

**Catholic Schools: Time To Decide**  
Editorial

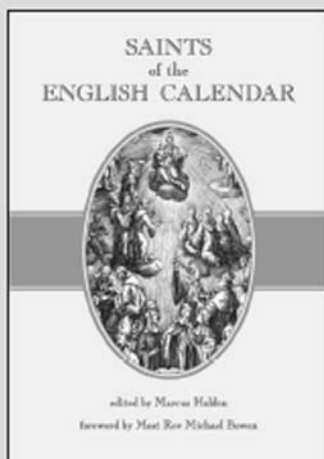
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**“Till You Live In Light So Brilliant”**  
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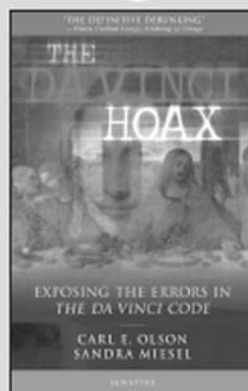
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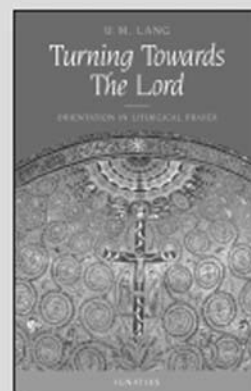
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JESUS CHRIST IS THE MASTER KEY TO THE MEANING OF THE UNIVERSE

# Catholic Schools: Time To Decide

*"If you are willing, my son, you will be taught, and if you apply yourself you will become clever." (Sirach 6,32).*

*"Either we support, re-equip and offer within the state system an educational service that is unequivocally Catholic in its foundation and content, or, if that is no longer possible or desirable, we should pull out and throw our energies into parish based catechesis as a matter of urgency."*

## An Historic Pastoral Vision

In 1852, two years after the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales, the new bishops, meeting at Oscott, set out their pastoral strategy:

*'Wherever there may seem to be an opening for a new mission, we should prefer the erection of a school, so arranged as to serve temporarily for a chapel, to that of a church without one. For the building raised of living and chosen stones, the spiritual sanctuary of the Church, is of far greater importance than the temple made by hands.'*

It was a visionary directive. They knew, of course, that education has always been close to the heart of the Church's mission, that it is part of her care for the human person and the progress of human society. But that was not what they meant, they were not merely promoting 'education' in the abstract as a noble ideal, rather they had grasped a more practical truth. They saw that a school is a natural community and that schools also build communities beyond their own physical boundaries. The bonds of friendship, shared experiences, common identity and purpose engendered by school life spill over into the homes and onto the streets of a locality.

In our increasingly urbanised and fluid culture, where traditional communities based on self-contained towns and villages are fast disappearing, a school can set the boundaries of a virtual village within an anonymous, modern suburb. It can be a complex and far flung 'village', for sure, especially in the case of a secondary school, with boundaries and identities that overlap other institutions and community centres, but its bonds are real and strong. And these can feed the life of parishes in a number of very fruitful ways.

## A Ready Made Community

The astute pastor can do much informal evangelising and community building among several generations at the school gates, so to speak. For example, building a parish youth group can draw on a ready made network of relationships. Gathering parents for catechesis based around programmes of sacramental formation is made much easier with a core of adults whose common interest is the education of their children. Although this does not mean that sacramental programmes have to take place in the classroom. The bishops of 1852 did not envisage the school itself as the centre of Catholic life: Christ present in the Mass on the parish altar - wherever that is physically located - is always the centre of the Church's life and identity. But they did realise the vital and useful role that a good school can play in building a thriving parish.

Now, it ought to go without saying that the most essential ingredient for the success of a Catholic school is the Catholic Faith. But the Victorian bishops were wise enough to know that it did need saying. They emphasised the need for Catholic schools to offer a fully rounded education: "a liberal, scientific and professional education", but it must also be, "united with solid religious instruction". Their

reason for saying this was not because they saw a school as some sort of vehicle for sectarian indoctrination, but because they knew that the Faith is an essential framework for the full flourishing of the human person and they also saw a crying need for religious truth and certainty in the society of their day, which was already showing signs of secularisation.

*"The innumerable contradictions of doctrine, which have long prevailed in every system out of the Catholic Church, fretting and clashing together, have worn themselves down into a smooth apathy; and the simplest hypothesis for getting rid of the scandal of contention about sublimest truths has been adopted - that they are matters of indifference."*

The pervasive indifferentism of the surrounding culture posed a threat to the souls of Catholic children and of society itself. But this situation also imposed an evangelical duty on the Catholic community to raise up generations who would be formed in authentic truth and love. So they emphasised that:

*"...while we thus wish to promote a secular instruction equal to what others offer, we consider sound faith, virtue and piety by far the most important elements of education."*

### The Faith Of Our Fathers

In other words, they considered that the Catholic Faith itself is our greatest contribution to individual education and to the nation. As a system, Catholicism is not just a series of traditional beliefs and practices, but a philosophy that illuminates, integrates and elevates what is human into communion with God in Christ. As a religion it is nothing short of a personal and social relationship with God who redeems and fulfils our humanity in the fullest possible way.

Such a claim could never be content to be sidelined as just another schoolroom subject or point of view among many; it should never become just an optional add-on to an otherwise self-contained educational package. Catholicism should shape and inform every aspect of the life and curriculum of a Catholic school. The bishops warned specifically against the danger in their own day of a system where

*"... religious knowledge should be confined to a perfunctory repetition of the catechism, and devotional affections not cultivated at all. The mischievousness of children so educated would be in proportion to their knowledge and cleverness."*

Over the next hundred and fifty years the policy of

Cardinal Wiseman and his colleagues of 1852 proved remarkably successful. Catholic schools made a significant contribution to the Catholic revival in England and Wales and they were gradually recognised as making a useful contribution to the common good.

### The People's Sacrifices

Of course, such gains were not won without great commitment and sacrifice. By 1870, when elementary education was made compulsory in Britain, more than £4 million had been contributed towards the cost of building Catholic schools, most of it made up literally of "pennies in the plate" from the labouring classes in city parishes. It was a remarkable act of collective generosity, which bears witness to the deep faith and selfless spirituality of the ordinary laity of the time.

Then in 1944 The Education ("Butler") Act famously accorded 90% state funding to the running of Catholic schools that came under the state education system, while still allowing the Church to retain control over school management and ethos. The situation in Scotland differs in some details because of the distinctive Scottish legal and educational systems and a somewhat different religious culture, but in essence it is the same story. It was a remarkable breakthrough, one which brought Catholic education into the mainstream of British schooling, where many Catholic schools gained a reputation for excellence and popularity; a reputation that still endures today.

### Crisis And Decline

But unfortunately in the late nineteen sixties and throughout the seventies our schools were first and hardest hit by the post-Conciliar decline. This period coincided with a great upheaval in catechetics and the casting aside of the old apologetics. There was indeed a good case for some reforms to be made. Sometimes popular teaching had become "mere catechism repetition" as the earlier bishops had feared, and there was a desperate need for a new apologetic to meet the insights and objections of the scientific age. A more discursive, inspirational and scriptural approach to religious teaching was rightly called for.

But what happened in many places was more akin to a revolution than a reform. Everything was swept away - books, devotions, traditions, even doctrines - with the force of a tsunami. It has to be said that the marked influence of modernism was evident in much of the new catechetical ideology. Schemes of the day downplayed the divinity of Christ and the need for grace. They portrayed religion as a celebration of the self and of



humanity, with Jesus becoming simply a cipher or heroic example of kindness and tolerance etc. Sacraments became signs that celebrate our own yearnings and achievements, and the Church a purely human community of like minded spiritual seekers.

## The Abandonment Of Doctrine

However, more often than not, what happened on the ground was the abandonment of doctrine altogether. Religious education and catechesis became purely aspirational, appealing only to the feelings and the will, with little or no intellectual content. Such an exclusively emotional approach may be appropriate to infancy, but over time it fails to hold or form the young.

It breeds a religion of insubstantial sentiment with no power to resist the world or answer the inquisitive mind. It does not endure much beyond mother's knee. Already by the top years of primary schooling many children are quietly questioning their faith. If the sentimental approach is carried over into the secondary school - as it so often is to this day - it breeds nothing but cynical disrespect for religion in most modern adolescents.

## Fear Of Testing

At an age when children are learning and being tested on substantial factual information and critical thinking in other subjects - the sciences for example - they are still being asked to draw pictures and pretty posters in the RE class, or at best having endless non-directive and inconclusive discussions about 'moral issues'. The absence of doctrinal content sends a message, conscious or subconscious, that religion makes no truth claims, that it is all a matter of opinion. This attitude is reinforced by the equally modern reluctance among teaching experts to countenance any kind of testing of the results of religious education.

Much of this is based on the fear of being perceived as 'turning the clock back' to a supposed culture of rigidity and narrowness, which is the popular caricature of everything before 1965. There are some elements of truth to this cartoon picture of the past, but it was by no means universally or wholly that way. Was common sense and sensitivity only invented in the nineteen-sixties? In any case, why is it beyond our imagination to think that we could approach things today in a kinder spirit and yet at the same time maintain and monitor a clear factual content to Catholic education? The tragic result of all this confusion was that through most of the nineteen seventies and eighties Catholic schools in Britain stumbled on with little or no formal programmes at all. No wonder the lapsation rate was so high!

## Webs Of Confusion

The latter half of the nineteen-eighties did finally see the arrival of new formal RE schemes. But by now the doctrinal relativism which had infected the catechetical and religious education establishment had evidently descended into syncretism. Criticising controversial programmes like Weaving The Web (now happily consigned to the dustbin of history) caused a row at the time and we have no wish to rub an old sore. The intention, we are assured, was to show the alienated modern youth that religion is common to all cultures and embodies some basic human values. All well and good, but the deeply questionable philosophy and theology that underpinned the programme meant that Christianity was presented as no more than one tributary in the stream of human religious consciousness, and Catholicism as just one possible flavour of Christianity.

At the very least, such programmes did nothing at all to stem the tide of lapsation, and at worst they contributed greatly to the confusion of uninstructed children. At the same time many Catholic schools were drawing up mission statements in which the word "Catholic" was quietly dropped in favour of the more generic "Christian" and the ideal of teaching Catholic doctrine was replaced with much vaguer expressions such as "gospel values".

## The Impact Of Secularism

This is not to say that there have not been, and still are good and sincere teachers who have made great efforts to communicate Catholic certainties in a chaotic world. Parents and parish priests know well that there are other factors influencing their children from beyond the classroom. By the late twentieth century the popular indifferentism identified by the bishops of 1852 had hardened into a thoroughgoing and aggressive secularism.

But our current religious education policies have signally failed to address the problem. We desperately needed a modern apologetic that is relevant in content and tone to the times we live in and for this we also need a new philosophical and theological synthesis to answer the challenge of the modern sciences. Sadly this has not happened, at least not on a widespread and popular scale - not yet.

The net effect of all this has been that far from helping build the Catholic community, many schools have become a breeding ground for the culture of lapsation in early adolescence; so much so that some of our most committed parents prefer to send their children to other schools. They feel that an honestly secular environment, one which genuinely respects their child's personal faith and religious practice, is less harmful than bombardment

with false or inadequate teaching in the classroom and sarcasm and negative social pressure in the playground. There are times when one cannot help but sympathise with such a view!

However, it is only right to observe that there does seem to have been a change of heart in some quarters recently, especially following the publication of the new Catechism of the Catholic Church. There are some rather better, but still patchy, RE programmes on offer now for the secondary sector. And we have, at last, some much clearer guidelines about what is to be taught as the minimum content of classroom RE, although in many places there is still a marked reluctance to test whether this is actually being carried out! But tragically there remains a desperate shortfall of well trained Catholic teachers who can discuss and explain the Faith in a lively, balanced and orthodox way. This is really another facet of the vocations crisis in the Western Church. So the lapsation rate among the young continues apace. We know by experience that it can be reversed, but it takes clear thinking and concerted action to turn it round.

### A New Political Attack

And now to add to our woes we also face a new attack from political factions in the Government, which are dead set on abolishing religious education altogether in the UK. In Parliament and in the media the case against faith based schools draws on a combination of fear of extreme Islam, historic anti-Catholicism and secularist socialism/humanism. But within educational circles it sells itself under the cloak of "multiculturalism", an apparent ideal of tolerance and social integration.

On the face of things, of course, Catholicism has no problem with such an ideal. The Catholic Church is supremely multicultural by definition and Catholic schools are probably the most culturally mixed in Britain for the same reason. But we should be under no illusion; "multiculturalism" in this context really means "multi-faith", and this does not imply some calm intellectual neutrality and even-handedness. It is systematic secularism under another name; an ideology which portrays all religions as equally 'interesting' from the point of view of detached cultural studies, but ultimately they amount to no more than quaint and colourful ceremonies built on private prejudice and ancient superstition, of no public or lasting value therefore - just "stories" to be shared.

This is the framework of education that some politicians seem intent on imposing on the entire state sector. It is not actually the publicly stated view of the Prime Minister, who sends his children to Catholic schools, nor,

we presume, is it the view of our recently appointed Secretary of State for Education, who is a committed Catholic. So all may not be lost. And after all, the parishes still contribute 10% - about £20 million per year - to the financing of our schools. Surely this must give us some rights or at least some leverage? But the fight is definitely on.

### What Can We Do?

So what are the choices before us? We could simply give up on state education for Catholics in the UK, cut our losses and put the financial and personnel resources into parish based catechesis or fee paying parish and diocesan schools as in America. We do not favour this solution. It would be a massive social change and loss of infrastructure, with no guarantee that we could provide something better via parish instruction just now in any case.

We believe our schools are still worth fighting for. It is still true that the school is a natural community. It would be a tragic waste to close our schools with all the valuable social and pastoral contact they afford, as well as the money and effort already invested in them over a hundred and fifty years. The crisis of teacher formation and pupil lapsation could be turned round in time if there was the humility to listen and the will to change our policies.

We must stand up for the personal and social value of specifically and unapologetically Catholic education. Some Catholic MP's have already had the courage to do so in The House of Commons. This does not mean that Catholic schools should be exclusively for the education of Catholics; they never have been. But it does mean that what is on offer at a Catholic school should be based on the Catholic world view and that Catholic parents should have a *prima facie* right to have their children educated in such a system.

### The Unique Value Of Catholicism

It does not mean that we offer a narrow, uncritical indoctrination, but it does mean that Catholicism should be taught and explained as a coherent, organic system of thought and lifestyle. Of course other religions and ideologies should be explored and presented with respect. And of course students may accept or reject the faith on a personal level, but they should not leave a Catholic school without at least understanding what they are rejecting.

It does not mean that a Catholic school can only be staffed by Catholics; they never have been. But it does mean that those who accept a teaching post at a Catholic school should accept the aims and ideals of the school's

mission, including the explicit support of a Catholic based system. Sadly this cannot be taken for granted, even among Catholics now. In some positions a respectful non-Catholic teacher can be a safer pair of hands than a disaffected or malformed Catholic.

What we must resist above all is the secular humanist propaganda that is trying to portray all faith based schools as inherently divisive and doctrinaire. There is no basis for levelling this accusation at the Catholic education system and we serve both the Church and humanity ill by weakly agreeing to their ideal of a "multi-faith" - for which read post-Christian - curriculum with an optional smørgesbord of religious trimmings offered from the sidelines.

## A Case In Point

This is already what appears to be happening in the recently publicised case of St. Theodore's Catholic High School, Burnley, in Lancashire. The flourishing sixth-form of the school is to be closed and its students transferred to a purpose built "multi-faith college", because the local County Council inspectors think that the pupils are "not effectively prepared for life in a multicultural society", even though they concede that the school has "an atmosphere where very good attitudes and behaviour are expected from all pupils".

The local diocesan authorities have said that they have no power to fight for Catholic selection of sixth-form students (16-18), because the student intake is beyond the legal age of compulsory education. That may or may not be so, but much more worrying is the fact that the diocese meekly concurred with the Council's ideological agenda by saying:

*"We wish to support [students] in their own faith development while giving them the wider experience of co-operating in a multifaith and multicultural environment. This, we believe, will best prepare them as Catholics for higher education or work in the modern world."*

## An Adequate Preparation?

Translated into practical reality this means the abandonment of effective Catholic education for the over 16's in the state-aided sector and retreating into providing just a chaplaincy of some kind. Even on experimental "ecumenical" campuses this policy fails to impart any coherent ethos or identity to a school. In a so called "multi-faith" environment it can only breed indifferentism in the vast majority. It would transform the Catholic sixth form into the environment of a secular university. As it is, Catholic pupils are hardly, if at all,

spiritually equipped for university life by our current Catholic schools, so what hope for the young if we abandon their doctrinal formation at 16? And how long before this secularising agenda is foisted on 11-15 year olds too?

No, quite frankly, this does not constitute an "adequate preparation" of young Catholics for the intellectual bear-pit of university or the world of work in a secular culture. What we desperately need is young adults with a sound and well informed grasp of their own faith, who can also give a reason for their faith, with respect and charity, to those who enquire of them (cf. 1 Peter 3,15). There is no evidence that being well instructed in your faith makes you narrow and belligerent; quite the opposite, in fact. You cannot have respectful dialogue with others unless and until you understand your own position well.

## Time To Choose

Across the Catholic education establishment in the UK, it seems that too much heed is being paid to pleasing the political masters of the moment rather than the interests of the People of God and thereby, in fact, the long term common good of the people of Britain.

We need decisive action. Either we support, re-equip and offer within the state system an educational service that is unequivocally Catholic in its foundation and content, or, if that is no longer possible or desirable, we should pull out and throw our energies into parish based catechesis as a matter of urgency.

The worst of all worlds is to go along with the current state agenda, drifting further and further into anonymous secularism until the loyalty and money of the People of God has all drained away and state funded Catholic education disappears in any case. We must not allow inertia and indecision to erode any further the uniquely valuable Catholic voluntary-aided education system in this country.





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# Why the Declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception Mattered and Still Matters

Eric Hester

*In this interesting and challenging piece, Mr Hester, a retired head teacher, argues that the Church in the UK made a mistake in ignoring the Pope's request that Catholics be encouraged to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception last year.*

*"England has missed the boat in terms of celebrating the Sesquicentenary of the Declaration. Is there anything else that the former Dowry of Mary could do? Why do the bishops not now come in line with the rest of the world and declare 8th December a Holyday of Obligation?"*

## Various Anecdotes

Let me start this article about the declaration of the Immaculate Conception with a series of anecdotes. First, I go back to the 1950s. In those days, it was not at all uncommon for BBC television to treat religion seriously and it was not anti-Catholic. Malcolm Muggeridge, not yet converted and still agnostic, was interviewing the then Bishop Heenan of Leeds. Muggeridge was blowing cigarette smoke towards the bishop, who responded with an angelic smile and refused to be rattled. "Let us take the absurd business of the Immaculate Conception of Mary," said Muggeridge. The good bishop, still smiling asked Muggeridge, "Do you believe in original sin?" "Of course not," said Muggeridge. "Then," replied Bishop Heenan, with a tone of one saying "Game, set and match" or "I rest my case", you certainly believe in the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. But you believe in the immaculate conception of everyone; Catholics believe in the Immaculate Conception only of Our Blessed Lady."

Next, I consider the BBC Radio 4 programme *Sunday*, notorious for attacking authentic Catholic belief. A few weeks ago, a professor of theology of an English university spoke about the Immaculate Conception and committed the schoolboy howler of confusing it with the perpetual virginity of Our Blessed Lady.

My next story was told to me by a good priest friend now dead. I have only his authenticity for it, but the man was Oxford educated and well read. He told me that when the newly restored English hierarchy was considering which days were to be kept as Days of Obligation and considering Pope Pius IX's stating in *Ineffabilis Deus*, that the 8<sup>th</sup> December was to be a Holyday, the English bishops of that time decided that there was no need to make this feast a day of obligation since, such was the love of the English for Our Blessed Lady that they would certainly go to Mass.

## Positive And Negative Reactions

I consider now not an anecdote but the truth about that saint who might be seen as the most characteristic and glorious saint of the twentieth century – St Maximilian Kolbe, whose sacrifice of his life for another in Auschwitz will surely live in the Church for ever alongside St Martin's giving of his cloak to a beggar and St Francis's embracing a leper. This martyr had spent his adult life spreading devotion not just to Our Lady but specifically to Mary Immaculate.

Unfortunately, the next and last item that I record is also only too true. For the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of the Dogma, on 8th December 2004, the Holy Father issued a special message and asked for celebrations but all this was ignored in England and Wales by official bodies. The Bishops' Conference website and all its publicity machine refused to publish the Holy Father's message and did nothing about the anniversary.

When I enquired of a most senior figure in the English Bishops' bureaucracy about what was done to celebrate the anniversary I received this casual reply: "With regard

to your final question, the Bishops' Conference as such rarely celebrates such things. Such celebration is a matter for individual Bishops in their Dioceses. I should imagine that each Bishop presided at a celebration of the Solemnity in their Diocese. Whether they did more I would not know." Yet Pope John Paul II himself specifically requested celebrations throughout the world.

As is commonly known, Our Blessed Lady herself was not so casual about "that title so wondrous" and when she chose to appear to the little Bernadette at Lourdes on 25th March, 1858, she named herself using that actual title saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

#### Historical Parallels

When we go back to the time of the declaration in 1854, we find times with similarities to our own. The Church was under threat, especially from secularism from outside and liberalism from inside. Pius IX, now Blessed, had been forced to flee Rome in disguise to save his very life. The response of some in the Church, as today, was that the Pope and the Church should keep a low profile and accommodate itself to the world. As now, there were those who thought that the Church should be the "sugar" of the world rather than the salt.

Instead, Pius IX, ignoring the lukewarm, gave the world *Quanta Cura* and *The Syllabus of Errors*, called the Vatican Council that declared infallibility, and, in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, decided to "declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her Conception was preserved Immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, and that this doctrine was revealed by God, and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

In an allocation given on the day after the proclamation, Pius IX used these words: "The greatness of this privilege will also confute those who deny that human nature was corrupted by the first sin and who amplify the powers of human reason in order to deny or to diminish the benefits of revelation. May the Virgin Mary, who confounds and destroys all heresies, uproot and destroy all the most pernicious errors of rationalism which, in these unhappy times, have so afflicted and tormented not only human society but also the Church itself."

Mgr Campana, a prominent theologian of that day wrote, "This day will be remembered until the end of time as one of the most glorious days in history. It was the most solemn affirmation of the vitality of the Church, just when perverse impiety flattered itself that it had

destroyed her." How theologians have changed! A fine recent biography, *Blessed Pius IX* by Roberto de Mattei (Gracewing, 2004) shows what a brave and necessary decision this was. I recommend this biography and freely admit my own indebtedness to the ideas expressed so clearly in it.

#### The Fiftieth Anniversary Remembered

When it was the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, Pope (Saint) Pius X clearly showed its importance in his encyclical *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*. He demonstrated how the dogma is an effective antidote to the "confluence of errors" of "the enemies of the faith":

*"These people deny that man was conceived in sin and that he therefore fell from his primitive nobility. They therefore reduce to the level of a fairy tale both original sin and the errors which flow from it; that is, the corruption at the very origin of the human race, hence the ruin of all human beings, the veils introduced among mortals and the necessity of a redeemer. It is therefore easy for them to be understood as meaning that redemption comes neither from Christ, nor from the Church, nor from grace, nor from any other order which is superior to nature, in a word, the whole edifice of faith is undermined at its very basis. By contrast, people believe and confess openly that the Virgin Mary, from the first instant of her conception, was exempt from all sin. On this basis, it is necessary to believe both in original sin and in the redemption of men through the work of Christ, the Gospel and the Church, and even the very law of suffering itself. With these things, 'rationalism' and 'materialism' are eradicated, it remains the merit of Christian doctrine to maintain and to defend the truth." St Pius X then shows how opponents of the church want to root out the idea of any obedience to the authority of the Church, leading to anarchy damaging to the natural and supernatural order. He declares roundly, "And again it will be shown that the Church is right to credit the Virgin Mary for having destroyed all the heresies of the world."*

#### Downplaying Original Sin

All this accurately and specifically identifies the doctrines that were under threat and which were strengthened by the Declaration. But the same is true in our times. Original Sin, grace and redemption are either denied or played down. The Anglican interpretation of original sin can be rather different from ours, but CS Lewis, as so often, put it well when he said that he could not understand why people denied original sin, since it was the one Christian doctrine that could be verified by a



glance at the daily papers. Certainly, the denial of this doctrine has huge practical consequences, not least in education.

The French writer Bernanos put it like this: “ Il est assurément plus grave, ou du moins beaucoup plus dangereux pour l’homme, de nier le péché originel que de nier Dieu.” (For men it is certainly more grave, or at least much more dangerous, to deny original sin than to deny God.) This is a huge claim but one can see what is behind it, with that word “dangerous”.

### The Social Impact Of False Doctrine

The idea of original sin is certainly not considered an important doctrine in the book officially recommended by the Catechetical advisers for English schools, *Icons*. It is mentioned at all only in the book for Year 8 (Second form, 12 to 13 year olds) and then not in great detail. There is a similar neglect of the ideas of grace and redemption and The Immaculate Conception is never mentioned, let alone explained. Naturally, the situation is even worse in non-church schools. It is sometimes said that children today do not learn about morality in schools.

As one who was head master of schools for twenty-four years I can report that pupils are, as they always have been, excellent learners. That is the trouble. They have learned what they are taught: that there is no such thing as objective right or wrong; that all views are equally valid; that the only thing universally wrong is intolerance; that there is no such thing as original sin.

School pupils have learned these lessons very well (and the reinforcement that the BBC gives them every day) and, indeed, do not merely regard them as inert and academic ideas: they put them into practice in their daily lives. That is why they steal our cars, vandalize our property, and confine the old and infirm to house arrest every night and ensure that frightened parents will not allow primary school children to walk to school any more.

### Sex Education And Original Sin

The worst area for schools to be unaware of original sin is in sex education. The Catholic Church teaches quite clearly and consistently that no sex education at all should be given to children of primary school age; at secondary level, such sex education as might be given should be under the control of parents. This does not happen in many Catholic schools. It is the advisers of several dioceses who are pushing sex education.

Parents would be appalled if they knew what was going on in some Catholic schools under the name of “sex

education”. Yet original sin and its consequences are most evident here.

As a speaker at a conference of Catholic teachers with their archbishop present, I was unable for sheer embarrassment to read out material about the details of homosexuality which was being recommended for Catholic primary school children. Do not blame the schools or the teachers: they are doing as they are told by advisers for the dioceses.

One of the many reasons for the increasing popularity of independent schools is that they work more closely with parents and do not feel themselves to be under the control of the diocese. But not all parents can afford Independent education under our present system in England.

### Making Reparation?

So England has missed the boat in terms of celebrating the sesquicentenary of the Declaration. Is there anything else that the former Dowry of Mary could do? Why do the bishops not now come in line with the rest of the world and declare 8th December a Holyday of Obligation? The Prime Minister has said that he wants an extra day’s Bank Holiday. Well, as G.K. Chesterton once wrote, who wants to celebrate the fact that the banks are on holiday? But the Immaculate Conception, that is worth celebrating.

The bishops could ask the government to make it a national holiday. This would bring us in line with most other European countries, something we are always being told is important as, for instance, when we want to buy a pound of sausages. The workers might be glad to have what they would see as a Christmas shopping day. Catholics would know better.



# "Till you live in light so brilliant"

Tim Weldon

Dr Tim Weldon, of the University of St. Francis, in Illinois, USA, examines the concept of "beauty" in the thought of St. Bonaventure.

*"What St. Francis had simply felt and lived, St. Bonaventure was to think..."*  
(Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*).

## A Philosophy Of Divine Beauty

In his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, author E.R. Curtius writes, "When the Scholastics spoke about beauty they meant by this an attribute of God."<sup>1</sup> As a representative of Scholastic thought, and with characteristic clarity of insight, Saint Bonaventure's philosophy of beauty provides support for Curtius' statement.

Bonaventure's philosophy of beauty was not articulated in a single body of work as such, but is found rather as a topic in his many sermons, lectures, treatises, and spiritual writings.<sup>2</sup> In these, ever mindful that "the entire world is drenched with the presence of divine mystery,"<sup>3</sup> Bonaventure addressed the recurrent themes in medieval aesthetics, namely symbolism, order and proportion, the metaphysics of light, and most of all, the meditation upon a loving God, "in Him is the highest beauty."<sup>4</sup>

Bonaventure's understanding of the beautiful is emblematic of the Franciscan tradition. With his sensitivity to the beauty of created order, the miracle of life and his reverence for the Creator, few figures from the medieval era understood experientially the totality of beauty as much as Saint Francis of Assisi. Indeed, Francis' profound awareness of the beauty of God's love for humankind inspired him to found an Order. As Sister Spargo reminds us:

*Considering the tradition of Franciscan thought, it is not difficult to understand its preoccupation with beauty and the insistence upon its universality. Who understood more fully the mystical, ecstatic experience than the holy founder of the Franciscan Order, St. Francis of Assisi? The Order that he founded is thus interested in spreading everywhere the metaphysics of beauty, the poet, artist, lover of nature, gave his genius to his order as part of its patrimony.*<sup>5</sup>

## A Christocentric Beauty

The Sixth General of the Franciscan Order, Bonaventure's genius is evident in his cogent insights on the presence of beauty in our lives; insights that begin with, adhere to and end in the all that is Christ's loving sacrifice:

*Bonaventure sees in Christ marvelously united, the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the centre, the Alpha and the Omega, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature.*<sup>6</sup>

Given the aforementioned, it is my contention that Bonaventure's philosophy of beauty is decidedly Christocentric and culminates in his brief masterpiece, *Hymn to the Cross*. Herein, Bonaventure's reflections upon beauty assume the poetic expression of philosophical and theological truths wrought only from a sustained

*"Bonaventure makes it clear that, as corporal and spiritual participants in creation, our enlightenment depends upon participation in Christ's eternal light,"*



meditation on what is, understood symbolically, most beautiful: The Cross of the crucified Christ.

## Metaphysics of Beauty

**B**onaventure's philosophy of beauty is an integral part of, and is to be understood within the whole of his philosophy. In outline, this includes Emanationism, whereby he understands the universe as created by God; Exemplarism, wherein Bonaventure understands God to be the Exemplar of all creation; and Consummation of Reduction, understood as a return or leading back.<sup>7</sup> In Bonaventure's philosophy, reduction "is concerned with God as the goal of created beings, who illumined by His light, return to Him."<sup>8</sup>

By analogy, Bonaventure understood beauty to emanate from God as is evidenced in creation, and that, as Creator, God is exemplary beauty. As a reflection of God, beauty then helps lead us back to Him.

In Bonaventure's scheme, beauty is valued not only for its obvious proportional excellence and brilliancy but more for the heuristic and secondary theophanic value of its symbolism.<sup>9</sup> The experience of beauty at once directs us Godward because it reveals the vestigial presence of the Creator.<sup>10</sup> Beheld, beauty draws the beholder into an enlightened participation in the created world, moving from the esteem for the transience of the material to an understanding of the eternal truths of God's love.

But enlightenment is not the end of beauty's symbolic effect, nor is it the end of beauty's influence upon the beholder. Beauty is more than intellectual gleam: "It is because Saint Bonaventure clearly saw that beauty leads to love that he was so concerned with the idea."<sup>11</sup>

Bonaventure valued beauty most for its ancillary quality of transformation: as knowers, once enlightened by the presence of beauty in our lives, we then become lovers, as our actions are informed by and proceed from beauty's divine exemplarity. "The contemplation of the beautiful transforms one into beauty under the action of love," writes Spargo.<sup>12</sup>

In the end, beauty leads to love, and love to God. As this movement begins with beauty, an overview of what defines it is in order.

## Order and Light

**B**onaventure defines beauty as order and light: "Beauty is nothing other than numbered equality or a certain situation of parts, accompanied by a suavity of colour."<sup>13</sup> It was from the work of Saint Augustine (354-430) that Bonaventure came to understand beauty as order.

"Beauty is nothing else than a numbered equality, or unity in plurality," wrote Augustine.<sup>14</sup> For Augustine and Bonaventure, beauty must exemplify the geometrical regularity of proportion, the ordering of parts that comprise the whole. The ordering of the whole must assume the numerical equality that is foundational to proportion, as beauty cannot exist from proportion and proportion is related to number.<sup>15</sup> Owing to its perfection of order, Bonaventure holds the Trinity to be a model of beauty,

*"The Blessed Trinity itself becomes the model of all beauty, consisting as it does, of plurality and equality. Here is found a unity of Essence with a Trinity of Persons."*<sup>16</sup>

The Trinity is exemplary as numerical order as it precedes and is archetypal for all descending, created order. In God "is found the highest possible harmony of order and the highest possible harmony of nature."<sup>17</sup> For Bonaventure, this harmony of order and nature must be an illumined harmony.

## A Universe Of Light

**I**nfluenced by the writings of the Bishop of Lincoln and lifelong friend to the Franciscans, Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253), who combined metaphysical theories of light with the metaphysics of proportion,<sup>18</sup> Bonaventure reasoned that light was primal matter and the source of all form. When generated upon material bodies, light confers form upon those bodies. "Light is the substantial form of all bodies," he writes.<sup>19</sup> As the source of form, Bonaventure then reasons that light must be the principle of beauty. He explained as much when using the example of sunlight shining through stained glass: colour is to be judged beautiful only against its source, light.

In much the same way, Bonaventure understands the beauty of the human person in terms of participation with its luminous source, the light of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Bonaventure held that the radiating presence of light extended beyond the conferral of form upon matter. True to the symbolism of his aesthetics, he believed light to be divine in source, evident in matter *and* spirit. As Father Hayes informs us, Bonaventure believed: "There is in the world of creation a corporal light and a created, spiritual light which can be compared in a limited way with God, the divine light."<sup>21</sup>

It was from creation and the successive order of creation that Bonaventure realized the divinity of light and its quintessentially Christological symbolism. In the first act of creation, God illumined the heavens before all else

(Genesis 1:3), while in the greatest act of love He sacrificed His only son and thus delivered the world from darkness. "I am the Light of the world," declares Christ (John 8:12).

### Sharing In Light, Participating In Christ

As God is the fontal source of light and as Christ is His image (*imago expressa Patris*), or "similitude" in Bonaventure's language, the Seraphic Doctor concludes that Christ "is the brightness of eternal light and the spotless Mirror of the majesty of God."<sup>22</sup> Expounding further, Bonaventure makes it clear that, as corporal and spiritual participants in creation, our enlightenment depends upon participation in Christ's eternal light, "by their greater or lesser participation in light, bodies acquire the truth and dignity of their being," writes Bonaventure.<sup>23</sup>

Thus it is in Christ's declaration from John that we find the defining experience of reductive beauty. As a universal invitation of enlightenment of heart and mind, it is the gift allowing us to follow the truth of Christ's love. Because of it, our return to God is possible. In the words of Bonaventure: "Through Him all our minds are led back to God, when, through faith, we receive the similitude of the Father into our hearts."<sup>24</sup>

For Bonaventure, the loving image of Christ on the Cross is *the* object of our faith, the consummate representation of reductive beauty.

### Hymn to The Cross

That an object of beauty is understood to inspire transformation of the beholder is a theme of aesthetic theory in general; that the Cross, as an object of beauty, is understood to inspire even greater transformation is essential to the Franciscan tradition in particular.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) provides us with an example of the former. In his well-known poem, *The Archaic Torso of Apollo*,<sup>25</sup> Rilke ponders the mystery of beauty before the sculpted likeness of Apollo only to conclude that, in the end, exposure to such excellence of form inspires the emulation of or the creation of such beauty in our own lives. "You must change your life," chides the end line of the poem. Rilke's message is clear: beauty's call to the beholder is an ennobling one; it is towards the better that we must aspire.

In the Franciscan tradition, the example of The San Damiano Cross and its explicit message provide a stronger call to change.<sup>26</sup> Known as "The Crucifix that spoke to Francis," it was at the foot of this Twelfth century Byzantine Cross that a praying Francis was

summoned by Christ to repair His house. The response of an inspired Francis was to found an Order, beginning a movement to effect peace, justice and impassioned care for the impoverished and sick. For Franciscans, The San Damiano Cross is the defining symbol of reductive beauty: by calling upon Francis to do His will, Christ brought him, his followers, and the myriads influenced by their example, ever closer to the light of eternal truth.

Bonaventure extends this example of The San Damiano Cross to every Cross and the example of Francis' divine summons to everyone.

### A Light That Shines In Darkness

In the thirty-nine stanzas (six lines each) that constitute his *Hymn to The Cross*,<sup>27</sup> Bonaventure incorporates his metaphysics of beauty and the attributes of beauty or the attributes of Christ, into poetic praise.<sup>28</sup> With its allusions to the perfect order that is Christ and of the association of Christ with light, the first two stanzas of the hymn serve as a call to meditate upon The Cross, believe in it absolutely, and commit with impassioned resolve to live in the light that redeemed humanity:

*Followers of life's perfection,  
May your heart be ever joyful  
As you see the Cross divine;  
Let the Holy Cross be present  
In your soul and meditation:  
To its rule your life resign.*

*Keep it close, with Christ for Leader,  
Till you live in light so brilliant  
That all doubt is cast away:  
Weary not and slacken never,  
That your heart be set afire  
With a flame as bright as day.*<sup>29</sup>

"Love the Cross, creation's beacon," is the first line from the very next stanza and the culmination of Bonaventure's aesthetics: the exemplary beauty that is Christ's love illumines our way back to God.

In John's Gospel we are reminded of the enormity of Christ's love: "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 10:15) For Bonaventure, Christ's love is perfect love which can only come from perfect virtue. At once the symbol of the greatest virtues and all virtue, The Cross reflects the illumined path of the virtuous:

*Cross the mirror of all virtues,  
Glorious guide to life eternal...*<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion: Light From Light

In conclusion, the perfect love of Christ's sacrifice enlightened the world to the very virtue that could save it:

*Christ is the light of the soul who by his grace awakens the seminal principle of the virtues dormant in it and enables them to bear their fruits.*<sup>31</sup>

A kneeling Francis is an example of the awakened soul. In his reflections on beauty and meditation upon The Cross, one imagines Bonaventure conjuring the image of the kneeling Francis before the Cross, awakened by the beauty of Christ's light, rising from his knees to do God's bidding which, in the end, is ours as well.

- 1 E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London, 1953), 224, n. 20.
- 2 If having a philosophy of beauty means composing a single treatise exclusively on the subject as we find in Hegel's *Philosophy of Fine Art*, then Bonaventure and his medieval counterparts did not develop a specific aesthetic theory per se. And yet in their philosophical and theological investigations, their commentaries upon beauty, owing to the integration of reason and Revelation, produced deeper insights than aesthetic theories limited to naturalism or the abstract.
- 3 Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. in *St. Bonaventure, On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1996), trans. Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., p.11.
- 4 Sister Emma Jane Marie Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1953) 37, n. 1.
- 5 Spargo, .8-9.
- 6 St. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978), 18.
- 7 Matthew M. DeBenedictis, O.F.M., *The Social Thought of Saint Bonaventure* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of

- America, 1946) 18.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 "Symbolism is the keynote of St. Bonaventure's aesthetic." See Spargo, .xi.
- 10 "Saint Bonaventure sees in every created thing a vestige, or footprint of God its Creator." See Spargo, 51.
- 11 Spargo, p.64.
- 12 Spargo, 42.
- 13 Spargo, 38, n. 3.
- 14 Ibid. See Augustine's *De Musica*, VI, 13, 38.
- 15 Spargo, 38.
- 16 Spargo, 39-40.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 109.
- 19 Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 50, n. .20.
- 20 Bonaventure understood colour in Christological terms with red being the most beautiful: "Of all the colours, Saint Bonaventure found red to be the most beautiful because this is the colour of the Precious Blood of Our Lord." See Spargo, .61.
- 21 Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. in *St. Bonaventure, On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, p.6.
- 22 Spargo, 59, cf. *St. Saint Bonaventure, De Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae, Sermo II* (IX 708-709).
- 23 Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 50, n.20.
- 24 St. Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 47.
- 25 Rainer Maria Rilke, "Archaic Torso of Apollo," in Mack, Maynard, et al, *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, vol. 2 (New York: Norton, 1985) 1654.
- 26 For a detailed commentary on the San Damiano Cross, see Father Michael Scanlan, T.O.R., *The San Damiano Cross: An Explanation* (Franciscan University Press, 1983).
- 27 St. Bonaventure, *Hymn to the Cross*, trans. Jose de Vinck (St. Anthony's Guild, 1960).
- 28 Allusions to order and light abound throughout the hymn. Order is alluded to as "rule," (stanza 1) or "perfect" (stanza 11 and 16) and "perfection" (stanzas 1, 11, and 16); while light is mentioned (stanzas 2 and 23) as are its secondary symbols (Christ being the primary symbol of light): "flame" (stanzas 2, 6 and 11), "effulgence" (stanza 16), "fire" (stanzas 2 and 11), and "shining" (stanza 17).
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. in *St. Bonaventure, On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 30.

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# Secular Fundamentalism

Roger Peck

*Roger Peck muses on the curious contemporary phenomenon of "Secular Fundamentalism"*

## Follow Your Feelings - The Modern Mantra

**T**he Sacred Cow of today's society is what could be described as "human autonomy"; the "right" of the individual to do what he or she likes – whenever, wherever etc. An Englishman's home is his castle. Anything that opposes this in any way is anathema. The phrase "human autonomy" is used here to distinguish the above from "true freedom" (or, true freedom in Christ). True freedom, paradoxically, is only achieved through discipline, because it is by the application of discipline that we are "freed upwards" from our appetites. Furthermore "true freedom" can only be realised through Christ because, having fallen, we need God's grace to help raise ourselves off the floor.

In the pursuit of human autonomy, absolute moral precepts give way to a utilitarian ethic of "the greater good" and absolute truth gives way to subjectivism. The denial of these absolutes provides a spacious arena in which "ends justify the means" and almost any action can be defended; done in accordance with one's own personal belief system.

## Secularist Absolutism

**T**he belief that there is no such thing as absolute truth is what I would call "secular fundamentalism". The use of the word "fundamentalism" here buys into that trait common among all fundamentalists, namely an inability to dialogue. A theist speaking to an atheist might have the following conversation:

**Theist:** *I believe that God exists.*

**Atheist:** *I disagree with your position. In fact I see no evidence for God's existence.*

If a theist were to discuss the same issue with a secular fundamentalist, on the other hand, the following might ensue:

**Theist:** *I believe that God exists.*

**Secular Fundamentalist:** *You can't say that.*

**Theist:** *I believe that Christ rose from the dead.*

**Secular Fundamentalist:** *You can't say that.*

**Theist:** *Happy Christmas.*

**Secular Fundamentalist:** *You can't say that.*

Although the theist and atheist disagree with each other, at least they acknowledge each other's position, even if that acknowledgement is given in opposition. Whether

*"The real conversation that needs to take place is the conversation between people of faith and people of no faith and before that conversation can happen the obstacle of fundamentalism, both religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism, needs to be removed."*

the atheist or theist's conviction is a conviction born out of religious experience, prejudice or rational enquiry is neither here nor there. What is important is the acknowledgement that each gives to the other's position as being a claim on truth - absolute truth. Underpinning this acknowledgement is the unspoken understanding that either the atheist or the theist might have the good grace to say to the other as an analytical truth: "well, Mr (Theist/Atheist) - either you're right and I'm wrong, or I'm right and you're wrong - but as sure as "eggs is eggs", we can't both be right!"

## Subjectivism Run Amok

**A**lthough the truth of the above statement seems undeniable, the secular fundamentalist would beg to differ. As far as he is concerned the theist and the atheist *could* both be right, since there is no such thing as absolute truth. One only has to tune in to any daytime chat show to witness first hand this subjective notion of "truth" run amok. Ironically, secular fundamentalists think they are open-minded when in fact they are profoundly closed, unwilling even to brook the theist's assertions. Their whole approach fosters a form of totalitarianism in which the secular fundamentalist ends up telling the theist what he or she can and cannot say.

Now, it hardly needs to be stated that the above example conversations are caricatures. It is unlikely, in the extreme, that a secular fundamentalist would deny the theist's position in such a direct, ostensible way. For one thing, they would probably lack the self-awareness to do so! Notwithstanding this, however, the above examples ably illustrate where many people in today's society are "coming from", even though the precise manifestation of this underlying mindset may take different forms.

One form of secular fundamentalism is the politely dismissive put down. Faced with a statement formulated as an absolute truth, the secular fundamentalist smiles and nods his head while inside he rejects out of hand what is being said to him, not even hearing the words spoken. The messenger is dismissed as being some kind of religious freak and sent on their way with a patronizing "it's good to be so certain about such things".

## Taking Offence At Truth Claims

**A** common trait among secular fundamentalists is that they are very quick to take offence. The reason for this is that because people no longer recognise truth as being absolute and therefore objective (i.e. "out there"), but see truth as being subjective (i.e. "true for them"), any statement presented as "the truth" that contradicts a person's own particular beliefs is somehow seen as a personal attack on *them*. The real crime in today's society

is not to hawk a falsehood; the real crime is to "offend". The real sin is not to be wrong; the real sin is to be hypocritical. As was suggested above, secular fundamentalism fosters a latter-day form of totalitarianism. With this in mind it is interesting to reflect on how the modern day *crimes* of "offending" and "being a hypocrite" breed an unwillingness to challenge the wrongs of society.

When we proclaim the Gospel we are somehow seen as passing judgement, when in fact we are simply proclaiming the just Judge. When we stand up for our faith we are perhaps perceived as setting ourselves up as being "holier than thou", when in fact we are simply proclaiming the merciful God who sent his only Son among us so that we, unworthy sinners that we are, might be saved. This overriding drive to avoid offence finds its ultimate expression in the latter-day plague of *political correctness*. George Orwell in his vision of the future foresaw a similar device, and he called it *Newspeak*.

## Religious Belief: The New Heresy

**O**n the subject of offence, it is interesting to note that the faithful are not usually the ones to take offence by another person's religious symbols, or at least being offended by such is more a measure of a person's fundamentalist attitudes than it is a measure of his faith. More often than not these days it falls to some non-believing do-gooder to take it upon himself to be offended on other people's behalf. But this is just simply a different form of fundamentalism. In place of the religious fundamentalist tearing down the religious symbols, we have the softly, softly approach of the secular fundamentalist. To the Muslim he says "you mustn't offend Christians" and to the Christian he says "you mustn't give offence to the Muslims" whilst all the time what he is really saying is "don't offend me".

The Muslim and the Christian both alike know that if today you are prevented from saying "Happy Christmas", tomorrow you will not be allowed to say "Ramadan". If today you ban crucifixes from being hung on school walls, tomorrow you will prevent Muslim schoolgirls from wearing the hijab. The former may, in truth, be a justifiable proscription in a secular multicultural society (not being allowed to display religious symbols in a public building), but the latter is surely an abuse of a person's religious freedom. And neither is this mere scare-mongering. In France it has already come to pass.

A true, genuine ("authentic"), atheist or agnostic should have a laissez-faire attitude towards people of faith. There should be something of the "well, if that's your bag, if



that's what does it for you..." about their response. They might feel a certain pity towards their misguided (and indoctrinated) friends and may even want to "save" them out of their ignorance but more often than not they have probably come to accept, from past experience, that such attempts generally end in failure. The genuine atheist is comfortable with his worldview and does not feel threatened. There is, however, nothing laissez-faire about the secular fundamentalist.

"I don't mind what they believe as long as they don't try to foist their opinions on me". Who hasn't heard this phrase? Never mind that we have particular brands of coffee, particular makes of car, particular types of food foisted upon us 24/7. Never mind that opinions can never be foisted, they can only be formed. Never mind that one's right to "foist" opinions just happens to be a person's inalienable right to free speech. Having such opinions "foisted" upon us is the price we pay for living in a free democratic world.

### Obstacles To Debate

We may not like the double-glazing salesman calling on us during the middle of lunch, but the polite exchange at the doorstep is the mechanism by which the rights of both parties are upheld; the right of the salesman to make a pitch and the right of the homeowner to say "not today thank you". There is no inalienable right in a democratic society not to be disturbed when eating lunch, or when walking through the market place.

The real conversation that needs to take place today is not so much the conversation between Muslim and Christian, or between Christian and Jew. The real conversation that needs to take place is the conversation between people of faith and people of no faith and before that conversation can happen the obstacle of fundamentalism, both religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism, needs to be removed.

This brief survey of secular fundamentalism will end on a slightly lighter note by reflecting on one final example, the *antipodean interrogative inflection*. The *antipodean interrogative inflection* is a trait whereby all spoken sentences end with an up inflection. Quite when this habit entered our language is open to debate, but one theory is that a major influence in its introduction was a particular Australian TV series (hence "antipodean"), popular in the U.K., called *Neighbours*. The affect of the *antipodean interrogative inflection*, as the name suggests, is that all sentences are intoned as questions.

This, it seems to me, demonstrates an unwillingness today to so much as dare to voice a statement of fact –

to present something as an absolute truth. Things can no longer be true in themselves; they can only be true by consensus. Statements have to be intoned as questions.

### A Contradiction In Terms

The antipodean interrogative inflection betrays unease at voicing statements of fact without inviting a *stroke* from the person being spoken to, without eliciting an agreement from the listener. Now OK, this final example may seem a little far-fetched; but then culture is a strange beast that finds ways of manifesting the underlying philosophy and mood of the day in all sorts of subtle ways.

But now for the punch line. The secular fundamentalist's position is not only absurd, it is a self-contradiction, because the very statement "there is no such thing as absolute truth" itself purports to be a statement of absolute truth.

Welcome to cloud-cuckoo land.



# sunday

by sunday



## 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT: A

06.03.05, Jn 9, 1-41

1. The power of this sign given by Jesus is difficult to overstate. Even the poor wretch formerly afflicted with blindness can see that the facts speak for themselves: one who heals is the Messiah (Jn 9, 17). Isaiah's vision is fulfilled with devastating clarity, "Hear and hear again, but do not understand; see and see again, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people gross, its ears dull; shut its eyes, so that it will not see with its eyes, hear with its ears, understand with its heart, and be converted and healed" (Is 6, 9-10).

2. Jesus is the new Isaiah, who brings healing and clarity of vision in his wake. Blindness is not the problem: obstinacy in the face of known facts is. As Jesus observes about the Pharisees, "Blind? If you were you would not be guilty, but since you say, 'We see', your guilt remains" (Jn 9, 41). Seeing the signs is the essence of Our Lord's thirst for souls. Seeing leads to believing, believing in turn leads to life – that is, a share in the very life that the Father has in the Son and the Son has in the Father.

3. That life is God's gift here and now, leading up to fullness in heaven: "Indeed, of his fullness we have all received – yes, grace in return for grace" (Jn 1, 18). The New Covenant in Christ fulfils and supersedes the Old Covenant of the Jews because, "though the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come

through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1, 18). The Pharisees point blank refuse to countenance the presence of the Holy One of God among them, but to the blind man eternal life dawns in the worship of Jesus (Jn 9, 38)

## 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT: A

13.03.05, Jn 11, 1-45

1. We read in today's Preface, "As a man like us, Jesus wept for Lazarus his friend. As the eternal God, he raised Lazarus from the dead". John's account of the death and raising of Lazarus illustrates both the humanity and divinity of Christ. The narrative is alive with tension as the various characters interact with one another. Feelings are running high on a number of levels – for Martha and Mary because Jesus appears to have let them down (Jn 11, 5-7), and for the apostles because they suspect that they may die at any moment in the company of the Master (Jn 11, 16)

2. Brooding malevolently in the background, the Pharisees and their followers are ever on the lookout for evidence to bring Jesus down (Jn 11, 37). There is mourning, wailing, tears, confusion and grief (Jn 11, 33-36). But Jesus thirsts for faith in him as resurrection life (Jn 11, 25). He is the intimate of the Father (Jn 11, 41-42), and he lets the glory that he had with the Father before ever the world was (cf. Jn 1, 14) shine forth in the greatest of all the signs he worked throughout his earthly life: "Lazarus, here! Come out" (Jn 11, 43)

3. Resurrection life is readily available to us all here and now. Critics of the Christian religion often ridicule Our Lord's promise of salvation as 'pie in the sky when you die'. St John shows the error of this caricature – is not Lazarus raised up then and there for all to see? The life of grace in Jesus Christ starts right now. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church proclaims the same reality, who raised up Lazarus from the tomb, to

each and every one of us through the sacramental life of grace. We need open hearts.

## PALM SUNDAY: A

20.03.05, Mt 21, 1-11

1. "And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. 'Who is this?' people asked, and the crowds answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'" (Mt 21, 10-11). Jesus is the Prince of Peace, who enters into his inheritance not as a proud and warlike warrior, but rather as one who comes to suffer and die for his people. There is no pretension about the coming of the Messiah into his own, but there is acknowledgment and joy. His lowliness is emphasized by his title, 'Jesus of Nazareth', since Nazareth had no claim to fame.

2. 'Hosanna' is a word of Hebrew origin, and though here it is no more than a shout of acclaim, its first meaning is 'Pray, save'. Underneath the popular usage, it is a shout entirely appropriate for the coming of the Messiah. There is irony in Matthew's account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, because the unintended demand the people make of Christ is precisely what he will do through his Passion, Cross and Resurrection after he enters the holy city. There is never any doubt as to the identity of Jesus as Lord in Matthew's gospel. Here he proves it.

3. "Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mt 21, 9). We join the crowds on the road into Jerusalem as Jesus passes every time we proclaim the 'Benedictus' at Mass. Do we, like them, then turn on Our Lord and crucify him? After we leave Sunday Mass, is Jesus really crowned king of our hearts, or do we show that our religion is just lip service as our behaviour and charity throughout the week falls far short of the demands of gospel loving? Jesus' path led up to Calvary – do we ever follow him?

## EASTER VIGIL: A 27.03.05, Mt 28,1-10

1. Earthquakes witness to the presence of the divine in Matthew's gospel. They accompany a theophany, where God reveals his presence unmistakably to those whom he has chosen. For others, an experience of the holiness of God is one of unmitigated terror. God is sovereign and separate – beyond human categories and experience. Thus, for the soldiers by the tomb, the descent of the angel is a near-death experience (Mt 28, 4), whilst for the women it is one that needs the reassuring hand of God: "There is no need for you to be afraid" (Mt 28, 5). The initiative is with God.

2. The Resurrection is the central fact of human history. If all of creation builds up to the creation of man, then all of human history builds up to the coming of God made man. And the coming of Emmanuel both saves and redeems mankind through his life, death and resurrection. The physical resurrection of Jesus is the rallying cry of every Christian, because in it human nature is seen to triumph over the scourges of sin and death. Because Jesus is human, what he does for us has an eternal relevance since he is flesh and blood like us.

3. Because Jesus is divine, what he does in our human nature has power to transform us. There is no longer any need to be afraid (Mt 28, 5). We have a God who loves us so much that he will save us from our sins and the sentence of death, and he will do it from 'within' – that is, respecting our humanity and human ways of doing things. He could have cured us from 'without', but his love and respect for us was so great that he chose to do this work from 'within'.

## 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER: A 03.04.05, Jn 20, 19-31

1. The gift that the risen Lord Jesus bequeaths his disciples is peace (Jn

19,20), and its effect joy (Jn 19, 21). Just as there is no explicit mention of the Eucharist in John's gospel, even though the whole tone of Jesus' teaching is highly Eucharistic (cf. Jn 6, 35ff), so there is no mention of the word 'apostle', although the commission given the disciples is utterly apostolic (Jn 19, 21). The word means 'one sent out' and is a translation of the commission that Jesus gives his disciples (Jn 19, 21), though the evangelist never actually uses the title.

2. John shows the heart and soul behind Jesus' 'mandatum' by focusing on the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples for the forgiveness of sins (Jn 19, 22-23). The evangelist does not emphasize the 'going out' of Peter and the rest of his companions, but rather whose power it is that is operating within them – that of the Spirit of Truth (cf. Jn 15, 26). The enterprise of world evangelisation is the work of God. It is from above, not from below, and its guarantee is the charism of the Paraclete poured out on the fledgling Church.

3. Thomas completes a remarkably undistinguished career as a follower of Jesus on earth by entirely disbelieving everything about the Resurrection. Death had clearly been on his mind since the time of the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11, 16), and, understandably, he cannot cope with the reality of physical resurrection so soon after the trauma and tragedy of Golgotha. In this, and in his subsequent humble submission to his Lord and God (Jn 19, 28), he becomes a model of humility and resignation to God in time of difficulty and doubt. In God, even our weaknesses become our strengths.

## 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER: A 10.04.05, Lk 24, 13-35

1. "Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free" (Lk 24, 21). The pluperfect in Luke's

account expresses an action begun and ended in the past. So the hope in Jesus that had begun during his three years' Public Ministry was now ended in the tragedy of the Crucifixion. No verb more clearly expresses the despair of Jesus' followers than the 'had been' of this verse. Carravaggio expresses this brilliantly in his painting of this scene, where the torn and tattered clothes of the disciples mirror their torn and tattered hope in Jesus.

2. The same picture by Carravaggio shows the new radiant humanity of the risen Lord. Beauty and light emanate from him as he breaks the Eucharistic bread for the disciples. There is a serenity about his expression, which shows the peace and joy of one who has completed the work that the Father gave him to do. Luke is keen to emphasise that Jesus "vanishes from their sight" (Lk 24,31), though his real presence remains in the Eucharistic species. In the strength of this heavenly food, the disciples take the road back to Jerusalem full of resurrection joy.

3. Divine Mercy follows quickly on from the joy of hope fulfilled in Jesus. None of the disciples and none of us merit the forgiveness and love that Jesus' victory obtains for us. There is no human deserving here, but only a divine loving that stoops down to our depths and raises us to an eternal happiness. But Jesus will not force this mercy on us. We are free, and we must ask for and invoke this divine mercy frequently in our lives. Renewal is there for the asking, but only for those who put themselves in its path.

## 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER: A 17.04.05, Jn10, 1-10

1. "Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them" (Jn 10, 6). This remark refers to the Pharisees, whom Our Lord has just shown to be so wilfully blind (Jn 9,

40) that they do not understand the parable. They are the others who have come before Jesus and are "thieves and brigands" (Jn 10, 8). The flock take no notice of the Pharisees, but they do listen to the Master because they know his voice (Jn 10, 4). Jesus is the only legitimate leader of the flock (Jn 10, 7).

2. But Our Lord's words are not just about leadership, but also about quality of leadership. He is the good shepherd, who calls his sheep by name and leads them confidently to sustaining pastures (Jn 10, 3ff). Jesus has the care of souls at heart, thirsting for their eternal salvation and loving them individually to the shedding of his blood. He is no stranger or hired hand, but the one who has crafted us in the image of God and seeks earnestly to restore that likeness to God in his fallen creature. True shepherding requires love that leads to Calvary.

3. Vocations to the priesthood are all about imitating the Good Shepherd in his personal task of loving and sustaining his sheep. It is Christ's work, and his alone, because he alone has rights over the flock created by his own hand. Priestly character ensures that the man ordained is conformed in his very being to Christ the Good Shepherd. Therefore it is the Lord Jesus himself who forgives sins or confects the sacrament during Holy Mass. This priestly conformity allows the priest to say, "I absolve" or "This is my body", but it is Jesus who acts through him.

## 5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

24.04.05, Jn 14, 1-12

1. The Farewell Discourses in the Fourth Gospel ( Jn 14-17) are to reassure the disciples before Our Lord's bitter Passion, and to teach them at length about the fullness of God's abundant provision for them. The disciples are distraught at Jesus'

talk of leaving them (Jn 14, 5), and must be brought to understand by their Master the richness and joy of the Father's care for them in the sending of the Holy Spirit. These words are the swansong of the Messiah, and reveal the glory of Jesus' love for the Father, in which all are invited to live (Jn 14, 2).

2. John's Gospel gives us an insight into the heart of the Godhead. Jesus comes to reveal the Father to us, and to complete the work that the Father has given him to do. It is hard for the disciples to believe, but Our Lord ceaselessly encourages them to believe "on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason" ( Jn 14, 11). The works he has performed are the

signs whereby he has let his glory be seen (cf. Jn 2, 11). His divinity must be acknowledged if his life is to find a home in us.

3. Jesus Christ is the "Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14, 6), not *a* way, *a* truth, *a* life. It is all too easy to relativize the impact of Jesus in a secular culture. The notion that having a faith is alright if you're a sad, inadequate person, is all too prevalent in our secularised Catholic schools. If Jesus is taught as just one among many, then authentic apostolic Christianity is not taught at all. The splendour of his divinity cannot be so politely ignored, or else our own humanity suffers as a result.

## WHY DID JESUS PRAY?

Prayer is an uprising of the mind to God or a petitioning of God for what is fitting. How then did it happen that our Lord offered up prayer in the case of Lazarus, and at the hour of His passion? For His holy mind was in no need either of any uprising towards God, since it had been once and for all united in subsistence with the God Word, or of any petitioning of God. For Christ is one. But it was because He appropriated to Himself our personality and took our impress on Himself, and became an example for us, and taught us to ask of God and strain towards Him, and guided us through His own holy mind in the way that leads up to God.

For just as He endured the passion, achieving for our sakes a triumph over it, so also He offered up prayer, guiding us, as I said, in the way that leads up to God, and "fulfilling all righteousness" on our behalf, as He said to John, and reconciling His Father to us, and honouring Him as the beginning and cause, and proving that He is no enemy of God. For when He said in connection with Lazarus, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I know that Thou hearest Me always, but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me", is it not most manifest to all that He said this in honour of His Father as the cause even of Himself, and to show that He was no enemy of God?

Again, when he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: yet, not as I will but as Thou wilt", is it not clear to all that He said this as a lesson to us to ask help in our trials only from God, and to prefer God's will to our own, and as a proof that He did actually appropriate to Himself the attributes of our nature, and that He did in truth possess two wills, natural, indeed, and corresponding with His natures but yet in no wise opposed to one another?

*St. John of Damascus  
An Exposition of The Orthodox Faith  
Bk. III Cp. XXIV, 70-71*





FAITHFUL REASON: ESSAYS  
CATHOLIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL  
by John Haldane, Routledge, 288pp

"Faithful Reason" is a fine testimony to Haldane's ability to write in an attractive style with clarity and confidence. This volume gathers together twenty previously published essays by the Director of the Centre for Ethics, Philosophy and Public Affairs at the University of St Andrews. The wide range of topics discussed exemplifies the philosopher's vocation to let nothing escape his penetrating, intellectual gaze. The collection's diversity is unified by the author's commitment to the objectivity of truth. Each article elucidates the intrinsic intelligibility of the world and humanity's place within it by means of an "Analytical Thomism" informed by, and facilitating understanding of, the Catholic faith.

The essays are grouped together under five headings: Catholicism and Philosophy; Faith and Reason; Ethics and Philosophy; Education and Spirituality; Beauty and Contemplation.

In the first part, after an appreciation of St Thomas Aquinas' abiding value and suggestions as to how his synthesis could be further developed by the insights of analytical thought, Haldane offers a critique of Alisdair McIntyre's contribution to the Thomist revival. Haldane welcomes McIntyre's contribution but suspects him of relativism. An incisive commentary on John Paul II's encyclical *Fides at Ratio* follows. The call to recover the

sapiential dimension of philosophy is correctly identified as the document's most valuable contribution.

"Critical Orthodoxy," the first essay of Part II, gives a sound account of what it means to be Roman Catholic, arguing that those who transgress the logical limits of doctrinal development ought to be recognised as dissenters. The assertion that "one must combine theological orthodoxy with a critical social outlook" (p. 56) sums up well the relationship between right thinking and just action. "Infallibility, Authority and Faith" is a superb exploration of infallibility from a philosophical perspective, proving it to be a logically coherent concept, justifiable both epistemologically and metaphysically. The chapter on the Assumption is equally robust. "Incarnational Anthropology" is not an easy read. Nevertheless perseverance will yield rewards. I am still pondering, however, the statement that: "Creatureliness is not of the essence of humanity." (p. 83) I will have to read the article by H. McCabe to which Haldane refers.

A survey of Medieval and Renaissance ethics introduces the third part. "Natural law and Ethical pluralism" is most helpful, particularly with regard to matters concerning life and death issues and human sexuality. That natural law and practical politics may not always go hand in hand (cf p. 150) could provoke questioning in the reader's mind. A chapter on *Veritatis Splendor* recommends the encyclical as a model for a new phase in religious ethics, interweaving scripture, reason and tradition to produce an authoritative theology of the right and good. The essay following powerfully exposes why liberal individualism must be rejected by anyone committed to Catholic social teaching. "Religious Toleration," if read attentively, will be acknowledged as proposing a

prudential case for not tolerating intolerance.

"Education and Spirituality" is for everyone concerned about education. Strongly influenced by the common sense views of G. K. Chesterton, Haldane offers refreshingly sane ideas about education, and not least the identity of Catholic schools whose primary function is to "transmit Catholic truths and Catholic values." (p. 220)

The collection ends with a consideration of Beauty and Contemplation. The informed and informative essay on Medieval and Renaissance aesthetics highlights the shift from beauty as manifestation of reality to the aesthetic as experience of the beautiful. Next comes a fascinating account of how buildings convey meaning. This is then complemented by an article exploring how philosophical aesthetics can contribute to thinking about the natural environment by placing human experience at the centre. Yet this is not to contradict Aquinas' insight that something is beautiful not because we like it, rather we like it because it is beautiful. The final chapter entitled *De Consolatione Philosophiae* reasserts the goal of philosophy as the attainment of wisdom - and delight in it! Haldane, reworking Boethius, sees philosophy as a mode of thinking of the nature of things which is contemplative without transcending the realm of numerically, distinct empirical forms; a kind of spiritual enlightenment consisting in experiencing the real for what it is and being consoled by it.

Some minor criticisms of the collection. Perhaps the use of "cum," as in historical-cum-sociological, is too frequent. There is repetition of material, especially in Part Four. One essay on education, first published in 1988, was a little dated in some of its comments.

Readers of Faith magazine may be most attracted by the contents of



Parts I and II. However, a leisurely, reflective reading of all the essays will offer stimulation for a more fruitful exercise of faithful reason.

*John O'Leary*  
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FORTY DREAMS OF ST JOHN BOSCO  
*compiled and edited by Fr J*  
*Bacchiarello, 224pp, TAN Books,*  
*available through St Austin, Press*

As a young Catholic living in an age noticeably lacking 'fire and brimstone preaching,' it is easy to forget some of the traditional and core values underpinning a healthy practice of the faith. This book however simple and sometimes repetitive, gives a fascinating insight into the values that accompany sainthood, while reminding us of the necessity of a daily prayer life, regular confession and adoration of the Eucharist. If the description above had been written on the back cover I doubt that I, along with many other young Catholics, would eagerly open and devour. However St John – his life dedicated to youth – cannot fail to touch anyone who reads this book and takes note of the teachings within its pages, a message of great value and inspiration that can be practically carried into one's life.

The Forty Dreams of St John Bosco is exactly that; forty of the Saint's more interesting and profound dreams presented as small individual chapters of only a few pages each, often with an introduction explaining the context to the dream or with biographical information on St John. Commencing at the age of nine and continuing for sixty years, St John Bosco experienced remarkable vision-like dreams, which were so lively and vivid that he would often awaken exhausted the next morning. Indeed

the description 'dream' is a rather inadequate one in this case as they often merged with reality and revealed events later to come true, often with various guides to lead him through the experiences which were completely interactive. So vivid at times they could leave him physically affected. On one occasion having touched the walls of hell in a dream he woke with his hand stinging and the skin peeling. The dreams were recorded by St John in his memoirs often at the request of the Pope and were eagerly anticipated by the priests and boys at the oratory to whom we must be indebted for recording them.

Nicknamed by his peers at an early age 'the dreamer,' St John was wary of this special grace and did not always welcome it. However he learned to use the prophetic messages contained within them in a practical way in his ministry, especially with the youth, which was evidently fruitful since the Salesian order blossomed from his labours. It seems he constantly knew the state of "his boys" souls through these visions. He used the symbolism contained within them to warn of impurity, disobedience, gluttony and pride as well as the danger of flirting with temptations: "God forgives, but nature punishes! Habits of impurity will always have bad consequences." St John would predict the deaths of those at the oratory, converse with our Lord and his Holy Mother and be shown symbolic scenes regarding the future of his order and the wider Church, often involving bloody battles and even demonic monsters.

For readers of the messages today the lessons within are no less advantageous than in St John's time, while the mysterious nature of the dreams and their fulfilments hold your interest throughout. The colourful nature of the stories, the sense of divine mystery sustained and the evident character of St John make this a book well worth buying;

one which needn't be read in one sitting but will be of lasting value and interest.

*Ryan Day*  
*Hedon*  
*East Yorkshire*

PLUSCARDEN ABBEY – A GUIDE  
*by a monk of Pluscarden Abbey,*  
*Heritage House Group Ltd, 73pp*

It is always interesting to learn how Christian communities make a living. St Benedict in his Rule for communities was most adamant that they should be places of prayer and work 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore all the community must be occupied in prayer and work...' (RB Chap 48) Today this is reflected in the wide variety of work from the large North American monasteries (300 plus monks) with their publishing, universities and colleges to the smaller European houses with bee keeping and tourism (Buckfast Abbey has 250,000 visitors each year)

The community at Pluscarden Abbey near Elgin in Moray, Scotland has produced an attractive booklet, which is part history, part spirituality and part guidebook. Only 74 pages long, it is beautifully illustrated with colour photographs and diagrams, all well laid out, most attractive to the eye and engaging to the mind. The photographs of the stained glass windows are especially appealing whilst some of the more 'atmospheric' pictures of monks practising calligraphy play on our hopes and expectations of life in the cloister. It is a handy size that can be carried around in a glove compartment of a car or fit into a bookcase at home.

The Abbey at Pluscarden is unique in Britain being the only medieval monastery still inhabited by monks and being used for its original purpose. Founded in 1230 by Alexander II, its site in a sheltered,

south-facing glen against a background of forested hillside, adds to its beauty. The story of the Abbey is engagingly told through its early years to its dissolution in 1587 when it passed into a temporal lordship until 1948 when five monks returned to live the Benedictine life. In 1990 and 1994 guesthouses were opened for women and men and the community now numbers 28 under an Abbot.

For me the most important part of the booklet is the middle section, an explanation of the monastic vocation. In the world in which we live today, monastic communities are a sign and symbol against materialism, social disharmony and lack of peace. There is a spiritual restlessness abroad that is more noticeable than before and monasteries are in a unique position to respond to this searching. Pope Paul and the teachings of Vatican II, while approving the separation of the religious from the world, reminds us that 'the world and the church are realities to be faced' not to be run away from. So there is a real tension here.

How, without compromising the original idea, are the needs of contemporary man to be met? Some communities minister actively to the needs of souls – through teaching, giving retreats, providing parish priests- while others feel drawn to further the church's evangelical mission from inside their enclosures. Pluscarden Abbey belongs to this second category and this position is well reflected in the booklet.

However for me the disappointment was not having hospitality at the centre of this section of the booklet. In so many ways it is at the heart of St Benedict's Rule but it is also our common vocation as people of God. With Pluscarden encouraging visitors, through their website and this booklet, it is the most powerful charism that both religious and lay followers can easily offer to today's

searching world. Clearly there is a tension here between 'not unsettling the community' by 'guests who are never lacking in a monastery' and welcoming guests as Christ (RB Chap 53). Certainly there needs to be a balance but this hospitality is at the centre of who we really are as Christians.

This disappointment is again illustrated by the quotation from the RB 1980 translation of St Benedict's Prologue. I would have preferred Patrick Barry's more inclusive translation, which reads 'My words are addressed to you especially, whoever you may be...' St Benedict's Rule contains wisdom and relevance for today that can truly pierce our hearts, if only as children of God we can listen.

The final section of the booklet acts as guidebook and does the job most effectively. The illustrations are superb and the descriptions of the

various sites are precise without being patronising or fussy. Spattered throughout the text are references to poets, musicians, and patrons. George MacKay Brown the poet is a particular favourite. This is a good book that truly reflects a living Christian community – go and see for yourself.

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## I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

All the dimensions of the Eucharist come together in one aspect which more than any other makes a demand on our faith: the mystery of the "real" presence. With the entire tradition of the Church, we believe that Jesus is truly present under the Eucharistic species.

This presence—as Pope Paul VI rightly explained—is called "real" not in an exclusive way, as if to suggest that other forms of Christ's presence are not real, but par excellence, because Christ thereby becomes substantially present, whole and entire, in the reality of his body and blood.(14) Faith demands that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself.

It is precisely his presence which gives the other aspects of the Eucharist — as meal, as memorial of the Paschal Mystery, as eschatological anticipation — a significance which goes far beyond mere symbolism. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfilment of Jesus' promise to remain with us until the end of the world.

*From the Apostolic Letter Mane Nobiscum  
7 October 2004*

notes from across the

Atlantic

by Richard John Neuhaus

**SHARP DIVISION OF CULTURES**

Some years ago I came across an article titled "It's the Culture, Stupid", but in fact many articles I've written might well bear that title. Some pundits have denied the aptness of the "culture war" metaphor in describing the American circumstance, while others have contended that it may once have been appropriate but is no longer. Then came the 2004 elections. The percentages may change a little upon further analysis, but the immediate aftermath powerfully confirms the culture war thesis. Asked what issue mattered most to them, 22 percent of voters named "moral values". Of those voters, 80 percent went for Bush and 18 for Kerry. Next on the list (20 percent) was "economy/jobs", with 18 percent of those voters going for Bush and 80 percent going for Kerry. A perfect reverse symmetry. Third on the list (19 percent) was "terrorism", on which Bush beat Kerry 86 to 14 percent. So much for the vaunted "economic realists" who claim that the one thing certain is that "the people will always vote their pocketbook". In truth, however, I expect that the great majority of those who named moral values as their top issue also believed that a second Bush term would be good for the economy. People who say the economy is the top issue predictably think the economy is in bad shape, just as those who give priority to moral values think public morality is in trouble. A Democratic ploy is to pit moral values against the economy, but that is just that, a ploy. The

likelihood is that most people voting for Bush thought he would be better both for moral values and for the economy. Here's an analysis noting that Bush got 56 percent of the white Catholic vote and Kerry only 43 percent "despite Mr. Kerry's being Catholic". One might make the case that that "despite" might as well be "because". Catholics were not amused by a man who seemed so confused about what it means to be Catholic. The perception that he was confused was, I expect, sharpened by the bolder bishops who issued highly publicized reproaches of pro-abortion politicians. The claim that politicians who are thus reproached would get a sympathy vote from people who resent "bishops meddling in politics" seems to be belied by the outcome. Asked what one quality mattered most in choosing a President, people who named religious faith went 91 percent for Bush. Of all voters who attend church more than once a week, 61 percent went for Bush and 39 percent for Kerry. Of those who never attend church, the numbers were exactly reversed. Bush did much better (44 percent) with Hispanic voters than in 2000, but there was slight movement among blacks (up two points to 11 percent). The issue of same-sex marriage had gained traction with many black ministers, but that apparently had little effect on black voters, who remain a securely taken-for-granted segment of the Democratic "base." It is a great pity. A people with the highest rate of the poor locked in a culture of crime and dependency, and with 20 million of their children missing because of abortion, continues to follow leaders who have made a deal with powers that clearly do not have their interests at heart. What Gunnar Myrdal in 1944 called the American dilemma has sixty years later turned into the black American embarrassment. These, then, are some of the pertinent data in the

immediate aftermath of the election that underscore the ascendancy of the religious-moral-cultural matrix of American politics. Whether one approves or disapproves of the electoral consequences, it is not a good thing that the two parties are so sharply divided in this way. Republicans are understandably and with great success exploiting a division created by Democrats, most importantly by their don't-give-an-inch support for the unlimited abortion license decreed by *Roe v. Wade*. In the reconfiguration of our public life, including electoral politics, January 22, 1973, is the most important date of the last half-century on the American calendar.

**THE MEANING OF MORAL VALUES**

Not everyone on the left is joining the weeping and gnashing of teeth over the electoral triumph of the threatening theocrats. You've undoubtedly seen the articles claiming that the "moral values" vote really doesn't mean very much. The argument is that the category "moral values" is, unlike "economy/jobs" or "war in Iraq", so vague that it can mean anything or nothing. This is an argument from desperation. If nobody knew what the phrase meant, it would seem that Bush and Kerry voters would have been more or less evenly split on "moral values". Unless, of course, one assumes that Kerry voters are in principle opposed to moral values. As it was, however, all sensate voters understood that "moral values" referred to the candidates' clear differences on abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, a marriage amendment and, more generally, the role of morality and religion in public life. There is no other plausible explanation of the 80-18 split other than that those who named it as their number one issue thought they knew very well what was meant by "moral values". Back to weeping and gnashing of teeth.

## ON WINNING ELECTIONS

The social scientist James Q. Wilson undoubtedly means well, but he goes a claim too far. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, he is attempting to counter the hysterics who say November 2 marked the dawning of theocratic totalitarianism. He points out that the left can be, and frequently is, more intolerant than the right, and that what a voter says is the “most important” issue can obscure “the variety of factors that characterize voting preferences”. For instance, “What is the vote likely to be in Ohio among gun-owning union members who attend church but who have just lost their jobs and think the U.S. should spend less time fighting wars?” Fair enough. But then this astonishing assertion: “In fact, abortion was not an issue in the election and Messrs. Bush and Kerry both opposed gay marriage.” In fact, that is not true. On gay marriage, Bush regularly stated his position in stump speeches and advocated a federal marriage amendment. Kerry mentioned it only when asked and opposed an amendment. On abortion, Bush has repeatedly declared himself pro-life, has steadfastly asserted the goal of “every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life”, and has supported and signed pro-life measures in his first term. Kerry took and never deviated from the NARAL pledge of allegiance to the unlimited abortion license. These were not issues in the election? Does Mr. Wilson think Karl Rove was deluding himself in counting on Bush’s “base” among pro-life and pro-family voters? Wilson writes, “It is true that President Bush improved his voting support among people who attend church frequently and who describe themselves as Catholics, Protestants and Jews, but Sen. Kerry won nearly half of all Catholic votes and over three-fourths of all Jewish ones.” Wilson presumably knows but does not mention the huge switch of

Catholic voters to Bush, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of Jews never go to church, seldom go to synagogue, and have a deeply entrenched habit of voting Democratic. I recognize and sympathize with what Mr. Wilson was trying to do in his *Wall Street Journal* article. It is true that the election was not about establishing a theocracy. It is equally true that it was not about nothing.

## NOT JUST IN THE BIBLE

One of the problems with a literalistic “Bible only” approach to Christian thought is that it has no place for the role of reason or a tradition of authoritative interpretation. Here is an article by a Christian ethicist attacking the idea that abortion should be a decisive, or even a really major factor, in how a Christian votes. There are so many other issues, such as war, capital punishment, poverty, world development and on and on. Interestingly, he invokes the Catholic bishops on “a consistent ethic of life”. But of course there is no reference to the document of the same bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life*, or to their statement of June 2004, on the singularity of abortion in making political decisions. One probably should not expect from a Protestant writer any allusion to magisterial teaching, such as John Paul II’s encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. The author does acknowledge that the first century “Didache” condemns abortion, but qualifies that by noting that the condemnation “does not stand alone”. The clincher in this way of thinking, however, is succinctly stated: “Nor does Scripture give us any precise definition of what constitutes innocent life.” There you have the widely and rightly criticized fundamentalist approach: if it ain’t in the Bible—and explicitly and precisely so—it ain’t necessarily so. The author of the essay is Father John

Coleman, S.J., professor of moral theology at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles.

## REWRITING THE CONSTITUTION

If you don’t like the Constitution, you can always rewrite it. Or resort to the creative use of ellipses. The American Civil Liberties Union has an impressive website on free speech. The opening paragraph introducing the website is this: “It is probably no accident that freedom of speech is the first freedom mentioned in the First Amendment: ‘Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.’ The Constitution’s framers believed that freedom of inquiry and liberty of expression were the hallmarks of a democratic society.” The first freedom mentioned in the First Amendment is, of course, the free exercise of religion. It appears that among the liberties championed by the ACLU is that of taking liberties with the text of the Constitution.

## NEW REASONS FOR ANGLICAN SPLIT

Back when the Lambeth Conference said that homosexual practices are not compatible with scriptural teaching, retired Episcopal bishop John Spong opined that the ultraconservative position is attributable to pressure from culturally backward African bishops who are only a generation removed from the jungle. It was later pointed out by us (in *First Things*, May 2000) that the African bishops, who govern dioceses many times the size of their American counterparts, are also much better educated than the American bishops, with many of them having earned advanced degrees at European and American universities. Gene Robinson, the gay New Hampshire bishop, now tries a different explanation of why Africans and others oppose the attempt of



American Episcopalians to overthrow traditional teaching on sexuality. "I've had people say to me that in developing countries, people don't see any difference between you and George Bush, and this is being experienced as yet one more unilateral action on the part of Americans, and we're sick of it and we're not going to take it anymore," he said. "I'm not saying there aren't theological issues, scriptural issues and so on, but I do think that... may have something to do with the vociferousness of the debate." Add to the sidelining of the United Nations and the alienation of "Old Europe" George W. Bush's responsibility for the breakup of the Anglican communion.

#### HEALING THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

"Why do you hate us?" That, says Mustafa Akyol, writing in the *American Enterprise*, is a question frequently put to Muslims by Americans. "The first answer from someone like me, who is repulsed by terrorists who kill in the name of Islam, is that most of us do not hate you. Yet it must be acknowledged that radical Muslim rage is real in many countries." A major source of such rage is the moral decadence of American society as communicated by Hollywood and other media. Akyol writes: "This distaste derives not only from culture but also from ideas. When 'Western ideas' are mentioned, many Muslims think not of Jefferson, C. S. Lewis, Lincoln or Burke, but rather of Nietzsche, Freud, Marx and Carl Sagan. The behavior of some Westernised local elites in Muslim countries makes the situation even worse. In my country of Turkey, one popular stereotype of the Westernised Turk is of the soulless, skirt- and money-chasing man drinking whiskey while swearing at Islam. Although a caricature, it carries enough truth to further a bad image of the West . . . Obviously, that is a distortion of the truth.

America stands out in the Western world as 'a nation under God', particularly compared to 'Old Europe'. The aggressive secularism of Europe is one reason why European Muslims are especially radicalized. (Another spur is the lesser opportunities for upward mobility in Europe as compared to America.) As a Muslim, I feel at home in America when I see people saying grace at the table, praising the Lord, filling houses of worship and handling currency inscribed 'In God We Trust'. When I'm in Europe, on the other hand, with its empty cathedrals, widespread atheism and joyless cynicism, I feel alienated." So what is to be done? "To erase this false image, America must help Muslims see that it is indeed a nation under

God. The culture it exports should celebrate more than materialism, disbelief, selfishness and hedonism. America must do a better job of portraying the principles of decency that undergird its society, otherwise it will be despised by devout Muslims throughout the world, and radicals will channel contempt into violence. Of course, avoiding radical Islamist rage is only one reason for Americans to resist empty materialism. A deeper reason is that materialism is a mistaken philosophy. If they will save themselves from its disappointments, Americans will enjoy many benefits—including a better chance to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world, and avert a clash of civilizations."

## INCOMPARABLE TREASURE

**O** *Sacrum Convivium, in quo Christus sumitur!* The Year of the Eucharist has its source in the amazement with which the Church contemplates this great Mystery. It is an amazement which I myself constantly experience. It prompted my Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. As I look forward to the twenty-seventh year of my Petrine ministry, I consider it a great grace to be able to call the whole Church to contemplate, praise, and adore in a special way this ineffable Sacrament. May the Year of the Eucharist be for everyone a precious opportunity to grow in awareness of the incomparable treasure which Christ has entrusted to his Church. May it encourage a more lively and fervent celebration of the Eucharist, leading to a Christian life transformed by love.

**W**e have before us the example of the Saints, who in the Eucharist found nourishment on their journey towards perfection. How many times did they shed tears of profound emotion in the presence of this great mystery, or experience hours of inexpressible "spousal" joy before the sacrament of the altar! May we be helped above all by the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose whole life incarnated the meaning of the Eucharist. "The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery". The Eucharistic Bread which we receive is the spotless flesh of her Son: *Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine*. In this Year of grace, sustained by Mary, may the Church discover new enthusiasm for her mission and come to acknowledge ever more fully that the Eucharist is the source and summit of her entire life.

*From the Apostolic Letter Mane Nobiscum  
7 October 2004*



## cutting/edge

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

### AN ATHEIST RECANTS

An influential atheist, Antony Flew, emeritus professor of philosophy at Reading University, who as recently as 2001 was still vehemently professing his atheism, has changed his mind. For more than half a century he argued repeatedly against the existence of God, and his ideas have taken many scholars with him, but he has now come to a very different conclusion.

Precisely because of scientific questions, especially with regard to the ascent of life, he can no longer square his philosophical view of the world with outright atheism. He believes that new scientific discoveries reveal the existence of an organising intelligence in the created world, and finds it improbable that life simply arose from a primordial biochemical soup. "As people have certainly been influenced by me," he says, "I want to try and correct the enormous damage I have done."

### CURIAL CARDINAL ON SCIENCE

At the Festival of Science in Bergamo in the autumn, Cardinal Renato Martino re-iterated the Church's long-held view that, as held by many saints and theologians of the Middle Ages, the pursuit of science is utterly natural to a Judaeo-Christian view of the world. Challenging the widespread myth that the rise of science was a result of the Enlightenment, the Cardinal, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, instead showed how "it was precisely the lineal and progressive view of the cosmos derived from Christian doctrine which triggers the growth of science." That there is some real dichotomy between faith and science, which is a common misunderstanding of our

day, is a false idea which desires almost to create a dangerous ideology of science, he said. Quoting Pope Paul VI, he reminded his hearers instead of the dictum that "science is sovereign in its field" but "a slave in respect to man." The present Pope, too, he insisted, has done an enormous amount to show how science and faith are complementary in the service of mankind, whilst the idea of science loosed from any theological or moral framework is a false notion.

### TURIN SHROUD'S AGE

Seventeen years on from the famous carbon-14 dating of the Shroud of Turin in 1988 which concluded that it must have been a medieval fake dating from 1260–1390AD, new research on the fibres of the shroud have shown that this late date is very unreliable. In the 20th January 2005 issue of the journal *Thermochimica Acta*, the chemist Raymond Rogers from the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico has reported his chemical analysis of different fibres coming from the shroud. His essential discovery is that the sample used for the 1988 radio-carbon test was not taken from the original shroud material, but from later, indeed mediaeval, cloth, which had been used as a patch to mend some damage to the shroud.

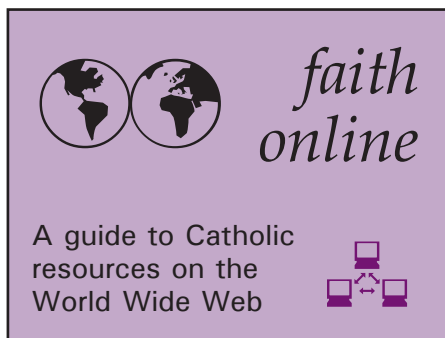
A number of factors prove that the radio-carbon-dated material is of completely different origin to the bulk of the shroud cloth. The most significant result is derived from the presence of vanillin in the radio-carbon-dated sample, and the absence of this chemical in most shroud fibres. Vanillin is a thermal decomposition product of lignin, a chemical compound found in plant material such as flax. Over time the level of vanillin in linen decreases and even though the rate of loss is temperature-dependent, a reasonable range of storage temperatures for the shroud leads to an age estimate of 1300–3000 years, given the

undetectable level of any vanillin. Whilst this thermochemical analysis, far more imprecise than a radiocarbon test, has led to a very broad date range, yet a medieval date (i.e. c. 800 years old) is clearly excluded. On the other hand, vanillin is detectable in the lignin in threads from the 16th-century 'Holland cloth' (the shroud's backing cloth) and in fibres drawn from very near the radio-carbon sample.

A second difference between the bulk of the shroud material and the radio-carbon-dated sample is detected when water is applied and the fibres viewed under magnification. The radio-carbon-dated threads are colourless in their cores, but have a yellow-brown coating which chemical analysis showed to be a plant gum and a mixture of dyes. The main part of the shroud does not have fibres with these characteristics. The evident indication is that prior to the repairs the material used to patch the shroud had to be dyed to match the original sepia-coloured cloth.

A third piece of evidence supporting the hypothesis that the cloth fragment on which radio-carbon dating was performed was uncharacteristic of the shroud as a whole comes from the re-analysis of 1981 pyrolysis mass spectrometry data. This technique isolates the different molecular elements of a material as it decomposes during heating. The radio-carbon-dated fibres displayed a noticeably different spectrometric signature to those from the main cloth.

The ultimate conclusion of the research paper is straightforward: that a new radio-carbon dating should be performed on some shroud material that is without doubt a fragment of the original cloth. Some such material is reported already to have been excised following the 2002 restoration. Dr Rogers research paper, *Thermochimica Acta* 425, 189–194, can be viewed via the website.



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

## More For The Year of the Eucharist

### BRINGING CHILDREN TO THE EUCHARISTIC JESUS

This thoroughly inspiring new initiative is a ministry of the Community of St John. Children Of Hope is dedicated to leading children into the mystery of the Real Presence through dedicated adoration prayer groups. The proven benefits are: children develop greater interest in their faith and in the Mass; they acquire an understanding of what Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross means; they become more aware of sin and want to come to confession more often; they become witnesses to their families, often bringing them back to Mass and gaining a desire to restore harmony in troubled homes. Who would not want to bring this to their parishes?

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

### TEACHING THE REAL PRESENCE

The saintly Jesuit Catechist, Fr John Hardon, who died in 2000, has inspired this site on the Real Presence. It has the backing of Cardinal George of Chicago and Archbishop Burke of St Louis. It provides some of Fr Hardon's powerful teaching on the Eucharist - which has also helped people on this side of the Atlantic for many years. There is also a directory of churches in the States that hold Adoration; we could do with one in Britain. A useful section provides testimonials from recent saints, an online chapel gives catechesis on prayer and there is a comprehensive archive of Fr Hardon's writings.

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

### VIRTUAL ADORATION

The concept behind this site is certainly startling to say the least. A 'live' image of the Blessed Sacrament is projected online via a webcam in the chapel of the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters in Philadelphia. "As our Faithful Shepherd, we trust in Jesus to utilise technology to create a true multiplication of His Living Presence."

Obviously this is not intended to substitute for being actually present at Exposition, but the testimonials from the housebound or those in non-Christian countries dispel any qualms one might have as to its use. There is also a series of short catechetical meditations on the Holy Eucharist.

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

### THE CROSSROADS INITIATIVE

Dr Marcellino D'Ambrosio, father of five, left his position at the University of Dallas to set up this catechetical project. Lord Alton writes about his work: "How helpful it is for a traveller to be given such good maps, a compass and a helping hand along the way." His website has a prominent resource section, including a Eucharist Library, for the Year of the Eucharist.

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

### YEAROFTHEEUCHARIST.COM

A useful compendium of online resources. This site has the usual Vatican document links, but also a section on Eucharistic books, videos and magazines. Send a Eucharistic Year e-card or play liturgically inspired hangman!

<http://yearoftheeucharist.com>

### DEFENDING GOD'S NAME

The Holy Name Society was founded by the Dominican, Blessed John Vercelli, to teach the faith, give honour to the most sacred names of God and Jesus and to assist its members in holiness.

Membership is for men over 18 and involves a public ceremony of profession.

Each member, if faithful to his obligations, shares in the blessings from all the Masses and good works etc of the Dominicans. Details are provided for setting up a confraternity in your parish.

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

# news

r o u n d u p

## BEHOLD THE LAMB

It promises to be the event of Summer 2005: a special congress held in Birmingham devoted to the Eucharist. Three dioceses are clubbing together to sponsor 'Behold the Lamb' a four-day Eucharistic congress this July 14th-17th. Sponsored by Nottingham, Northampton and Birmingham archdiocese the congress will take place at Newman College, Bartley Green, Birmingham. It will feature exciting talks and testimonies given by speakers including the preacher to the papal household, Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, Jesuit writer Fr John Edwards and Bishop McMahon OP of Nottingham. There will also be daily Mass and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament plus study sessions. Separate events will also run throughout the congress in Nottingham, Northampton, and Birmingham including special prayers for Birmingham's schools at St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham on Thursday 14th and Friday 15th July.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Birmingham will celebrate the opening Mass on July 14. Youth 2000, Diocesan Youth Services, Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, the New Forest Dominican Sisters, the Community of Grace and Sion Community will also be present at the congress which is expected to attract 1,000 delegates a day and is open to anyone who wishes to come.

Canon Tom Farrell, Episcopal Vicar for Oxfordshire and one of the organisers, said: "This Eucharistic Congress is a response to the Holy Father's invitation to celebrate the Year of the Eucharist and to renew people's faith in the power of the

Blessed Sacrament." Canon Farrell added: "We hope that many young adults will attend the congress and give a powerful witness of faith in the Eucharist that will help to revive Eucharistic devotion as central to the life of the Church." Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Birmingham described the congress as "a highlight of the summer," saying "Together we shall celebrate the great gift of God's love. We shall give thanks to God and rejoice together. It will be a Congress to remember and a great experience for all who take part." For further details please contact the congress director Fr Julian Green at

[eucharisticcongress@blueyonder.co](mailto:eucharisticcongress@blueyonder.co).

## EUCCHARISTIC INDULGENCE

And more good news: to mark the year of the Eucharist, Pope John Paul II has granted a plenary indulgence to Catholics who venerate the Blessed Sacrament in 2005. He also granted an indulgence to those reciting the morning and night prayers of the office before the Tabernacle. In a decree signed last Christmas day the Pope writes: "A Plenary Indulgence is granted to all faithful and to each individual faithful under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer in keeping with the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, with the soul completely removed from attachment to any form of sin), each and every time they participate attentively and piously in a sacred function or a devotional exercise undertaken in honour of the Blessed Sacrament, solemnly exposed and conserved in the tabernacle. A Plenary Indulgence is also granted, under the aforesaid conditions, to the clergy, to members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and to other faithful who are by law obliged to recite the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as to those who customarily recite the Divine Office out of pure devotion, each and every time they

recite - at the end of the day, in company or in private - Vespers and Night Prayers before the Lord present in the tabernacle.

"The faithful who, through illness or other just cause, are unable to visit the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist in a church or oratory, may obtain a Plenary Indulgence in their own homes, or wherever they may be because of their ailment, if, ... with the intention of observing the three usual conditions as soon as possible, they make the visit spiritually and with the heart's desire, ... and recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding a pious invocation to Jesus in the Sacrament. If they are unable to do even this, they will receive a Plenary Indulgence if they unite themselves with interior desire to those who practice the normal conditions laid down for Indulgences, and offer the merciful God the illnesses and discomforts of their lives."

## PLOT TO KIDNAP POPE REVEALED

We're used - and indeed tired - of hearing condemnations of Pope Pius XII for allegedly ignoring the suffering of the Jews in World War II. But recent news has emerged that casts an original light on the Pope's role in the War. For it appears that Hitler gave one of his generals a direct order to kidnap the Pope. General Karl Wolff refused to obey him, say reports in Italy's leading Catholic newspaper *Avvenire*. Details of the plot - codenamed 'Operation Rabat' - were discovered during research necessary for the process of beatification for Pius XII. Originally, 'Operation Rabat' was planned for 1943 but was delayed until the following year, for an unspecified reason. Hitler gave his order to Wolff, a senior Nazi occupation officer in Italy just before the Germans withdrew from Rome. The *Avvenire* report suggested that Wolff visited the Vatican at night, dressed in civilian clothes entering with the help of a priest. He then revealed Hitler's orders to the Pope,

assuring him he had no intention of personally complying with them but warned Pius XII to 'be careful' as 'the situation is confused and full of risk'. At the time, Italy's dictator Benito Mussolini had fallen and set up a German-backed puppet regime in North Italy but Allied forces were advancing upon Rome. To test Wolff's good faith, Pope Pius invited him to liberate two Italian resistance leaders condemned to death. Wolff subsequently arranged their release. The *Avvenire* report has also been backed by information contained in a new book on Hitler's spy chief, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. Head of the *Abwehr* or German military intelligence, Canaris was a closet anti-Nazi who consistently 'leaked' vital details of German plans to the Allies in World War II according to *Hitler's Spy Chief: a Biography of Wilhelm Canaris*.

The author, Catholic writer and former Times foreign correspondent Richard Bassett cites minutes from a conversation between Goebbels and Hitler in which the Fuhrer spoke openly of invading the Vatican. He is quoted as saying: "Do you think the Vatican embarrasses me? We'll take that over right away. For one thing the entire diplomatic corps are there. We'll get that bunch of swine out of there... Later we can make apologies." Subsequently, he gave orders to kidnap the Pope and 2,000 SS troops surrounded the Vatican blocking all exits, roads and underground tunnels linking the Vatican to Rome. "All that saved the Pope was the belief held by many senior Germans, including Canaris, even Himmler and perhaps eventually Hitler himself, that an un-seized Pope could be useful in a negotiated peace," writes Bassett who devotes several pages of his biography to the Vatican's attempts in 1943 to forge peace.

He claims that Admiral Canaris asked Dr Joseph Mueller to open peace negotiations with Britain via

the Vatican and the Pope, though refusing to meet with Abwehr agents passed their proposals to Francis Osborne, Britain's ambassador to the Holy See and a refugee inside it since 1940. "The Pope, via one of his staff, asked Osborne the significant question, in the context, of whether, if Hitler were overthrown by Germans, there would be a chance of agreement, or whether the formula of unconditional surrender ruled out such a possibility? Osborne's reply to this question does not appear to be in the British files but it is suggested by subsequent statements by the Vatican that he did not offer outright rejection of the possibility. The British papers unsurprisingly show (so far) nothing of this. But it is clear from Vatican archives and German documents that the plans were again well advanced," suggests Mr Bassett.

#### THE TRUTH ABOUT PIUS XII AND HITLER

He also posits that Pius refused to openly condemn the Nazi's Jewish atrocities for fear of not only prompting further violence against them, but also for fear of jeopardising the Vatican's potential role in negotiating a peace deal. The book says: "Vatican documents show the Pope indicated that after a German coup he would be willing to act as a mediator between the warring parties and send a special envoy to Berlin, an act which would show to the world that a new start had come to Germany. So keen was the Pope to assume the historic role of mediator that he was not prepared to compromise it by openly denouncing the horrendous persecution of the Jews.

As Kessel, the German diplomat assisting Weiszacker in the embassy to the Holy See noted, this fear of burning bridges with the Nazi leadership and therefore losing the chance to broker a peace caused Pius XII daily anguish over the fact of the Jews. The reproaches of Edith Stein,

the Jewish convert who became a Carmelite nun, whose letter imploring him to take up the cause of Jewry remains to this day the most eloquent testimony to the challenges facing the Pope's moral leadership, did not go unread. But the Pope was convinced that his public intervention would not save a single Jewish life and that everything had to be sacrificed, in his view, to the greater cause of ending the war and with it the conditions which made the factory slaughter of the innocents possible. His thinly veiled reference to the plight of the Jews had incensed both Hitler and Mussolini." However, the Pope did work to save an estimated seven of Rome's eight thousand Jews (according to SS figures) on the eve of the Nazi invasion of Rome in September 1944.

#### ALL CHANGE AT THE MEDIA OFFICE

It's been all change at the Catholic Media Office in Eccleston Square, now devoid of all the staff working there a year ago. Rigorous interviews, Faith readers will recall, were held to assess the suitability of the next head of the Bishops' press office. These included asking candidates to 'act out' possible 'office' scenarios including 'dealing with' staff members fixated 'on a single issue' something thought to be a reference to a member of the press office who had previously been employed by SPUC. In fact he - and the 'acting' head of news Ollie Wilson have now left. Mr Wilson, a slightly eccentric character who does part time stand-up comedy and whose real first name is Christopher (the choice of the more unusual 'Oliver' we are informed came about from people referring to his supposed resemblance to the actor Oliver Reed) has left to do PR for the British Horse Society. Mr Wilson was too discreet to reveal the reasons for his departure but he and the ex-SPUC colleague are alleged to have departed Eccleston Square due



to disagreements with their new boss Robert McLaughlin, a TV-whizz whose great interest is digital television. Mr McLaughlin is determined to assure the Church a niche in some form in the digital television revolution - perhaps on a religious channel, obviously collaborating with other denominations. To this end he has met with EWTN representatives to discuss potential digital TV programmes for the future. Alas, to Mr McLaughlin's surprise Mother Angelica's network showed zero interest in broadcasting a potential chat show featuring Dr Rowan Williams in conversation with Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. Mr McLaughlin's commitment to Catholic causes can perhaps be deduced from the fact that he is rumoured to have been ignorant about when precisely Advent began and had to be informed a Sunday or so after the start of the liturgical season. His second in command Mark Alderton shares Mr McLaughlin's television background and - er - minimal knowledge of the Catholic faith. But hope is not lost: Mr McLaughlin has had the sense to employ Josephine Siedlecka, a Catholic journalist who knows her way round the Church and is the founder of that impressive website, *Independent Catholic News*.

### TRAGIC COLLEGE CLOSURE

Plater College in Oxford has been closed after a disastrous inspection report in October damned the quality of resources for students, teaching standards and 'weak' leadership as well as 'significant issues' to do with 'bullying' and racial and sexual abuse. Insiders blame the rapid decline of the institute for higher learning - praised for the high level of teaching in its last inspection report three years ago - on its principal Robert Beckinsale, who is on the record as saying that Plater, an institution founded in 1921 to give the

educationally deprived a step up the ladder to university or professional jobs, did "not do" Catholic social teaching. Ironically, its expertise in teaching the Church's social doctrine was praised by Cardinal Hume at the college's 75th anniversary. His opponents accuse Mr Beckinsale of denying Plater's Catholic ethos - something picked up by the inspectors who commented in their report that none of the college advertisements for short courses made mention of its Catholic identity. Unofficially Faith News hears that he at one stage planned to use the chapel as a lecture room and sanctioned the removal of a prominent crucifix from Plater's premises.

### A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Is the Archdiocese of Westminster too close to 10 Downing Street? That is the gossip along the corridors of Westminster since the appointment last Summer of Sir Stephen Wall, a senior Blairite advisor and former British Ambassador directing the press affairs of Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor. Evidence of a growing cosiness between New Labour and the Archdiocese was obvious at the CAFOD Pope Paul VI lecture before Christmas. The speaker was Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer and his subject - in a speech laced with reference to the prophet Isaiah (not for nothing is he a son of the Manse) - was eradicating global poverty. The Cardinal warmly endorsed his words, assuring him in glowing terms that he had the 'support' of the Catholic community. Those specially invited beforehand to ask the Chancellor questions (is CAFOD taking tips from *Opus Dei*?) had been carefully selected for their impeccable liberal credentials. One of the first was Fr Rob Esdaile, chaplain of Sussex University, and one Jim O'Keefe, dressed in civvies, until last year the rector of Ushaw College in Durham where he was famed for his

unswerving support for issues of Third World Justice. And to prove further the unity of interests between Catholic and Labour, Paul Goggins, a Catholic who is Prisons Minister, made a special appearance at a press conference held by the Bishops in Brixton prison the next morning to launch their new document on prisons: '*A Place of Redemption*'. He disagreed with its conclusions but endorsed "its spirit" and emphasis on values such as justice and mercy." All very friendly indeed and presumably nothing to do with the forthcoming elections.

### CATHOLIC MINISTER DISAPPOINTS ON STEM CELLS

And talking of politics brings us on to Ruth Kelly, the new labour minister for Education who has been hounded since the day of her appointment by rumours that she is a member of *Opus Dei* - something that has been an open secret in Catholic circles for at least the past two years. To the careful observer, one tell-tale sign was evident from descriptions of the intelligent, dynamic Mrs Kelly: the fact that she astounded her political colleagues by managing to complete work on time to and to see her children, a feat of organisational skill that will astonish no Catholic who has close dealings with 'the work' and observed their admirable, almost military precision and talent for never wasting a moment. Perhaps this is necessary given the requirements for 'supernumeraries' (the section of members allowed to marry to which Mrs Kelly belongs): as well as daily Mass and recitation of the daily rosary they must do a quarter-hour's spiritual reading daily plus a nightly examination of conscience - a routine of spiritual rigour that is utterly praiseworthy and hopefully an indication of Mrs Kelly's mettle. Regrettably, she has in public said she supports Government policy on stem cell research telling BBC's Today programme: "We have a 10-



year science strategy, we have a policy toward stem cell research. I completely accept that that is the Government policy and I stand by it. The position I hold is one I have made absolutely clear, that I am a member of this Government and I will not only stand by the policies of this Government, but also, where I am responsible for implementing them, I will implement them as well".

Mr John Smeaton, National Director of SPUC, said he was 'deeply disappointed' by Mrs Kelly commenting: "As the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated in its note to Catholic politicians - '[T]he lay Catholic's duty [is] to be morally coherent, found within one's conscience, which is one and indivisible. There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence:

on the one hand, the so-called 'spiritual life', with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called 'secular' life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social responsibilities, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture.'" The 'two masters one God' dilemma is an age-old one for England's Catholic politicians. Witness St Thomas More.

## PUT OUT INTO THE

**D**uc in altum! (Put out into the deep) The command of Christ is particularly relevant in our time, when there is a widespread mentality which, in the face of difficulties, favours personal non-commitment. The first condition for "putting out into the deep" is to cultivate a deep spirit of prayer nourished by a daily listening to the Word of God. The authenticity of the Christian life is measured by the depth of one's prayer, an art that must be humbly learnt "from the lips of the Divine Master", almost imploring "like the first disciples: 'Lord, teach us to pray!' (Lk 11,1). In prayer, a conversation with Christ develops and it makes us his intimate friends: 'Abide in me and I in you' (Jn 15, 4)".

The link with Christ through prayer also makes us aware that He is also present in moments of apparent failure, when tireless effort seems useless, as happened to the Apostles themselves, who after toiling all night, exclaimed: "Master, we took nothing" (Lk 5,5). It is especially in these moments that one needs to open one's heart to the abundance of grace and to allow the word of the Redeemer to act with all its power: "Duc in altum!"

Whoever opens his heart to Christ will not only understand the mystery of his own existence, but also that of his own vocation; he will bear the abundant fruit of grace. The first fruit will be his growth in holiness, in the course of a spiritual journey which begins with the gift of Baptism and continues even to the fullness of perfect love. He will commit himself to persevering in unity with his brothers within the communion of the Church, and he will place himself at the service of the new evangelisation, to proclaim and bear witness to the wonderful truth of the saving love of God.

**D**ear adolescents and young people, it is to you in a particular way that I renew the invitation of Christ to "put out into the deep". You find yourselves having to make important decisions for your future. Young people need Christ, but they also know that Christ chose to be in need of them. Dear young men and

women! Trust Christ; listen attentively to his teachings, fix your eyes on his face, persevere in listening to his Word. Allow Him to focus your search and your aspirations, all your ideals and the desires of your heart.

Now I turn to you, dear parents and Christian educators, to you dear priests, consecrated persons and catechists. God has entrusted to you the peculiar task of guiding young people on the path to holiness. Be an example to them of generous fidelity to Christ. Encourage them to "put out into the deep" without hesitation, responding eagerly to the invitation of the Lord. Some he calls to family life, others to consecrated life or to the ministerial priesthood. Help them to discern their path, and to become true friends of Christ and his true disciples. When adult Christians show themselves capable of revealing the face of Christ through their own words and example, young people are more ready to welcome His demanding message, stamped as it is with the mystery of the Cross.

**D**o not forget that today too there is need of holy priests, of persons wholly consecrated to the service of God! With this in mind, I want to repeat once more: "There is a pressing need to implement an extensive plan of vocational promotion, based on personal contact and involving parishes, schools, and families in the effort to foster a more attentive reflection on the essential values of life. These values reach their fulfilment in the response which each person is invited to give to God's call".

To you, young people, I repeat the word of Jesus: "Duc in altum!". In proposing His exhortation once more to you, I think at the same time of the words which Mary, his Mother, addressed to the servants at Cana in Galilee: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2,5). Dear young people, Christ is asking you to "put out into the deep" and the Virgin Mary is encouraging you not to hesitate in following Him.

*From the Message of John Paul II for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 17 April 2005*

# REINTERPRETING RAHNER

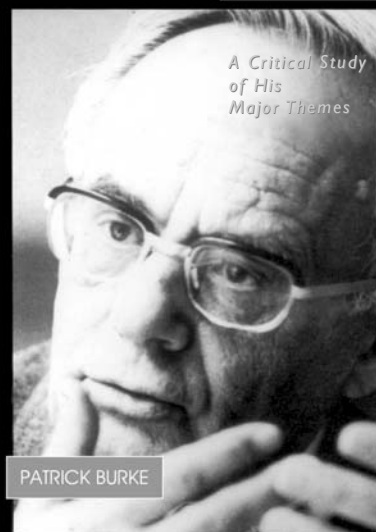
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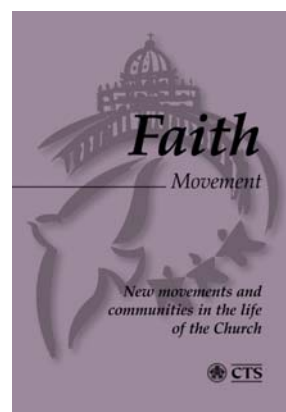
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