that the only-begotten Son of God, He who subsisted in the nature of God (see Philippians 2:6), reflection of his glory, mark of his substance (see Hebrews 1:3), who in the beginning was with God and was God, through whom all things were made (see John 1:1-3), after having assumed the nature of a servant, appeared in the form of man, by his human figure was considered as a man, was seen on earth, had relationships with men, bore our infirmities and took our illnesses upon himself.

"The Creator worked for our salvation with wisdom and justice. Because he did not wish to make use only of his power to give us generously the gift of freedom, nor to use only mercy against the one who has subjected the human race, so that he would not accuse mercy of injustice, he devised a way full of love for men and at the same time adorned with justice. In fact, after having united to himself man's vanquished nature, he leads it to the struggle and disposes it to repair the defeat, to rout him who previously had iniquitously won the victory, to free man from the tyranny of which he had been cruelly made a slave and to recover his original freedom" (Discourses on Divine Providence, 10).

from the address of Pope Benedict XVI given at the general audience, for 1 June 2005

John Paul II and the Femininity of Holiness

David Meconi SJ

In this essay, originally given as a talk for Catholic students, Fr. Meconi who is currently completing doctoral studies at Oxford University, examines the theological anthropology of Pope John Paul specifically with regard to his profound understanding of human spirituality.

“John Paul claimed that women are more perspicacious, more attentive to others than men generally prove. This is not based on some outdated caricature, but on what Genesis reveals about the nature and inter-personality of the first human couple. Simply, life has been entrusted to Eve.”

Introduction

Among all his ground-breaking insights, two of the bolder statements of John Paul the Great were his insistence that woman “is the representative and archetype of the whole human race: she *represents the humanity* which belongs to all human beings, both men and women”¹ and, again, “all human beings—both women and men—are called through the Church to be the ‘Bride of Christ.’”² Reading the first few pages of scripture gave this philosopher-pope a theological anthropology unmatched in the history of Christian thought.

Of the many contributions of this past pontificate, perhaps it was John Paul’s opening up and developing the Second Vatican Council’s understanding of the person as ‘gift’ which will have the most lasting influence. In particular, it may be his insights into woman’s special role in defining this anthropology which will prove to be the most radical of his reflections on the human person.

This essay accordingly lays out how and why John Paul II concluded that woman best signifies creaturely completion and holiness. It will become clear how he identified three essential tasks in Eve’s very being, or as he wrote, “the dignity and role of woman is... the guarantee of what ‘feminine’ humanly symbolizes: acceptance, care of man, generation of life.”³

First, she inaugurates not only a profound understanding of the human but an entirely new way of being human. She signifies a personal orientation, a necessary turning toward and acceptance of the other. Secondly, Eve receives and is thus called to care for another in a way unavailable to Adam. Her receptivity allows man to understand himself in a way his solitude could never have allowed. Thirdly, humanity has been entrusted to the woman because only she is able to embody the other, a maternity, the Pope made clear, not relegated simply to pregnancy but to that “feminine genius” which characterizes every woman’s way of being.

Back To The Beginning

Before we turn to his writings in order to understand these three aspects of femininity more deeply, let us first address how John Paul II brought such truths to light. In his many writings, the full meaning of the human soul’s embodiment as well as the beauty of human sexual expression have finally become a matter of serious theological reflection. He began his pontificate by bringing all of us back to the Book of Genesis, to “the beginning”, because he realized that millennia of sin and stereotype have only distorted the truest meaning of man and woman.⁴

He returned to Eden where the sexes enjoy their truest splendor, to a place where domination and manipulation have not yet marred who we are and how we treat one another. In doing so, he was able to argue that “each person bears within him the mystery of his beginning”, and all people carry deep inside them the truths of this primal story.⁵ So, let us now turn to John Paul’s study of Genesis and discover the role of the feminine in God’s good creation.

Oriented Toward the Other

In Adam's solitude, nothing satisfies. Though sinless, Adam fails to find any affinity. Composed of both the earthy ground and the divine breath, this angelic animal finds no friendship in the merely material creatures and he likewise finds no incarnate companionship in the heavenly Trinity. John Paul writes:

"Right from the first moment of his existence, created man finds himself before God as if in search of his own identity. It could be said he is in search of the definition of himself. The fact that man is alone in the midst of the visible world and, in particular, among living beings, has a negative significance in this search since it expresses what he is not. Nevertheless, the fact of not being able to identify himself essentially with the visible world or other living beings (animalia) has, at the same time, a positive aspect for this primary search."⁶

In Adam's search, neither animal nor angel will do. He is in search of another self: one who is both identical yet different. In the moment of Eve's appearance, then, human recognition and receptivity begin.

Unlike Adam who is placed in the Garden in a moment of supreme solitude, Eve arises only in relation to the other. From the beginning, human acceptance is thus emblazoned with a feminine stamp. With her genesis, comes human inter-relationality, mutual reciprocity, and personal communion. Woman's very presence proclaims the sterility of the self-in-isolation.

The self-in-communion, in contrast, is characterized by orientation toward another, for it is only with Eve that Adam can finally exclaim, "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). Eve mirrors Adam's enfleshment and teaches him that his life's beatitude will lie in neither mere sensation nor in a false spiritualism, but only in the act of incarnate love.

She acts as a trustworthy reflection of his own embodied personhood. She helps to complete Adam's search, thus proving to be a mirror of man's dual nature, an image of his divine dignity.

One Humanity In Two Genders

Eve thus signifies how humanity is complete in two unalterable genders. She reminds us that there are two ways of being distinctly human: male and female he created them. Here John Paul made good use of a Hebraic word shift lost on most of us. At Genesis 1:27 we read, "God created man (*Adam*) in his image, in the divine image he created him, man (*is*) and woman (*issah*) he

created them." Notice how at Genesis 1:27a, *adam* is alone and is simply "human", not yet distinguished as male. Only with the appearance of Eve at Gen 1:27b, does *adam* realize that he is a man: *is* and *issah* he created them. The person of Eve simultaneously defines and complements Adam and in so doing, offers him a new self-awareness into both the longing of humanity and the meaning of gender.⁷

Eve is the icon of Adam: the reflective other whose presence shows him at once who he is and who he is not. An image both unites and differentiates. Made in the divine image, the human person will find no completion apart from communion with God, but such participation in the divine nature consummates, never corrupts, his humanity. It is in this way that Eve's turn toward Adam shows him who he is. As Adam sees in Eve another self, he also sees one who is irreducibly different; as divine images, men and women see in God the one like whom and for whom they have been created, but they also see the one who is and who remains wholly other.

Sexual differentiation thus becomes a propaedeutic for learning about human and divine communion. In Eve's embodiment, humanity catches a glimpse of its worth as the closest creature to God on earth: "The body which expresses femininity manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons. It expresses by means of the gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is the body—a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and so a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs."⁸

John Paul sensed deeply how such truths needed to be proclaimed at the turn of the twenty-first century. As artificial birth control and abortion define the other as something to be destroyed or defended against, or as in-vitro fertilization and cloning treat the person as a commodity which can be manufactured and marketed, the body of woman reminds man that our eternal dignity is realized precisely in our embodiment and not despite it. Eve's incarnation teaches the solitary Adam how the human body is not some autonomous vehicle but precisely how the infinite life and dignity of each person is made manifest.

Receiving the Other

Woman is created to receive the other. She accepts Adam never to possess him but to stand before him to welcome him. Although it took the sensitivity of John Paul II to draw out the role of woman here more explicitly, this is nonetheless the key anthropological insight of the Second Vatican Council: the human person has been created so as to become a gift of self. In a line that John

Paul never tired of quoting, we read that there is a “certain similarity between the union of the divine persons and union of God’s children in truth and love. And this similarity indicates that the human, the only creature on earth whom God willed for its own sake, can attain its full identity only in sincere self-giving.”⁹ John Paul’s entire theological anthropology can be summed up by the two central truths contained here.

First, the human person is the only being on earth whose existence is not subordinated to another creature. Lower beings exist for the sake of the higher—grass for cows, cows for hungry humans—however, men and women exist for no other reason than God’s own delight. God rejoices in his images on earth and has ordered them to nothing except his own goodness. Secondly, made in the divine image, men and women must actively reflect the Trinity in order to become fully human and this means they must give themselves away in a constant communion of love. Self-gift fulfills personhood: true for us because it is first true for God.

That is, we reflect the triune love of God because as the Father gives himself wholly over to the Son, the Son receives and gives himself completely back over to the Father, and the love who is the Spirit unites and distinguishes the two, we have been made to find our truest self in a communion of persons as well. This is how John Paul consistently maintained that through her gift of self, Eve teaches Adam how humanity is to find its fullest realization.

The Feminine Archetype of Human Spirituality

This is also why holiness has a uniquely feminine character. In the creation of woman John Paul saw the primal human vocation of receiving the other. Eve accepts and responds to Adam and in so doing, shows all of humanity its essential task: to welcome and take on the other. Eve opens herself in an unmatched act of transparency and trust. Standing before each other, the nakedness of Adam and Eve represents this reality:

“Interior innocence in the exchange of the gift consists in reciprocal acceptance of the other, such as to correspond to the essence of the gift. In this way, mutual donation creates the communion of persons. It is a question of receiving the other human being and accepting him or her. This is because in this mutual relationship, which Genesis 2:23-25 speaks of, the man and the woman become a gift for each other, through the whole truth and evidence of their own body in its masculinity and femininity. It is a question, then, or an acceptance or welcome that expresses and sustains, in mutual nakedness, the meaning of the gift.”

Therefore, it deepens the mutual dignity of it. This dignity corresponds profoundly to the fact that the Creator willed (and continually wills) the human person, male and female, for his or her own sake.”¹⁰

Women Teach Men How To Be Open To God

Eve teaches Adam how to go out of himself and thus find himself: how to become a loving gift of self. Their mutual nakedness honours their co-subjectivity; sinless, neither is willing to reduce the other to an object. Whereas lust reduces the other to a mere extension of one’s own desires, an apparatus to fulfill one’s own fallen cravings, true love sees the other as she or he is – a unique and irreducible other.

Eve shows Adam what it means to be given to another, to receive another without any pretence or demands. That is why from the beginning God entrusts woman to man, “to his eyes, to his consciousness, to his sensitivity, to his heart... [and] he must in a way, ensure the same process of the exchange of the gift, the mutual interpenetration of giving and receiving as a gift. Precisely through its reciprocity, it creates a real communion of persons.”¹¹

John Paul saw that through her orientation toward Adam, Eve initiates human receptivity. She is creation’s first act of donation and in the giving of herself, allows Adam to make of himself a gift as well. Without Eve, humanity would never discover that to be a person is to enter into loving communion.

Hers must therefore be the way of tenderness, of embracing the other, and of allowing oneself to become vulnerable. Like the Creator, she lives for the other and thereby risks her own woundedness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the punishment meted out after the Fall, that place where the nakedness which once bespoke trust and mutual self-gift now becomes an object of shame and concealment.

Whereas Adam’s object of punishment is a project, Eve’s is again a person. Adam’s punishment distances himself from his body as he uses it merely as a tool to conquer the unyielding hardness of the earth.

Embodying the Other

Eve, on the other hand, must internalize the consequence of her actions in the painful bringing forth of human relations. This brings us to the third aspect of what the feminine brings creation and to our understanding of Christian holiness: the incarnation of human life. In her unique role, woman is the only being able to give enfleshed life to another. Because Eve has

been made toward and receptive of the other, John Paul saw in her a sensitivity to life unmatched by other creatures. He located such sensitivity in the way of being a woman and in a spiritual maternity which is not reducible to the biological.

That is, John Paul never limited motherhood to the physical but rather defined it as a woman's "readiness to be poured out for the sake of those who come within [her] range of activity. In marriage, this readiness, even though open to all, consists mainly in the love that parents give to their children. In virginity this readiness is open to all people, who are embraced by the love of Christ the Spouse."¹²

In this pouring out of self, men and women complement each other but woman enjoys a certain priority or preeminence due to the inescapable fact that God entrusts her with the life and care of the other in a way that a man cannot experience.

*"This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude toward human beings: not only toward her own child, but every human being, which profoundly marks the personality of the woman. It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man, even with all his sharing in parenthood, always remains outside the pregnancy and the birth of the baby; in many ways he has to learn his own fatherhood from the mother."*¹³

John Paul claimed that women are more perspicacious, more attentive to others than men generally prove. This is not based on some outdated caricature but on what Genesis reveals about the nature and inter-personality of the first human couple. Simply, life has been entrusted to Eve.

Her makeup bespeaks God's trust in co-creating alongside him in the intimate generation of new life. Because God has entrusted the human person primarily to the woman, her sensitivity toward life enables Adam to understand his fatherhood as well.

There is much more than just biological reproduction at play here. The psychosomatic make up of woman is marked by a certain maternity: physical and spiritual. Why so? Eve is created so as to be oriented toward another because in her alterity, the other is defined and never dominated. That is, while the possibility of possessing the other exists for both Adam and Eve, from her very beginning Eve has learned to allow the other

simply to be. Whereas Adam is created alongside an external call to dominate and subdue the earth (Gen 2:15), Eve is created with a silent gaze toward the human person.

Mothers Shape The Fatherhood Of The Sons

This is why each man must "learn his fatherhood through the mother." The baby beholds the face of the other, the face of the mother, and slowly learns the identity of self and the uniqueness of the other.

In the beginning there is no external pressure, no projects to complete, but simply the enjoyment of being. Woman's singular strength arises from her awareness that God entrusts other eternal subjects to her and even where modernity has resulted in a "gradual loss of sensitivity for man, that is, for what is essentially human", maternal love must "ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human!"¹⁴

In this way, woman became the basis of John Paul's "personalism"—where love is the only proper response to another human person, or as he says in his letter on women: "Only a person can love and only a person can be loved... Love is an ontological and ethical requirement of the person. The person must be loved, since love alone corresponds to what the person is."¹⁵ Eve's sensitive receptivity to and embodiment of the other teaches us all that a person may never be reduced to efficiency or pleasure, but must always and everywhere be loved.

The Genius Of Femininity

Such openness is no doubt oftentimes painful, physically and emotionally, but the feminine pours itself out in order to receive another, to open the human heart so wide that its fissure becomes fertile. Because of such a life-giving vulnerability in loving the other, John Paul has rather beautifully argued that woman,

*"...has a genius all her own, which is vitally essential to both society and the Church... she is endowed with a particular capacity for the human being in his concrete form. Even this singular feature which prepares her for motherhood, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually, is inherent in the plan of God who entrusted the human being to woman in an altogether special way."*¹⁶

The maternal face consequently becomes the material manifestation of the infinite longing for each human person, the visible reminder of each human person's being wanted and desired, of each person's infinite value and worth regardless of output or production.

The Femininity of Holiness

Holiness is essentially “feminine” for John Paul II. As Eve stood before and was oriented toward Adam from the very first moment of her life, the human person must likewise come before and enter into communion with the divine. From the start we must make clear, however, that supernaturally women have absolutely no natural or inherent advantage over men in the spiritual life.

Nonetheless, as this essay has argued, a key component in understanding John Paul’s anthropology is seeing how holiness manifests a feminine structure to which all human persons are called. Again, this is not to say that women have special graces simply because of their femininity—in Christ there is neither male nor female (cf. Gal 3:28)—but that very femininity can be offered to God in order to allow woman to enter into divine communion with such attentive receptivity that it becomes the image upon which John Paul patterned all created holiness.

The three characteristics of Eve become consecrated and permanent in Mary and are thus offered to all her children, both man and woman. Attentiveness to the other, humble reception of the other, as well as a loving generativity are all signs of Christ’s life in each of the baptized. Every creature has been made so as to turn toward, receive, and incarnate the divine life.

On the natural level, woman best embodies this call to holiness. Mary’s “let it be done unto me” ought to reverberate through the “yes” of millennia of created souls. These three marks of holiness are “feminine” characteristics not because they are limited to women but because they became possible only with the presence of Eve before Adam and because they now become eternally significant wholly sanctified in the Second Eve.

The Feminine Naturally Attuned To Christ

This is precisely what the Incarnate Son brings about in his own humanity: he confirms the femininity of holiness by using the natural and finite to point us to the infinite and eternally worthy. In his person, Christ recapitulates all that created femininity forfeited in the Fall. In Christ alone does the feminine structure of holiness become real: he literally pours his blood out for the sake of another, he literally lays his life down to bring forth the life of another, he literally opens up the table of his own body to feed and calm another.

John Paul saw how women can continue Christ’s selfless love in a way that teaches the world the meaning of holiness and true human happiness. Yet while his pontificate has come to an end in a moment of universal catechesis, his understanding of the uniqueness of the

femininity of holiness will be, thankfully, continued and developed.

Pope Benedict: A Similar Pro-feminine Message

For example, when Pope Benedict XVI was head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he penned the recent *On the Collaboration of Men and Women*, concluding that feminine values are

*“above all human values: the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible. It is only because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values... ‘femininity’ is more than simply an attribute of the female sex. The word designates indeed the fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because of the other.”*¹⁷

While there are passing reports on how John Paul II devalued women, his teaching provides a truth the media are simply unwilling to understand. He discerned in holiness a feminine structure because he saw in woman how all are called to turn toward God, receive the divine, and thereby give birth to the life of Christ. The natural makeup of femininity teaches us what it means to be both spouse and mother of God, what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be human, and, ultimately, what it means to be holy.

1. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman §4.
2. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman §25.
3. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman §25
4. Biblical Account of Creation Analysed, Sep. 12 1979
5. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman §25
6. Original Unity of Man and Woman, Oct. 10, 1979; TOB, 36-37.
7. Cf. General Audience, Sep 19, 1979; TOB, 29-32.
8. General Audience, Jan 9, 1980; TOB, 61-62.
9. Gaudium et Spes §24; trans., Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, ed., Norman Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 1083-84.
10. Original Unity of Man and Woman, Feb. 6, 1980; TOB, 70
11. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, §6.
12. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, §21.
13. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, §18.
14. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, §30.
15. On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, §29.
16. Angelus, July 23, 1995.
17. On the Collaboration of Men and Women, May 31, 2004, §14

THE EUCHARIST, OUR UNITY AND OUR STRENGTH

God went to help the Jewish people in difficulty with the gift of manna to make them understand that “man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). In today's Gospel, Jesus explained to us for what kind of bread God wanted to prepare the people of the new covenant with the gift of manna. Alluding to the Eucharist, he said: “This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6:58). The Son of God, becoming flesh, could become bread and in this way be the nourishment of his people journeying toward the promised land of heaven.

We need this bread to cope with the toil and exhaustion of the journey. Sunday, day of the Lord, is the propitious occasion to draw strength from him, who is the Lord of life. The Sunday precept, therefore, is not a simple duty imposed from outside. To participate in the Sunday celebration and to be nourished with the Eucharistic bread is a need of a Christian, who in this way can find the necessary energy for the journey to be undertaken. A journey, moreover, that is not arbitrary; the way that God indicates through his law goes in the direction inscribed in the very essence of man. To follow the way means man's own fulfilment, to lose it, is to lose himself.

The Lord does not leave us alone on this journey. He is with us; what is more, he wishes to share our destiny by absorbing us. In the conversation that the Gospel just recounted, he says: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:56). How can we not rejoice over such a promise? However, we heard that, in the face of that first proclamation, instead of rejoicing, the people began to argue and protest: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52).

To tell the truth, that attitude has been repeated many times in the course of history. It would seem that, deep down, people do not want to have God so close, so available, so present in their affairs. People want him to be great and, in a word, rather distant. Then they ask themselves questions to demonstrate that in fact such closeness is impossible.

However, the words Christ pronounced specifically in that circumstance retain all their graphic clarity: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). Facing the murmur of protest, Jesus could have backed down with tranquilizing words. “Friends, he could have said, don't worry! I spoke of flesh, but it is only a symbol. What I wish to say is only a profound communion of sentiments.”

But Jesus did not take recourse to such sweeteners. He maintained his affirmation with firmness, even in face of the defection of his own apostles, and did not change at all the concrete character of his discourse: “Will you also go away?” (John 6:67), he asked. Thank God, Peter gave an answer that we also assume today with full awareness: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

In the Eucharist, Christ is really present among us. His presence is not static. It is a dynamic presence, which makes us his, he assimilates us to himself. Augustine understood this very well. Coming from a Platonic formation, it was difficult for him to accept the “incarnate” dimension of Christianity. In particular, he reacted before the prospect of the “Eucharistic meal,” which seemed to him unworthy of God. In ordinary meals man becomes stronger, as it is he who assimilates the food, making it an element of his own corporal reality. Only later did Augustine understand that in the Eucharist the exact opposite occurs: the centre is Christ who attracts us to himself; he makes us come out of ourselves to make us one with him (cf. Confessions, VII, 10, 16). In this way, he introduces us into the community of brothers.

*the homily of Pope Benedict XVI given during the closing Mass of the
24th Italian National Eucharistic Congress, Marisabella, May 29, 2005*

The Election of Pope Benedict XVI

James Hitchcock

Professor James Hitchcock, of St. Louis University in USA, reflects on the election of Joseph Ratzinger to the papacy.

A Controversial Choice

The election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Pope, although often predicted, came as a surprise, particularly because of the speed with which the cardinals reached their decision. Conventional wisdom considered him “controversial,” which was thought sufficient to prevent his election.

The address that Cardinal Ratzinger gave to the cardinals at the beginning of the Conclave, if it was a campaign speech, was a highly unusual one, in that it offered no concessions, did not hint at compromise, merely proclaimed in effect, “If you see the situation facing the church in the way I do, then perhaps I am suitable to be pope.” He did not seek, and certainly did not want, the papacy on any other terms.

In the public discussions of the papacy, in a culture where even many church-members are religiously illiterate, it seems almost impossible to get beyond the “bottom lines”: will the new pope agree to ordain women, rescind the teaching on birth control, accept homosexuality? Advice as to what the new Pope “must” do is often proffered by people who have scarcely an elementary knowledge of Catholic doctrine, and who in fact cannot understand why we should have a Pope at all.

An Intellectual Pope

Critics of the new Pope (as well as of the previous one) in effect demand that he simply conform the Church to modern culture. Cardinal Ratzinger, one of the most important Catholic theologians of the late twentieth century, was intellectually the best qualified man to be Pope, and he defines his role in a way exactly opposite to that of his critics: a confrontation with modern culture in order to assert the primacy of the Gospel in all aspects of human affairs.

Such a confrontation need not be abrasive, although it may often have to be, but it does recognize that the values of the world are in many ways in fundamental conflict with the Gospel and that the world always needs redemption. Many modern intellectuals are in various ways antithetical to enduring truths.

They are predominantly men of the left, in the broadest sense of that term. But at this moment in history the needs of the time require that the leader of the Church precisely be a kind of intellectual, because only an intellectual is likely to see the whole cultural pattern, the way in which the various manifestations of modern civilization are deeply rooted and systemic.

Challenging The Presumptions of Dissent

Many people who reject Benedict XVI’s judgments about modern civilization simply have not thought about it nearly as deeply as he has. For forty years it has been customary in the media to equate “thinking Catholics” with dissenters, and the new Pope annoys his critics in part because they cannot dismiss him as intellectually deficient, not only is he more learned and intelligent than practically all of his critics, he also understands modernity better than they do.

“Advice as to what the new Pope “must” do is often proffered by people who have scarcely an elementary knowledge of Catholic doctrine.”

I met the new Pope about thirty years ago, before he was a bishop, at an editorial meeting in Munich of the international journal *Communio*. I recall a modest and friendly man, for all his formidable intellect.

Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, and it is significant that now two Popes in succession have been men who in some sense could be considered Balthasar's intellectual colleagues, even in important ways his disciples.

A Common Theological Outlook

Communio was founded by the Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar, probably the single most important

Although many of us like Wiseman's old hymn, some of the lyrics are rather dated. Here two young Catholic writers offer a new version of the old hymn which preserves the essence while revising some of the dated elements.

A Revised Version of "God Bless Our Pope"

Joanna Bogle and Fiorella Sultana de Maria

Full in the pulsing heart of Rome
The pilgrim's and the stranger's home
Our voices rise to God in prayer
With faithful Christians gathered there
God bless our Pope...
The great, the good

Almighty God, whose sacred word
The great Apostle Peter heard
Who guides with ever-faithful hand
Your holy Church in every land
God bless our Pope...

O Lord of every age and place
Peter's successor asks your grace
Abundant faith and strength provide
Inspire and lead, protect and guide.
God bless our Pope...

O God of light and God of truth
The hope of age, the strength of youth
To whom the holy martyrs pray
Renew and bless your Church today
God bless our Pope...

Where Peter is, the Church shall be
As Christ once taught in Galilee
Your saints join us to sing your praise
From now until the end of days.
God bless our Pope...

*"Peter's successor asks
your grace."*

letters to 
the editor

The Editor, Our Lady & St. Ninian
 52 Quakerfield, Bannockburn
 STIRLING FK7 8HZ
 editor@faith.org.uk

THE TABLET AND THE POPE

Dear Fr Editor,

How refreshing to read your last editorial. At last, a voice to cut through the monotonous, predictable dirge that The Tablet has been subjecting us to for years. John Paul's papacy was immensely fruitful. The remarkable scenes witnessed throughout the world at the time of his dying and death were not the product of mass hysteria or personality cult. If such an enormous, and particularly young crowd gathered to mourn it was not because of his personality, as The Tablet would have us believe, but because of what John Paul represented and the manner in which he witnessed consistently to the truths of the Catholic Faith. That is the point Pepinster and her colleagues, with equal consistency, fail to acknowledge.

While she and her predecessors have spent the last twenty years clamouring for the same old issues to be addressed - contraception, homosexuality, women priests, divorce and remarriage etc - an increasing number of young people, who have glided through most of their Catholic education practically untouched by Magisterial teaching, are coming to a knowledge and love of the Faith through other channels (like, for example, the new movements). They find, to their joy and utter amazement, that Catholicism is beautiful and perfectly coherent. Divested of any long-nurtured prejudices, their eyes are opening to Christ's vision of the

world as embodied in His Church. And in John Paul these young people had a friend, because it was Christ's vision, not his own, that he tirelessly gave them. Not only that: he explained the Faith, he taught them to be ambitious and he inspired them to be saints. Do they always live up to that teaching? No, of course not. Who does? But where John Paul was encouraging his flock to live up to the exacting standards demanded by Truth, The Tablet was heralding its own paltry little truth, sowing seeds of disenchantment and dissent along the way. John Paul was a Rock and they wanted a lump of malleable dough. Pope Benedict must be a mortal disappointment, as must every pope thereafter.

Their arrogance in believing their liberal agenda could enlighten Church wisdom of 2000-years standing and their deceitfulness in encouraging Catholics to think that a pope, any pope, has the authority to reverse doctrine, has cost The Tablet dearly. Its voice of dissent is barely audible. It has nothing of relevance to say to emerging generations of Catholics; and those who once shared their Utopian dream are too tired to listen.

Yours faithfully,

*Mrs Frances Gallagher
 Stanford, Clonskeagh
 Dublin*

Dear Fr Editor,

Sincere thanks for your incisive and inspiring editorial on the life of John Paul II (Faith, May-June 2005). It was an editorial worthy of the man's extraordinary papacy and the world-engrossing occasion of his death. We are all indebted to his fidelity to his office and his witness. He truly was a great man who inspired many of us to the priesthood.

Coincidentally, before reading

The Tablet's editorial, I had already preached on the relationship between "the man and the message" but had come to an alternative conclusion to that of Catherine Pepinster: it was precisely the message that inspired the man and made him who he was. As your response brought out, a failure to understand that the teaching of John Paul II was based upon the message of Christ is to fail to comprehend the man himself and, indeed, his popular appeal.

It was because he taught the fullness of the truth of Christ in the moral and doctrinal vacuum of modern culture that he attracted so many young people to him; it was because he lived the fullness of that message, even in his dying moments, that all generations and cultures witnessed its authenticity; and it was because he loved with the heart of Christ the High Priest that his teaching and witness resonated in the hearts and minds of so many.

How desperately sad it was, then, that The Tablet's editorial should drudge up those old chestnuts of women's ordination, liberation theology, English liturgy and contraception - so 70s! Like a cheesy pop song whose lyrics you can finish-off before you hear the rest of the line, the Tablet was utterly predictable in its analysis of the pontificate of John Paul II. For those of us in our twenties, it simply reinforces the stereotype of the average Tablet reader as a 50s something, lay-looking nun or priest whose dreadful taste in liturgy is only outdone by their appalling taste in fashion.

You are right. Dissent has nothing to offer. It has no vision; and where there is no vision, the people perish. Perhaps the only thing we should all dissent from is purchasing The Tablet! I humbly offer my own example: I do not actually buy The Tablet. I only flick

through it when I visit the homes of the aforementioned priests and nuns. Alas, they are getting rather thin on the ground.

Yours faithfully,

*Fr M.J. Galbraith
St. John the Baptist's
Corstorphine, Edinburgh*

Dear Fr. Editor

Thank goodness for FAITH magazine and its forthright challenge to the prejudices and ranting of The Tablet. Your editorial felt like a much-needed airing in an overheated and dusty room where everyone has been seated for far too long, allowing conversation to go in dreary circles. There was something irresistibly comic about the sight of The Tablet, while Catholics and non-Catholics were buzzing with the news of the election of Benedict XVI and the events in Rome, giving that news one line on its front cover and then hurrying on to feature an interview with an American nun and her lesbian-and-gay activism!

There was this sense of a longing for a retreat into its own comfort-zone, a refusal to recognise the great and dynamic realities of a Church that is always renewing itself and moving forward with history. The Tablet has a curiously bureaucratic feel to its tone and message, a sort of don't-rock-the-boat mood which obliges its editorial team to assume a commitment on the part of all right-thinking people to an agenda rigid in its political and ethical thinking. It is trapped, as if scared to move, in a circular talking-circle about affirming contraception and homosexuality and the need to create female priests. It won't do. This isn't a discussion about the living Church.

The millions of young people who flocked to Rome to honour Pope John Paul - one of the great

peacetime movements of population in modern history - went because they loved the message of the man. He had taught them about Jesus Christ, and they loved him for it. If ever there was a group saying "We are Church" this was it. And the banners saying "Santo Subito" had about them something of the air of "canonisation by acclamation" that we are told was a hallmark of the early Church and certainly represented a genuine and heartfelt message that deserved - and got - a hearing.

What The Tablet circle need to recognise is that this is no longer the 1970's. A new generation has grown up in the Church - the JP11 generation with its own vigour and vision. Perhaps the first to acknowledge this were the writers in the French press in the summer of the Paris World Youth Day, where it was confidently expected that very few people would attend to listen to Pope John Paul or celebrate the message of the Church. It was meant to be a scene of gloom with a modest gathering politely applauding a Pope reaffirming a Catholic message no one really wanted to hear. But the reality was vastly different - hordes and hordes of young people, backpacking from everywhere, thousands upon thousands of them, poured into Longchamps racecourse to sing and pray and to cheer to the echo a Pope with a message that they loved. The "Longchamps generation" intrigued and baffled commentators. But the Tablet-faction didn't want to look or listen. Now, several major youth events later, it's still inward-looking and trying to ignore what is going on.

The idea that there is an absolute Truth that is worth seeking and finding, that human relationships in love and marriage are part of a "theology of the body" that is beautiful and important, that God is real and lived among us, that there

is a Mass and a priesthood that is directly connected with Him - all this is enormously interesting, dynamic and even exciting. It won't disappear just because The Tablet wants it to do so. Nor can all be suppressed into a box marked "right wing and old fashioned" and thoughts turned inward into the circle of why-contraception-is-all-right-really and when-are-we-going-to-have-women-priests?

FAITH magazine offers a coherent, readable, and challenging read that always seems to open up new lines of thought on some aspect of the Faith. But perhaps nothing it has offered in recent months has been quite as useful as its direct challenge to the perceived non-negotiable "Tablet line" on the Church and its future. The truths of the Catholic Faith, cherished by generations, honoured by the sacrifices of martyrs, explored by theologians, are not the private possession of a particular Pope who can change them at will. Nor is the Papacy a political office which launches a new agenda or programme when a new incumbent arrives. It is a means of transmitting unchanging truths, at the service of the Church. Pope Benedict pointed this out, with touching clarity, at St John Lateran in the first few days of his Papacy. He has probably been too busy to write to The Tablet to explain that, irrespective of the lobbying of a nun with an agenda about homosexuality and lesbianism, he cannot and will not change the teachings of the Church on this or on the other issues on The Tablet agenda. So it is up to the rest of us to point this out instead. Thank goodness for FAITH magazine for doing it so well.

Yours faithfully,

*Joanna Bogle
New Malden
Surrey*

Dear Fr. Editor,

At last someone has had the courage to speak out against The Tablet! Your editorial pointed out that the Church is not about individual personalities (as The Tablet would have us believe) but rather God become Man in the person of Jesus Christ. John Paul II in his Papacy made this so abundantly clear, not only in his humble approach, but also in his courageous action and teaching, when time and again he stood up for the truth.

It was precisely the truth of Jesus Christ that the late Holy Father constantly presented to the world in his teaching, a point entirely missed by The Tablet and indeed by other commentators. But then, when the philosophy of our age is that of nominalism, i.e. 'that's what I feel and think, therefore it must be right', is it any wonder that even the Catholic media could be effected by such reductionist ideas. At the dawn of the third millennium, one would hope that editors and the like, would move on from the 'touchy feely church' of the 1970's, instead of being stuck in such a time warp.

Your editorial made abundantly clear the objective truth and reality of Christ that John Paul II presented to the world, and it was precisely because of this teaching that so many young people made their way to Rome for his funeral. I remember hearing several young people say of John Paul: "He was like a father to us...", and any parent always wants the best for their child, which will include teaching them of the things of God and setting the parameters of how and why they should live according to God's plan. John Paul did exactly that.

Yours faithfully,

Fr. Ian Vane
St. Charles Borromeo

Worthing
West Sussex

Dear Father Editor,

Recently my wife and I were very pleased to find your publication online. We have been encouraged in our faith and have found many of your articles very pertinent and relevant to the challenges facing a family today. Having left the Anglican Communion some fifteen years ago we are well aware of the erosion caused by dissent to traditional Christianity. I would ask the Editor of The Tablet to honestly try to imagine the form of the Church her criticisms would favour, and then to look around and see if that church does not already exist.

Is it reasonable to expect ordinary parish families to defend St. Athanasius every time they attend Mass? Perhaps they could rightly expect to attend the liturgy in peace- in the calm knowledge that our Lord's kingdom is not of this world, nor of current politics.

Yours faithfully,

Brett and Penny Dawe.
Nelson Rd
Longmont, Colorado
U.S.A.

Dear Fr. Editor,

As a young Catholic, I was heartened by your recent Editorial. The Tablet maintains that young people were attracted to the personality of John Paul II rather than his teaching. This is both patronising and incorrect. The late Pope was an outstanding sign of contradiction. His uncompromising stance on issues of faith and morals set him at odds with Western, secular culture. Yet the young embraced him. They did so because they appreciated the challenging and eternal truths he articulated in his

words and demonstrated through his work on earth.

Why does The Tablet always talk about John Paul's 'policies' as if he were the leader of a political party? Pope John Paul II had no personal, political agenda. He was consistently faithful to the original Mind of Christ, like his predecessors before him: he spoke eternal truths, regardless of their popularity. This is what young people respected and responded to.

In an age when we are bombarded with an assortment of supposedly indistinguishable 'lifestyle choices', John Paul II reminded us that we were made to mirror the life of Christ alone. Christ who praised his Father for revealing the truth to the little ones.

Yours faithfully,

Matt O'Gorman
Dower Avenue
Wallington
Surrey

Dear Fr. Editor,

Your attack on The Tablet (May-June issue) is simply another instalment of the unending "conservative v. liberal" battle in the Church, the view that Church teaching cannot be changed as against the view that, in some areas, it ought to be.

Surely one way in which some reconciliation between these positions might be effected is via the notion of "development of doctrine", popularised by Newman. If we could be taken back several centuries (and sometimes not nearly as long ago as that) we would be surprised at some of the teachings which were being propagated by the Church and accepted by the faithful. You referred to the rehabilitation of Galileo; this is one well-known example, where the previous teaching that the earth was the centre of the universe was

“developed” as a result of scientific discovery. Another is slavery, once accepted and even commended by the Church and now condemned as a result of a greater appreciation of the rights and dignity of the person.

A more drastic example is the interpretation of *ex ecclesiam non salus est*, which Popes and Councils once solemnly proclaimed as meaning that all non-Catholics were damned. The final burying of this teaching at Vatican II has been described by some as “development of doctrine”, but to others, myself included, it is simply a change. Another example is the Modernist crisis of a century ago; their ideas on Biblical criticism were condemned at the time, but are now widely accepted. (Interestingly, the Pope who ended the oppression of the Modernists was Benedict XVI.

I am perfectly happy to have teachings which I regard as “changed” to be regarded by others as “development of doctrine”. Is this not a way of ameliorating the bitterness which sometimes exists between “conservatives” and “liberals” in the Church?

Yours faithfully,

*Alan Pavelin
Leesons Hill
Chislehurst
Kent*

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS DEBATE

Dear Fr. Editor,

Your are to be congratulated on your editorial (Faith March April 2005) which, at some length, and with intelligence and candour, examines the current position of Catholic schools in Britain. Rightly you point out that there is a crisis and you identify that the crisis has come about because “too much heed is being paid to pleasing the political masters of the moment rather than

the interests of the People of God...” It is thirty years this year since I first became a head master of a Catholic maintained secondary school. The governors then controlled the curriculum, decided their admission criteria for pupils and applied them and appointed all the teaching staff.

All this has gone. Catholic governors no longer control the curriculum in maintained schools; we have a national curriculum. They no longer control their own admissions and, for instance, are forced to take in non-Catholics to satisfy a number imposed by the government. Even the right to appoint teachers is now under threat since the government, under the guise of “Diversity and Equality” in practice forbids any real attempt to appoint the teachers ordered by Canon Law, Canon 803 section 2 “formation and education in a catholic school must be based on the principles of catholic doctrine, and the teachers must be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.” Catholic schools, in reality, cannot refuse to appoint practising homosexuals. If a “person” turns up for an interview with a moustache and wearing a dress anyone who asks this “person” what sex (sorry gender) he or she belongs to risks a huge fine.

Now it may be that one would think that hostile governments have imposed such appalling laws on schools with Catholic officials fighting to the death. Sadly and incredibly this is not the case. On the contrary, the Catholic Education Service in London, the CES, has enthusiastically pushed the government to limit the powers of Catholic governors. The Freedom of Information legislation has meant that I have seen documents that prove this. For instance, Catholic governing bodies used to decide themselves whether or not to interview parents and pupils before

admission. They knew their own business best. Even the Blairite government was willing to accept this and had no proposals to end it until the Church authorities themselves asked them for the change.

In Catholic education, as in so many things in the Catholic Church in recent years “The Fortress is betrayed even by those who should have defended it,” to use St John Fisher's great and prophetic words.

Yours faithfully,

*Eric Hester
Somerdale Avenue
Bolton*

MORAL MATTERS

Dear Father Editor,

In the Family Values versus Safe sex debate (last issue), it would be good to see the focus move right away from the safety or non safety of the condom onto the surer, urgent evangelical territory. The Lord longs to nourish us with the love for which we yearn. We need to move through the numerous illusions within our fallen natures into the promotion of those things which fulfill our deepest longing. In the depths of our nature, we long for true unity with others through the only possible way of closer union with God.

Like masturbation, contraception utterly destroys the transmission of emotional loving forces, encouraging all the self centred forces to gather and circulate constantly around ourselves. We need to be very much more open to the procreational purpose of sexuality so that the Loving Creator can convert our mixed up feelings into something more worthy of the name of love. Without this we become increasingly demanding in every direction, more arrogant, bad tempered, aggressive,

narcissistic, thus promoting loneliness and emotional disturbances which lead us rushing towards dissatisfaction, despondency and even despair. The inner conflicts involved in learning the art and craft of sexual self control are increasingly soluble as we move towards love just as Our Lord teaches (Mt5.8). The conflicts brought about by ignoring the Gospel, grow greater.

Contraception is one of the most subtle and really big promoters of marriage instability and infidelity. It has disgracefully been promoted into something that is respectable, superior and quite altruistic. Promoters of contraception frequently look down on and scoff at those who avoid such practices. It urgently needs to be shown up not so much for its unreliability as a contraceptive but for the reality that it is. It is a great evil, it is anti friendly, anti love and one of the big promoters of separation and divorce.

Yours sincerely,

*Father Bryan Storey,
Tintagel Catholic Church
Cornwall*

Dear Fr Editor,

Fr Scott Deeley has done us all an enormous favour by setting out, with clarity and simplicity, his reflections on the Theology of the Body in the teaching of Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory. Nonetheless, when he looks closely at the composition of the sexual act, I believe Fr Deeley's reflections are not unproblematic.

Our late and much beloved Pope advanced Christian thinking in many areas but in the "Theology of the Body", he has, perhaps, taken theology further forward than on any other front. I write as a man, married and with three children, and I have to tell you that I am moved

beyond measure by the profound understanding displayed by Pope John Paul the Great with regard to the place and the effect of the sexual act in marriage. His meditations on the effect of the unitive faculty of this act ring true to my own marital experience and his reassertion of the profound complementarity of the unitive and procreative faculties of sex, make sense not only of the scriptural warrant that "the two shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) but of the sacramental nature of marriage, in which signs make real what they signify and bring with them God's gift of grace.

It is his taking as paradigmatic this complementarity (never one faculty without the other) that represents a transforming contribution by John Paul II and takes Catholic theology into an engagement with the world of sex that presents a sublime alternative to the ridiculous approach offered by modern secular culture and often by "The Tablet". By taking seriously the blessed nature of the unitive within the sexual act, John Paul II presents us with a view of each sexual act as an icon, a manifestation of that Trinitarian love in which the unity of the persons is so real that it naturally gives rise to new life and to personal communion. Here this great Pope successfully overcomes the shallow and empty view of sex as merely a recreational activity of the body, devoid of any lasting meaning and I think that he also opens the way to a view of sex that makes otiose any prioritisation of the procreative over the unitive.

John Paul II's vision of sex overcomes the risk that seeing it as being in remedium concupiscentiae and presented as being "always for children" in a pre-fallen humanity, leads inexorably to a descent into prudery and puritanism (the

caricature Catholicism beloved of the Church's modern critics both within and without the visible bounds of her communion). He achieves this by the positive assertion that the sexual act, if true to itself (i.e. within the covenantal bond of marriage, open to God's gift of new life and ordered to the unity, the community, the communion of the man and woman), is itself not only good but a blessed channel of grace.

Indeed, Pope John Paul II seems to suggest that the uncoupling (no pun intended) of the two faculties actually strips them both of their real meaning, making the act itself almost meaningless and certainly less human. Fr Dermot Fenlon, Cong. Orat. saw this nearly twenty years ago when teaching Seminarians at Oscott. He encouraged us to mark John Paul II's words closely: that contraception and reproductive technologies were the twin fronts of the assault on human sexual activity that first seeks, in contraception, to alienate the procreative faculty from the sexual act and then, in reproductive technologies, seeks to remove the unitive, leaving a debased and debasing understanding of an act so closely tied up with our understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage that one might sensibly see this assault as a sacrilege.

I would add, finally, that, given the incredible procreative inefficiency of sexual intercourse, "sex only for children" does not seem to correspond to observable biological reality. There is no suggestion in Fr Holloway's writings, at least so far as I can find, that he believes that this inefficiency is a result of the Fall. I would argue, therefore, that it becomes necessary to present a view of sex that takes proper account of that biological reality. In the face of this reality, the human sexual appetite, if presented as being properly ordered

"only for children" implies an almost continual frustration of that appetite by human reproductive inefficiency, unless the sheer joy and profound communion in one another can be recognised as being equally constitutive of that properly ordered sexual act.

I would suggest that John Paul II's understanding of sex, as a single act of unity and procreativity, neither the one without (let alone prior to) the other, offers a view of sex before and after the Fall which overcomes these difficulties. It is, I would suggest, a new synthesis of faith and reason that firmly rejects the contraceptive mentality, that recognises the inherent sacramental beauty of what the Catechism so wisely calls the "marital act" and which overcomes the problems attendant upon understandings that seek to prioritise the one faculty over the other.

Yours faithfully,

*Stephen Morgan
The Long House, West Street
Warminster
Wiltshire*

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF ATHEISM

Dear Fr Editor,

Your anonymous correspondent (name and address supplied, May/June 2005) seems a little confused about one or two issues. May I do my best in a brief space to be of what help I can. First they wonder whether believing in a literal, historical Adam and Eve is compatible with a new synthesis of faith and reason. Well, the names "Adam" and "Eve" are symbolic, but there must have been real historical people who were the first to be created with spiritual souls, surely?. It is unlikely that we would know what they called themselves or each other for that matter, but there must

be human persons who lived in some real, down to earth locality and fell into sin at the dawn of history. For more clarity on this question I would recommend the excellent Faith pamphlet: *Evolution and Original Sin* by Roger Nesbitt.

Next, the letter writer doubts the logic of your suggestion (editorial Jan/Feb 2005) that to be an atheist who is outraged or incensed by human misery is to be incoherent. They object that an atheist "is a human being with the usual emotions, and quite entitled to grieve at the suffering of others". I think they have rather missed the point. No one is saying that atheists are without feelings, nor that they cannot express those feelings, but there is indeed a logical conundrum in asserting, on the one hand, that the world is ultimately meaningless because there is nothing greater than the accidental events of the moment. then the other hand, to protest that there is something about the way things are which isn't "right". How can you judge that death and suffering are not "good" when you have already said that there is no final purpose or value to anything that exists? Where did these notions of "right" and "goodness" come from?.

In fact the atheist's heart is in the right place when he feels distressed or disturbed about the state of the world, but the problem is that he is off his head - in a purely philosophical sense, of course!

The same can be said about the correspondent's defence of Richard Dawkins and his "selfish gene" theory. If life is utterly "selfish" - that is to say, without any higher framework of values, no scale of "better" or "worse", and so on, then you can't suddenly introduce these categories when talking about human beings unless you justify where they have come from.

He has already denied that there is anything other than blindly

evolving matter, and he has insisted that human beings are nothing other than the blind product of blind and meaningless evolution, so he is quite illogical about clinging to the remnants of Christian morality and sentiment when talking about the need for a human "morality" that must be different from all the rest of matter. If human beings are no more than animals why have they got to be "better" than the animals? And in any case, what does "better" mean in a purely materialist world view?. Better adapted for survival maybe, but anything more than that is really bringing in a supernatural or supra-material (ie. spiritual) dimension again by the back door. So this is at the very least a contradictory world view and perhaps a rather dishonest one - a bit like inviting God to your party as long as he sits there with a bag over his head!

Along with many other ageing secularist Richard Dawkins will be dismayed to find that the rising generations whose minds he has so successfully managed to shape with his atheistic principles, are far more logical and far more ruthless in its application than he is, as the Soviet and Chinese Marxists found to their cost and and the considerable suffering of many.

yours sincerely,

*David Conellan
Usher Gardens
Co. Wicklow
by email*



sunday 
by *sunday*

SUNDAY BY SUNDAY

14TH IN ORDINARY TIME: A
3.7.05, Mt 11, 25-30

1. Children at primary school rarely guess why the priest wears a 'Y' pattern embroidered on his chasuble at Mass. Some suggest it is a cross, but virtually none guess it's a yoke. Yokes and ploughs are not symbols of a computer age, but the richness of this imagery is nevertheless striking. In every pair of oxen ploughing, there is a lead ox which bears the brunt of the toil and a following ox which supports the efforts of its stronger colleague. Jesus is saying, "Let me be your lead ox. I will do the work, and in my company you will find rest amidst the toil".

2. Jesus knows our difficulties and the things that weigh us down. He is with us to lift us up and give us heart when our courage fails. All we need is the humility to know our need of God and the grace to turn to him in our hour of need. We live in a world of pseudo self-sufficiency and arrogance, where the ability and willingness to destroy lives under the guise of sound economy is often a key measure of success. Our Lord shows us another way - the way of charity which alone satisfies the human heart.

3. Elsewhere in Matthew's gospel, the meek are promised the earth for their inheritance (Mt 5, 4). In this gospel, the Good News of the Lord of heaven and earth is revealed and accepted by mere children in stark contrast to the learned and the clever. Humility comes from the Latin word for earth ('humus') and is the virtue by which we keep both feet on the ground. It is only people such as this who breathe in the sweet and wholesome air of the gospel of life. Only when we begin to inhabit a self-centred world of our own making does the air grow stale.

15TH IN ORDINARY TIME: A
10.7.05, Mt 13, 1-23

1. "...now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty" (Mt 13, 23). Why this law of diminishing returns for those winning souls for the kingdom of God? Is there some tacit warning here about growth ending in decline? Surely not. Matthew the Jewish evangelist is merely emphasizing utter gratuity in the gifts God showers on us. The work is the Lord's and the victory is his (cf. Judg 7, 2). What is it to man if God grant him a hundredfold increase or ten? Since without God's grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit nothing could be achieved, there is no room for vain pride and human boasting here.

2. St. Augustine saw faith continually seeking understanding. The Christian journey is a voyage of discovery until we put in at the harbour of paradise. Our hearts and minds are restless until they rest in God. It is easy to see the basis of this doctrine in this parable, where the key element distinguishing the man who produces solid fruit from the one who falls victim to the devil is understanding. Both men could have attended the same church regularly, heard the same sermons and the same teaching. But where one opened his mind and heart, the other did not.

3. Jesus takes up the mantle of Isaiah as he preaches using difficult images. A modern spin doctor might simplify the message and ask if he might edit the Master's speeches. But Jesus is fulfilling the shocking vocation of Isaiah to "Go and say to this people, 'Hear and hear again, but do not understand; see and see again but do not perceive'" (Is 6, 9). Jesus is well aware of the hardness of our hearts, but also of our capacity to be drawn up into the divine. Only those that persevere in his service will bring in the kingdom.

16TH IN ORDINARY TIME: A
17.7.05, Mt 13, 24-43

1. Jesus refers to the devil as a person throughout the gospels. He is

the father of lies and a murderer from the start in whom there is no truth at all (Jn 8, 44). Once a society lady went to confession to Padre Pio, saying that she didn't believe in the devil. Her confessor simply replied, "You will". Our Lord assures us that Satan is active in the world and that the sin he engenders is real. But Christ's whole ministry demonstrated his absolute power over unclean spirits and the deceiving influence of the devil. In Jesus we triumph.

2. Satan is the sower of darnel among good seed (Mt 13, 39). No word is ever without meaning in a parable, so the alarm of the owner's servants can be seen as the alarm of the angels at the distortions brought about in man through the malice of the Evil One. " Was it not good seed that you sowed in your field?" (Mt 13, 27). Was not man made in the image and likeness of God, a creature of beauty given a divine vocation? (cf. Gen 1, 28; 2 Pet 1, 4). Just as the wheat is not destroyed by the darnel, so human nature is not destroyed by original sin.

3. God chooses the weak and makes them strong. His power is always at its greatest in human weakness. Thus the mustard seed, which is the smallest of all the seeds turns into the biggest shrub of all, giving shelter to the birds of the air in its splendid branches. The kingdom of God has the humblest of origins in the manger at Bethlehem, but grows in the power of the Holy Spirit into the worldwide Church, where fallen humanity can find healing and shelter in its many branches. The work is God's, not man's. We are mere servants.

17TH IN ORDINARY TIME: A
24.7.05, Mt 13, 44-52

1. "Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old" (Mt 13, 52). In this classic text, beautifully describing the intimate and vital relationship

between Old and New Testaments, Matthew seeks to show his Jewish audience clearly how their religion is fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus Christ. More than any other evangelist, Matthew draws heavily on the Jewish scriptures and often assumes a familiarity with the Law and Prophets in his account of the life and ministry of Jesus (cf. Mt 12, 15ff; 5, 20-48)

2. Breaking the intrinsic link between the Old and New Testaments was among the first of the early Christian heresies, attributed to Marcion. He rejected the Jewish writings in favour of preferred texts in the New Testament, so that his religion reflected more his own tastes than the revelation of the Word of God. If we see no value in the Old Testament and fail to read it in the light of the New, especially by altering the Easter Vigil, for instance, then we radically fail to understand the gospel. It would be better for us to be sons and daughters of Jesus Christ than followers of Marcion.

3. These quick-fire similes wash over our heads because we have no time to contemplate them. They are similar, but by no means the same, and we struggle to fathom them. The kingdom of heaven is of more value than the deepest of buried treasure or the most perfect of fine pearls. But it is also as commonplace as drab fish hauled in by the dragnet. There is a sense that this struggle is the same for the disciples, whose "Yes" to Jesus (Mt 13, 51) is anything but decisive. Like children who nod to please the Master, they proclaim an understanding they lack.

18TH IN ORDINARY TIME: A

31.7.05, Mt 14,13-21

1. Jesus' generosity amidst tiredness and grieving humbles us, leaving an example to follow. Any priest knows the tiredness resulting from demands in parish life, with the temptation to say, 'No'. Jesus does not do this, despite agonizing grief at the passing of John the Baptist, further

exacerbated by the gruelling toil of his outdoor ministry. He does not seek to do his own will, but the will of the Father in providing for the hungry sheep. Our Lord teaches them at length, satisfying their thirsting souls and giving them the solid doctrine entrusted to him by his Father.

2. The miracle of the loaves and fishes reveals to an unsuspecting world the depths of God's provision for his people. In giving bread to the hungry, Jesus satisfies human needs with generous charity, but he also hints at a meaning beyond the immediate. How will he heal the sick in future generations, teach them solid doctrine and live among them? Through the Church he founded on Peter and the Eucharist he instituted hours before his death. In this way his real presence will be perpetuated just as the five loaves and two fish became abundant food filling twelve baskets full of scraps.

3. Jesus' action in taking the five loaves and two fish, raising his eyes to heaven and saying the blessing, before breaking bread and handing it to the disciples, echoes the words of institution reported later (Mt 26, 26). Although Matthew does not recall Jesus raising his eyes to heaven at the Last Supper, this gesture of prayer and supplication is contained within the blessing recorded. Jesus is our High Priest, offering prayer and the sacrifice of the cross on behalf of all people. He needs to make no offering for his own sin, since his sinless perfection is its own all-powerful plea on our behalf.

19TH IN ORDINARY TIME: A

7.8.05, Mt 14, 22-33

1. One of the last scenes in the recent 'Lord of the Rings' film echoed the dramatic gesture of Jesus in putting out his hand and holding the floundering Peter. As the fellowship of the ring breaks up, Frodo seeks to escape in a boat, only to be pursued by his faithful servant, Sam, who leaps into the water despite the fact

that he cannot swim. As Sam sinks, a strong, Christ-like hand grabs him and prevents his drowning as Frodo hails him into the boat. Tolkien's Frodo bears many of the hallmarks of the Messiah who must tread a stony path for the salvation of all people.

2. Peter's impetuosity is brave but short-lived. Here is in an unprecedented and alarming situation, which he tries to deal with by clinging to the love he has for the Rabbi who has taken him from his nets on a pioneering journey of faith. But the man he admires and is growing to love seems to be bear little real resemblance to the apparition which has paralyzed his colleagues with fear and set his own teeth on edge. Peter is all emotion but with no spiritual strength and endurance - not yet. No-one can meet the divine Son on these terms without grace, which comes to him in the form of an outstretched hand.

3. Though Peter's doubts began to arise as he took his eyes off the Master and began to contemplate the fury of the crashing waves, the identity of the Messiah is never in doubt. In his terror at sinking, Peter still cries out, "Lord, save" (Mt 14, 30). Jesus is Lord throughout Matthew's gospel, and his divinity is never in doubt. Thus his ability to save is assured, and Peter has only to make his desperate plea and salvation is accomplished. The word, "at once" is key here as Matthew reminds his persecuted Jewish audience that Jesus is not slow to act, but needs us to remain steadfast in the faith.

21ST IN ORDINARY TIME: A

21.8.05, Mt 16, 13-20

1. Mark's gospel sees Jesus constantly telling his disciples and even unclean spirits to remain silent about who he is (cf. Mk 8, 30; 1, 26). Commonly understood to be a reflection of the evangelist's theology that only on the cross is Jesus' identity fully known and the

Messianic secret revealed (Mk 15, 39), this device is rarely used in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus is always openly the Messiah, often addressed as 'Lord' (cf. Mt 8, 25). Matthew has a different editorial purpose to outline the miracles and teachings of the Messiah as openly as possible. He is appealing to a principally Jewish audience anxious to know the basis of Jesus' Messianic claims.

2. So why the secrecy in this key passage, exclusive in its rich detail to Matthew? (cf. Mt 16, 20). It may well be because Simon has not yet completed his transformation into Peter. Though his faith has sparked into flame, it is still immature and all too susceptible to the cold winds of persecution. Jesus knows that Peter will betray him (Mt 26, 69-75) and utters words and promises that will only be fully understood in the light of his own resurrection and Peter's re-birth as Prince of the Apostles through the gift and regeneration of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then will he proclaim Christ.

3. Grace perfects through human nature. Simon was an impetuous and often irritable fisherman, whereas Peter becomes the head of the Church, willing ultimately to give glory to God by his martyrdom at the Circus of Domitian in Rome around 64 AD. We can all take courage from Peter and be inspired by his example and determination. No situation is too difficult for the grace of the Holy Spirit, if only we stick close to Jesus as Peter did, not giving in to a sense of despair that our own sinfulness can engender within us. Self-reliance is the enemy of God's grace.

22ND IN ORDINARY TIME: A

28.8.05, Mt 16, 21-27

1. Jesus draws on the Wisdom literature of Israel, bringing it to fulfillment in the power of his cross. For a thousand years the Sages of Israel had sought to instill principles of right conduct in every day living. For the man who leads astray there is

no excuse: " Will you object, 'But look, we did not know'? Has he who weighs the heart no understanding, he who scans your soul no knowledge? He himself will repay a man as his deeds deserve" (Pv 24, 12) Sirach too advises his son that the Lord will repay, " each as his deeds deserve and human actions as their intentions merit " (Sir 35, 22)

2. Thus when Jesus says that the Son of Man, " will reward each one according to his behaviour " (Mt 16, 27) he is merely echoing the inspired wisdom of the ancients of his people. Where he is radical is in apportioning this heavenly task to himself as the anointed of God, the one who was to come, the Messiah. None of this would have been lost on the disciples, who would have heard the teaching of the Wise Men each week in the synagogue. Only in the light of the resurrection do they fully understand the claims of Jesus. Here Matthew makes the connection.

3. Correct behaviour is this: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me " (Mt 16, 24). Peter is scandalized that the anointed of God could associate himself with a cursed death by crucifixion. He places himself between Christ and the cross the Father wishes his Son to bear. Instantly, from being " a happy man" (Mt 16, 17) Peter becomes "an obstacle in my path "(Mt 16, 23) as Jesus rounds on him as one who would see the kingdom of God in this-worldly terms, like Satan (Mt 4, 8-9). But Jesus' victory will echo in heaven as well as on earth.



SUNDAY BY SUNDAY EXTRA

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION

14.8.02, Lk 1, 39-56

1. "Great Mother of God, so wondrously united with Jesus Christ, from all eternity, by the same decree of providence; in her conception immaculate, in her divine motherhood a virgin most pure, the noble associate of our redeemer in his victory over sin and its consequences - what reward awaited her at last? For the crown of all her graces, she was exempted from the sentence of decay; shared her Son's victory over death, and was carried up to heaven, soul and body, there to reign as queen at his right hand, who is the King of Ages, the immortal " (Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

2. Pius XII wrote with passionate intensity about the privileges accorded to the Mother of God at her Assumption. In doing so, he was responding to the enormous ground swell of Catholic opinion throughout the world that asked him to declare on this matter. The Pope developed the logic of St. Paul's teaching to the Corinthians: " Christ is the first fruits and then, after the coming of Christ, those who belong to him" (1Cor 15, 23). No-one belonged to him more closely than his mother.

3. Jesus really rose in his physical body and ascended into heaven. His mother did the same, through the merits of her Son. He who walked the earth for thirty-three years also walked it after his death in the same physical body, though risen and glorified. The Church has never defined whether Mary died, but we know that in the same body which gave birth to the Messiah, she was taken up to heaven to continue her ministry of drawing all to her Son. Our vocation is to follow Jesus and Mary. Therein lies our hope.



TRUTH AND TOLERANCE.
CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND WORLD
RELIGIONS

by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Ignatius
Press, 284pp, £10.95

"We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognise anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires". Words of Cardinal Ratzinger, not from Truth and Tolerance but from that by now famous homily preached at the pre-Conclave Mass on 18 April 2005. To find out just what Benedict XVI means by "a dictatorship of relativism" read Truth and Tolerance.

This is Joseph Ratzinger's last major publication before his election as Pope. It is a collection of his writings, the first written in 1964, the remainder in the 1990s, either first delivered as public lectures or contributions to journals like *Communio*. For this reason it is not a systematic work. Ideas appear and reappear in more detail so the book requires careful reading and in full to draw together all the insights on a particular theme.

Truth and Tolerance is a study of relativism in religion, its origins, its common forms, its contradictions. And it offers a robust demonstration of how we can and must speak still of the 'truth' of Christianity. Many people today would say that all religions are more or less the same. Ratzinger adopts an historical and phenomenological approach to show that they are not. There was a radical novelty in Christianity's claim to be a religion of personal encounter with God in history rather than a mystical identification with God which has

always been a characteristic of eastern religions. The alternatives to Christianity are not interlocking pieces of the relativist's jigsaw but independent, different and often contradictory. The consequences are real and practical for everyday living. For example, Christianity confers a high dignity on the human person as unique and immortal, called into an eternal communion with God. The two alternatives of repeated reincarnations or of being dissolved into the All-One are surely less attractive. Still less attractive is the Marxist willingness to sacrifice the individual for the sake of the long term cause of equality or the Aztec rituals of human sacrifice to "feed" the gods and in order to keep the world going.

Ratzinger traces the origins of relativism to the Enlightenment. If Kant was correct in saying that we can never reach reality but only mere appearances, then all is mediated through the finite categories of the mind. The infinite God is unknowable. The claim of any religion to be 'true' is unacceptable. It can only accept equal status with all others. In any event, it now belongs in the box marked 'irrational', for some 'unscientific' and for those who still feel drawn towards it, in the realm of private 'experience' or 'feeling'. But Ratzinger shows just how alien these attempts to enfeeble the Christian claim to truth are to the history of Christian evangelisation. A recurring theme throughout the book (and indeed in another important work, Ratzinger's Introduction to Christianity) is that the God of Christianity was embraced not only by Jews as the fulfilment of the 'hope of Israel' but by the pious gentiles as the genuine rejection of a lesser, insufficient religion of irrational, mythical gods, and by Greek philosophers as the Wisdom that explained the rational universe. From this lesson in history, Ratzinger offers a way forward. Judeo-

Christianity was enlightenment for the ancient mythical religions and the philosophers searching for truth because it offered a synthesis of the search for the divine and the power of rational explanation. The Christian faith can still provide that synthesis of faith for reason and reason within faith. "The longing for the infinite is alive and unquenchable in man" (p.137). The rationalist critique does not satisfy the human mind or heart and while often not sufficiently confident to turn to religious claims of absolute truth, people turn to superstition: "We embrace rationality while clutching a rabbit's foot", as Matthew Syed confessed in *The Times* recently.

Of great interest to FAITH readers will be Ratzinger's insistence that faith must enter into dialogue with and "inculturate itself" into technical, scientific culture. For example, the Christian synthesis of reason and faith will only be convincing when we respond to the claim of scientific positivists that evolution is sufficient explanation to vanish metaphysics and render superfluous the "hypothesis of God". Ratzinger calls for openness on "both" sides: from people of faith not to cast doubt on the evidence for evolution and from people of science to consider the claim of Christianity that their rational universe is not the chance by-product of what is irrational but proceeds from the intelligent Verbum of God.

Throughout Truth and Tolerance the strongest argument against accepting religious relativism is based on a demonstration that human beings (and culture) show a consistent and dynamic openness to the transcendent. This is nothing less than the yearning for the "revelation of God... [to be] written into them" (p. 195). Indeed Ratzinger proclaims the universal primacy of Christ across time and culture which is the only motive for true mission and conversion. Here he also finds the

basis for optimism when considering the salvation of non-Christians: "We are all part of a single history that is in many different fashions on the way to God", (p.44) and the agreement in essentials across cultures far removed from each other "can only be explained by the hidden way our souls have been touched by truth" (p.65). But he is realistic about the need for discernment of genuinely "darker elements" in other religions.

Jacques Dupuis SJ, who wrote on Christianity and the world's religions, was asked by the CDF several years ago to clarify his explanation of Christ as unique and only Saviour. He was of the opinion that "it can and must be said" that the world's religious traditions are ways or routes of salvation for their followers. Ratzinger maintains the cautious balance of attitudes: of "acceptance as preparation for Christ" and "rejection as false religion" that we find throughout the Bible. In the end, he urges that we respect the mystery of God's activity rather than "invent theories" about how God might save people, for it is "a question of God's judgement, not ours" (p.18) - language that echoes *Gaudium et Spes'* confident but humble acknowledgement that these ways are "known only to God" (article 22).

Joseph's Ratzinger's *Truth and Tolerance* is a demanding but very important and useful book. It offers an overview of ideas that have shaped the world view of religion and of the Christian faith in particular. And it offers a way forward that is authentic: in keeping with the initial Christian evangelisation because rooted in the conviction that the Logos, the Truth, the Divine Person through whom and for whom all was made, has broken into the world in the Incarnation to fulfil all, restore all and purify all.

Fr William Massie
West Hull Parishes
Hull

NIELS STENSEN, THE SCIENTIST WHO WAS BEATIFIED

by Hans Kermit, *Gracewing*, 179pp, £12.99

This book outlines the inspiring story of a young Danish scientist, and his journey from the public dissection theatres of Copenhagen to the Bishopric of Titiopolis. It is the story of a journey in faith and the quest for truth, both religious and scientific. On first reading the title of the book, it is tempting for the reader to think that the book will be an account of an atheistic scientist who becomes Christian, however, this is not the case at all. Indeed the young scientist Stensen was a very devout Christian, albeit of the Lutheran Church (it may come as a surprise to some to learn that there was a time when it was actually considered to be quite normal and quite acceptable to be both religious and scientific - even as late as the 17th century!). Hans Kermit tells the tale of how Stensen was led from the Lutheran Church to embrace the fullness of the Catholic Faith, through his studies in natural science.

Born in Copenhagen in 1638, Stensen studied medicine at the university there, before going on to study anatomy and dissection in Amsterdam. Stensen was clearly a very able scientist and made several important contributions to the progress of medical science, not least of which was the discovery of a duct now known as the Ductus Stenonianus, named in his honour, which he identified through the dissection of the heads of sheep and dogs. (This book, dear reader, is neither for the squeamish nor the faint hearted!).

Stensen also got caught up in one of the greatest philosophical debates of the time, namely the question of how the mind is connected to the body. The famous philosopher Rene Descartes had proposed the idea that the mind and body, were connected

together through a little gland in the brain known as the Pineal Gland. Stensen spent a good deal of time and effort trying either to prove or disprove this idea, and after dissecting many animal heads (again, this book is not for those of a squeamish disposition), Stensen was able to disprove Descartes theory.

Hans Kermit goes on to describe Stensen's many other valuable contributions to natural science, in the fields of biology, geology and palaeontology. One of the real strengths of this book is that it contains many of Stensen's original drawings, beautifully and intricately detailed, showing the findings of his anatomical investigations, as well as copies of the title pages of his books, and many other photographs and engravings of interest.

Fascinating as Stensen's scientific work was, it is raised to a much higher level when we learn that it was through his scientific investigations that Stensen drew closer to God. Stensen explains that the purpose of anatomy is 'to lift the observer from the singularly brilliant construction of the body, to the dignity of the soul and from thence to acknowledge and love for its creator'. For Stensen, faith and reason were eminently compatible, with science at the service of religion, he believed that 'the role of science was to provide insight into the beauty of the Creator's work and to generate love for Him' (p.63)

Stensen, a rational man, needed a rational explanation for religion. He eventually reached the point when he decided that 'either religion is a binding injunction which mankind concocted in order to show its Creator the adoration they owe him..... or else religion is prescribed by God Himself and so there can be only one which must exist unbroken from the world's beginning to its end.'(p.51) Thus Stensen struggled with the trial of conversion and the ultimate Ecumenical question: Is any

one religion more true than the others? If so which one? And why am I not following it?

The final outcome of this intellectual and spiritual struggle was that Stensen was received into the Catholic Church, making great sacrifices in the process, as Catholicism was viewed with great disdain and suspicion in Stensen's very Lutheran home country. Stensen went on to be ordained and later became a bishop, renowned for his austerity and simple way of life, before dying a holy death in 1686.

Hans Kermit's account of Niels Stensen is more about his scientific life than about his spiritual life (though really the two are inseparable), and is more biographical than hagiographical, but it is nonetheless an inspiring story and a very readable book which I would commend to all.

*Marisa March
More House
South Kensington*

SHRINES OF OUR LADY IN ENGLAND
by Anne Vail, Gracewing, 246pp, £9.99

On a beautiful May day in 1982 I stood in the sun in Coventry Airport in the midst of a vast crowd to greet the Holy Father, John Paul II, on his visit to the Midlands. On that glorious day, four hundred years of estrangement between the British people and the Holy See seemed to evaporate overnight. A papal visit that would have been unthinkable just fifty years earlier now seemed perfectly natural and normal.

Reading Anne Vail's fine survey of the Shrines of Our Lady in England made me realise that huge changes of attitude with regard to the Catholic Church in this country had been taking place over many years, and I couldn't help concluding that the ease and naturalness of the papal visit owed much to the preparation of minds that had been taking place for

decades beforehand. Anne Vail's book is the story of how so many Marian shrines destroyed at the Reformation and neglected or forgotten for centuries have been restored or renewed in modern times. Veneration for Our Lady in this country is no longer a topic for the history books but a widespread living ecumenical reality.

There are a number of features of this book which make it particularly important. First, there is great attention to the work of modern artists and sculptors who have helped to beautify the restored shrines covered in the text. Second, the writer lovingly conveys what it feels like to visit each one, drawing a pen picture of the approaches and surroundings of the various shrines. The pen pictures are supplemented by pencil sketches. (Though these are competently executed I personally think I would have preferred photographs, but then that is a matter of taste.) Third, there is also a very practical dimension to the presentation of the topic, for the author provides a traveller's guide to each shrine including directions and listings of local Catholic Church addresses and Mass times as well as suggestions for accommodation. This book is not simply a presentation, it is also an invitation.

Each reader will have his favourite story or anecdote from the rich historical collection contained in this book. I was fascinated by Our Lady of the Portal in Truro, of whom I had never heard, and the extraordinary global connections revealed by the author. The name echoes the title of an ancient icon in Rome known as the Madonna del Portico - 'Our Lady of the Gate'. I was very moved to read that James Edward Stuart, son of King James II, prayed continually in front of this icon during his final exile in Rome, and he prayed for the return of the Catholic faith to England. But the contemporary importance of the subject is aptly

illustrated by the reminder that the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham was taken to Wembley Stadium for Pope John Paul II's Mass there in 1982.

For me personally it is the artistic dimension to the restoration of these shrines that is most powerful. This is not because I am artistically inclined - far from it. It is because of an experience I had that helped me on my way into the Catholic Church. In the parish church where I was an Anglican curate back in the 1970s there was a side-chapel with a wooden statue of Our Lady which had been brought over from Austria by a very Catholic-minded incumbent of earlier times. Feeling the pull of the Catholic faith, I used to kneel before this statue in a state of considerable perplexity. The statue was not in any way artistically special, but to me it had a flowing grace that I somehow knew could not have been created by the culture to which I was accustomed. I sensed that it was the product of a certain faith, a certain belief and habit of mind from which I knew I was excluded at that time by virtue of the place I had chosen to be. It was as though 'Our Lady was saying to me: 'I am here to call you to the place where I am truly honoured'.

*Cyprian Blamires
Market Harborough
Leics*



THE STREAM

The Spirit of God hovered above the waters.

The undulating wood slopes down
to the rhythm of mountain streams.
To me this rhythm is revealing You,
the Primordial Word.

How remarkable is Your silence

in everything, in all that on every side
unveils the created world around us ...
all that, like the undulating wood,
runs down every slope ...
all that is carried away by the stream's
silvery cascade,
rhythmically falling from the mountain,
carried by its own current—carried where?

What are you saying to me, mountain stream?
Where, in which place, do we meet?
Do you meet me who is also passing—
just like you.

But is it like you?
(Allow me to pause here;
allow me to stop at a threshold,
the threshold of simple wonder).
The running stream cannot marvel,
and silently the woods slope down,
following the rhythm of the stream—
but man can marvel!
The threshold which the world crosses in him
is the threshold of wonderment.
(Once, this very wonder was called “Adam”).

He was alone in his wonder,
among creatures incapable of wonder—
for them it is enough to exist and go their way.
Man went his way with them,
filled with wonder!
But being amazed, he always emerged
from the tide that carried him,
as if saying to everything around him:
“Stop—in me is your harbour,
in me is the place of meeting
with the Primordial Word.
Stop, this passing has meaning ...
has meaning ... has meaning”.

from
Roman Triptych
by
John Paul II
translated by
Jerzy Peterkiewicz
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Libreria Editrice Vaticana

notes from across the

Atlantic

by Richard John Neuhaus

TRIUMPH OF MADNESS

At age sixty-seven, Hunter S. Thompson, author of the pharmaceutically inspired "Fear and Loathing" books, was taking a call from his wife whom he asked to come home and help him with the writing of a column. In the middle of the conversation, without saying anything out of the ordinary, he put down the phone and fired a .45-calibre bullet into his mouth. "I heard the clicking of the gun," Anita Thompson said. "I was waiting for him to get back on the phone." Hunter's son, daughter-in-law and six-year-old grandson were a few yards away in adjoining rooms when he killed himself. The Rocky Mountain News reported: "Hunter S. Thompson died Sunday as he planned, surrounded by his family, at a high point in his life, and with a single, courageous and fatal gunshot wound to the head, his son says."

The son and daughter-in-law declared they "could not be prouder" of his suicide. The family gathered around the body sitting in the kitchen chair and toasted his achievement with Chivas Regal, Hunter's alcoholic favourite. "It was very loving," said Anita Thompson. "This is a triumph of his, not a desperate, tragic failure." In the days following, numerous writers reminisced about a wild night once spent with Thompson, and generally agreed that his exit was in character. He was really something. Novelist Tom Wolfe declared him the Mark Twain of his century. In the account of the post-suicide kitchen party, the six-year-old grandson is not quoted.

U.S. ON A ROLL

It is said that a week in politics can be a lifetime, with setbacks or

successes working kaleidoscopic changes, and there is no doubt something to that. But as of this writing, the Bush administration appears to be on a foreign policy roll, and the direction of that roll is in continuity with the decisions made and publicly articulated in the months following 11th September, 2001. The dramatic success of the Iraqi elections of 30th January is being hailed, also by formerly harsh critics of the administration, as a "tipping point", with many comparing the moment to the fall of the Berlin Wall. That "purple revolution" (referring to the ink-stained fingers of voters) is joined to the "orange revolution" in Ukraine, and in the minds of many is associated with the "red revolution" of last 3rd November in the U.S. In his low-key but unmistakably triumphant tour of Europe in February, Bush politely received the grudging acknowledgments of critics that maybe the Americans know what they're doing after all. Add to this the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Lebanon's "cedar revolution" against Syrian control, tentative moves toward a measure of freedom by the dictatorship in Egypt, and a revived "road map" toward peace between Israel and Palestine, and it begins to look something like what a "cowboy president" calls democracy's moment. Not to be overlooked are striking changes at the UN. Secretary General Kofi Annan and the UN itself are under siege as outrage builds over the exposure of widespread mismanagement and corruption in the secretariat, the multi-billion-dollar scandal of the Iraqi oil-for-food scheme, and UN troops in Congo engaged in systematic rape and looting.

Only a couple of years ago, the UN seemed to be riding high, presenting itself as the source and guardian of moral legitimacy in international affairs. Even the Vatican seemed to be going along with that pretension.

Now UN-boosters such as Richard C. Holbrooke, President Clinton's ambassador to the organization, are much sobered. "The UN cannot stand above its member states," he says. "That's not acceptable to the big powers, and not just the U.S. The Chinese and the Russians and countries like India also won't accept the UN as senior to them." We have not moved beyond the sovereignty of nation states after all. The UN exists and operates at the sufferance of the P5-the five permanent members of the Security Council who have a veto (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States)-and most particularly of the P1, meaning the United States, which pays the biggest part of the bills and provides the muscle behind UN decisions.

World-government enthusiasts, a group largely indistinguishable from the declared opponents of the world's only "hyperpower", have not raised the white flag, and probably never will, but their influence has been sharply curtailed. This is notably the case with the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) that have tried to use the UN to trump national sovereignty by advancing their social agendas through "international law". We are witnessing the shape of a new realism in world affairs. It is not a cynical Realpolitik. Under the leadership of the United States, it is very explicitly moral in purpose, and some complain it is dangerously moralistic. It appears, however, that we are finally being given the answer to the question of what comes after the end of the Cold War. All in all, and as of this writing, it is an answer that is hopeful and increasingly believable.

FIGHTING ACADEMIC MIEDOCRITY

We are among the many who have been watching with great interest Baylor University's effort to become a top-drawer research university under the all-encompassing lordship

NOTES FROM ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

of Christ. The vision is called “Baylor 2012” and has been pressed these past ten years by Robert B. Sloan, who has now resigned as president and assumed the title of chancellor, an office without policy-making authority. Sloan’s vision was, as they say, controversial from the beginning; most things worth doing are. He says he would not have resigned as president if he were not confident that “Baylor 2012” is secure.

The school’s governing board insist they stand behind the vision. Some are sceptical, and understandably so. What Sloan proposed is that Baylor could defy the drift into either secularization or academic mediocrity (or both) typical of religiously affiliated institutions, as documented by scholars such as George Marsden and James Burtchaell. Robert Benne, a Lutheran and close observer of church-related higher education, writes: “Protestants have simply not been able to establish the one thing Sloan has been striving to establish: a first-rate research university that preserves its soul ... Sloan’s resignation poses a serious question: Do Protestants have enough confidence in the intellectual claims of the Christian faith to make them relevant to the educational life of a great university?”

The more hopeful believe that Sloan’s fault was to press a course that was too fast and too expensive. “Baylor 2012”, they say, will now be implemented in a more-deliberate manner that does not risk excessive destabilisation of the school.

Benne writes, “There is no guarantee that this ambitious plan will be completely successful or that it will now be free of controversy, but its likelihood of success is now greater without Sloan than it was with him.” Everybody concerned about the future of Christian higher education in this country has reason to hope that Benne is right.

SOME HAZARDS OF SMOKING

A reader found this on the Internet, so it must be true. A man in Charlotte, North Carolina, bought a box of very expensive cigars which he insured against fire. Having smoked them, he filed a claim, saying they had been lost “in a series of small fires”. The insurance company balked, the case went to court, and the judge ruled in the man’s favour, noting that the company did not specify what is an “unacceptable fire”. The company was required to pay the fellow \$15,000, but then had him arrested on twenty-four counts of arson. He was convicted and sentenced to twenty-four months in jail and a fine of \$24,000. If true, it is a sobering tale, confirming me in the wisdom of smoking cigars that are inexpensive and uninsured.

DISCRIMINATION BY ANY OTHER NAME

A red herring still successfully employed to distract attention from serious arguments about government funding of “faith-based organisations” is the claim that such organisations engage in “religious discrimination in hiring”. Jeffrey Rosen of the New Republic puts the matter succinctly, “It’s obvious on reflection that, without the ability to discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring and firing staff, religious organisations lose the right to define their organisational mission enjoyed by secular organisations that receive public funds.” In other words, the charge of religious discrimination is but another instance of discrimination against religion. These questions are expertly addressed in a 170-page study from the Centre for Public Justice in Washington, D.C. For more information on “The Freedom of Faith-Based Organisations to Staff on a Religious Basis,” edited by Carl Esbeck and associates, contact

www.cpjustice.org.

MAKING YOURSELF MORE COMFORTABLE

A number of universities around the country are accommodating transgendered, transsexual and otherwise ambiguously self-identified persons who protest the heteronormativity of restrooms designated for men and women. Matthew Rose, a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, former First Things editorial assistant, and legendary football star of Wabash College reports: “The University of Chicago has just supplied us with a number of bathrooms for those ‘uncomfortable’ about classifying themselves within the hegemonic taxonomies of bourgeois heteronormativity. The new bathrooms are private and much nicer than the bathrooms for those of us who have timidly accepted the social construction of our maleness or femaleness. They are so much nicer, in fact, that I use them regularly. When I was confronted about using the bathroom by a confused looking ‘somebody’, I simply replied, ‘I’m not comfortable calling myself a man on this campus.’” Heteronormativism. Add it to the list of things of which you are probably guilty.

SOFTENING THE IMAGE

Res Publica, which describes itself as a public interest group, which is about what one would expect from an organisation named Res Publica, is sponsoring a project called “Abortion and Values: An Interfaith Consensus”. The process will involve a software programme called Synanim that “allows hundreds of people to collectively draft a statement”. That will be followed by a “closed meeting of key stakeholders in the progressive faith community”, who will draft the final statement and try to gain maximum publicity for what will be announced as a new religious consensus on abortion. Some who are known for their definite pro-life convictions have

been invited to participate in this project and have declined for very good reasons.

The way the questions are framed in the project proposal, plus some of the key leaders and participating organisations, suggest that this is yet another of many initiatives in recent months to soften the image of pro-abortionists. The proposal cites favourably the essay by Frances Kissling, head of Catholics for a Free Choice, as an "attempt to open a more nuanced conversation".

Glen Stassen, an anti-Bush activist and professor of ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary whose arguments have been employed by Senator Hillary Clinton, is another key player in the project. The consensus at which the project aims is intended to overcome polarisation and depoliticise the controversy over abortion, which, being translated, means to preserve the status quo of the unlimited abortion license. Or at least, now that the pro-choicers are on the defensive, to keep the license as unlimited as is politically possible. Prolifers who know their nursery rhymes will decline the invitation to the parlour of Res Publica.

ART ON THE PARK

Yes, I got up to Central Park to take a look at the big project of Christo Javacheff and his partner Jeanne-Claude, 7,500 steel gates hung with orange nylon along twenty-three miles of park paths. On first look, it seemed a tacky display that had the saving merit of lasting only sixteen days. Myron Magnet, editor of City Journal, got more worked up about it: "For all the cant about the artist as liberator of the human spirit, there is much in contemporary art and especially architecture that seeks to impose upon individuals the artist's vast ego and confine them within it, so that they cannot escape his will. It is this whiff of totalitarianism that makes Polish intellectuals label such architecture 'neo-oppressionism'."

While I agree with my friend

Myron's view of much contemporary architecture, his alarm is something of a reach with respect to the Christo lark. Christo is a master of publicity who, as in wrapping Berlin's Reichstag in plastic, takes adolescent-some would say child-like-delight in doing what has not been done before. Distributing 7,500 garbage pails around Central Park with a teddy bear atop each might be as creative, if creativity is measured by novelty. Ask any twelve-year-old about other really cool things that might be done.

"The Gates" was, or so it seems to me, an innocent exultation. I am reminded of John Gielgud watching a fireworks display: "I do so love fireworks. They are so unnecessary." Yes, the \$20 million, as Judas might complain, could have been given to

the poor. But it is now reported that the cost was considerably less than \$20 million, and it is estimated the city reaped more than \$200 million from the curious thousands who flew in to witness the once-in-a-lifetime display.

Like P.T. Barnum, Christo and the Bloomberg administration are not indifferent to the potential in a sucker being born every minute. Had it lasted much more than sixteen days, the whiff of totalitarianism might have become detectable. As it was, however, "The Gates" was more like a 1960s "happening", although a good deal more decorous. It was an indulgence of high spirits or, at worst, a vulgar exhibit of personal vanity and artistic vacuity. This is New York. One gets used to things, for better and worse.

We know well that the language of faith is often very far from today's men and women; it can bring them close only if it becomes in us our modern-day language. We are contemporary, we live in this world, with these thoughts, these emotions. If it is transformed in us, one can find the answer.

Naturally, I am aware and we all know that many are not immediately able to identify themselves with, to understand, to assimilate all that the Church teaches. It seems to me important firstly to awaken this intention to believe with the Church, even if personally someone may not yet have assimilated many particulars. It is necessary to have this will to believe with the Church, to have trust that this Church - the community not only of 2,000 years of pilgrimage of the people of God, but the community that embraces heaven and earth, the community where all the righteous of all times are therefore present - that this Church enlivened by the Holy Spirit truly carries within the "compass" of the Spirit and therefore is the true subject of faith.

The individual, then, is inserted into this subject, adheres to it, and so, even if he or she is still not completely penetrated by this, the person has trust and participates in the faith of the Church, wants to believe with the Church. To me, this seems like our lifelong pilgrimage: to arrive with our thought, our affections, with our entire life at the communion of faith. We can offer this to everyone, so that little by little one can identify and especially take this step over and over again to trust in the faith of the Church, to insert themselves in this pilgrimage of faith, so as to receive the light of faith.

Let us all go forward together, moved by the love of Christ. And in this way, we will succeed!

from a spontaneous speech given by Benedict XVI to the clergy of Rome on May 13, in the Basilica of St. John Lateran

cutting/edge

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

STEM CELL NEWS

Much questionable progress has been publicized of late concerning cloning and embryonic stem cells. For the first time a UK research group has produced a human embryo by cloning techniques. The group is headed by Professor Alison Murdoch, a gynaecologist and fertility expert at the Centre for Life, an IVF clinic in Newcastle, who also heads the British Fertility Association and is an honorary clinical lecturer at the University of Newcastle. Along with Dr Miodrag Stojkovic of Newcastle University, she holds a licence to create cloned human embryos in Britain, and in late May they announced that for the first time they had achieved just that. Whilst originally expecting that they would use spare eggs from the IVF clinic, the Newcastle group found that in fact they only achieved successful cloning with eggs freshly ovulated from donor women. Three human embryos were created using cloning techniques, but only one developed as far as the stage of a blastocyst, and from none was an embryonic-stem-cell line derived.

Ahead by some two years in experience of these techniques is the research group in South Korea led by Professor Woo Suk Hwang at the Seoul National University. On 19th May 2005 Hwang et al. published a paper in the journal, *Science*, announcing that they had significantly advanced their methods of 'somatic cell nuclear transfer' - that is, cloning - along with consistent harvesting of embryonic stem cells matched perfectly to the DNA of the donor patient. Compared with their published research last year, when they obtained only one stem-cell line from some 30 embryos, this year's results show that they

have produced 11 stem-cell lines from 31 embryos, clones of patients aged 2 to 56 who have a variety of serious medical conditions. Hwang's work, however, relies on a ready supply of freshly produced human eggs, which South Korean law allows women to donate specifically for this research by opting for ovarian stimulation, despite the risks for donor women.

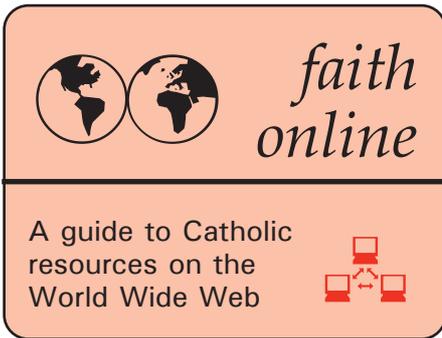
Additionally, after an impassioned debate, a late-May vote in the US House of Representatives has indicated their intention to allow hitherto-prevented embryonic-stem-cell research. President Bush has not so far allowed any federal funding for embryonic-stem-cell research, and has threatened to veto the legislation if passed by Congress. The House passed the motion 238-194, insufficient a margin to prevent a Presidential veto, which would instead have required a two-thirds majority. The Senate has been asked to consider the legislation soon, although the leader in the Senate, Dr Bill Frist, has long been an ally of President Bush in bio-ethical issues. On the very day of the Congress debate President Bush appeared at a gathering in the White House of families formed by the growing practice of unfreezing 'spare' embryos formed by IVF techniques, and allowing childless couples to have a family. At this event President Bush said, "Every embryo is unique and genetically complete, like every other human being. And each of us started out our life this way. These lives are not raw material to be exploited, but gifts." That same day, the House of Representatives also passed a motion 431-1 in favour of establishing an umbilical-cord blood bank to foster adult-stem-cell research. With federal funding to date unavailable for embryonic-stem-cell work, the US has pressed forward fast with adult-stem-cell research, which is already showing signs of promise.

In fact, adult stem cells are already being used in a number of clinical

treatments. Patients with certain types of blindness, and those suffering from some spinal-cord injuries, have successfully received restorative procedures on otherwise incurable conditions. However, opinion is sharply divided over whether adult stem-cells could ever have the potential to form the tissue types needed for the novel cures about which media speculation is rife, namely, heart disease, strokes or degenerative diseases.

An ethical alternative to embryonic stem cells being produced via cloning techniques is being developed in Chicago. Effectively 'embryonic stem cells without the embryo,' the work of Yuri Verlinsky of the Reproductive Genetics Institute based in Chicago avoids the need for therapeutic cloning of the patients, and the consequent destruction of the cloned embryo. Verlinsky's alternative is known as the 'stemrid' technique, and takes pre-existing embryonic stem cells, replacing their nuclear DNA with a cell from the adult patient, allowing a re-programming of the cells to form a new line of embryonic stem cells that are genetically matched to the patient. At no point in this technique does a new embryo have to be created, although an ethical question would still remain over the origin of the initial stem cells. Nevertheless, this could yet provide a more ethically acceptable alternative to the cloned-embryo techniques, whilst still providing the benefits of embryonic stem cells over adult stem cells.

The group, 'Comment on Reproductive Ethics', www.corethics.org offers a pro-life analysis on many matters concerning cloning and stem-cell research. Concerning many recent developments, CoRE expressed the fundamental disquiet: "The moral issues remain unaltered: to destroy human life in order to attempt to cure others is an inadmissible trade-off."



The links to all the websites mentioned in Faith Online are included in the Faith Website at www.faith.org.uk

FAITH ONLINE

POPE BENEDICT FAN CLUB

What at first sight seems merely affectionate and light-hearted turns out to be very comprehensive and quite scholarly. All of his works published as Cardinal and Pope are listed here, often with highlights of the texts included or links to where they can be purchased. A timeline of the principal doctrinal decisions and documents taken from 1981-2005 provides a rather fascinating cameo of recent catholic history. But you can't leave without visiting the shop, selling 'papist' baseball caps and "the cafeteria is closed" steins!

www.Popebenedictxvifanclub.com

NEWMAN ONLINE

It is reported that the Pope has a particular regard for Newman. Here we have a useful place to find all the famous works (Tracts for the times; Anglican difficulties; Apologia; Dream of Gerontius; Development of doctrine etc) as well as several lesser-known ones. There are some fine photos and portraits as well as a collection of Popes' words about him. John Paul II writes in 2001: "Let us pray that the time will soon come when the Church can officially and publicly proclaim the exemplary holiness of Cardinal John Henry Newman, one of the most distinguished and versatile champions of English spirituality."

www.newmanreader.org

A MODERN SAINT-MAKER

"Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious? To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: Be ye perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect." This site provides a smart introduction to the founder of Opus Dei; there is a detailed biographical profile, brief descriptions of his main works and several personal testimonies.

www.josemariaescriva.info

'THE MONASTERY'

In many people's eyes the BBC2 programme revindicated contemporary TV as well as pushing Catholic spirituality into prime focus. The monks proved to be compelling ambassadors of the Benedictine life. Worth's attractive site has a monastic simplicity about it. There is a description of life in the Abbey as well as a section on the programme. If one or two of the meditation aids provided seem a little agnostic, the community's powerful witness shines through: Tony's story ends: "Worth changed my life. God exists."

www.worthabbey.net

MORE RADIANT LIGHT

The site containing Elizabeth Wang's now famous inspirational paintings has been up-dated.

There are presently fifteen 'exhibitions' according to spiritual theme. These beautiful pictures are often used at faith events; highly economical visual aids.

www.radiantlight.org

EVANGELISING WITH ST IGNATIUS

Mission FIDES uses the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola as a missionary tool. Although the many retreats, parish missions and days of recollection take place mainly across the Atlantic, the site gives a simple and helpful synopsis of the Exercises and is a witness to their potency.

www.missionfides.com

GIRM AT LAST

Here is the freshly translated new General Introduction to the Roman Missal in pdf format: follow the links.

<http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturgy/>

DIARY OF FEASTS

A calendar of liturgical dates up until 2087!

www.toolan.com/liz/litcal.html

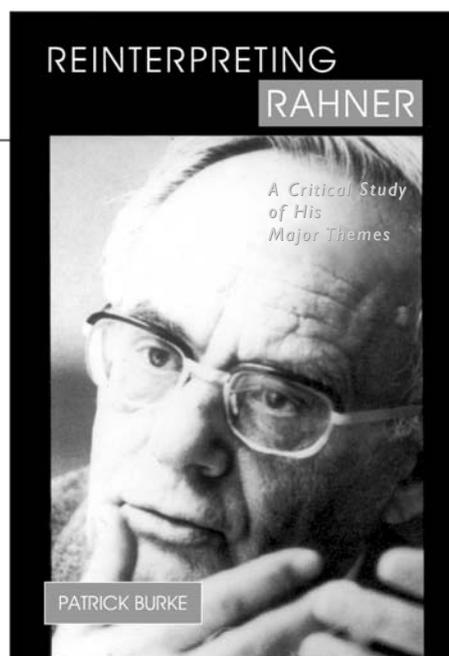
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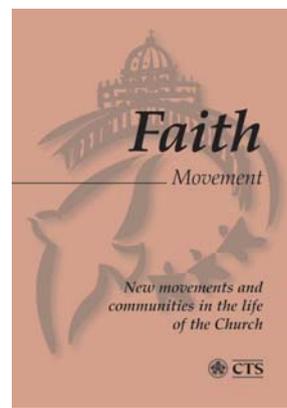
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A CHANGE OF EDITOR

In view of his recent appointment to serve the Church in the Sacred Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, Fr. Patrick Burke will be stepping down as Editor of Faith magazine as from this issue. The Trustees of Faith Movement will appoint a new Editor as soon as possible.

In consideration of the work involved, the next issue of Faith Magazine will be published in November/December 2005. All subscriptions will be adjusted accordingly; we apologise for any inconvenience.

We thank all our readers for their continuing and growing support and assure everyone that normal service will be resumed in the Autumn. Faith magazine will continue to promote a new synthesis of the orthodox Catholic Faith with contemporary insights and discoveries, so that Christ may be preached to the nations and his name be glorified everywhere.

We thank Fr. Patrick for his excellent and tireless work as Editor of Faith magazine and we wish him every blessing in his new post. We feel sure that our readers will join us in praying for him in his new job.

