

# faith

Promoting A New Synthesis Of Faith And Reason

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Celibacy and the Church  
Luminous Mysteries - Meditations from John Henry Newman  
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**Book Reviews:**

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## Enforcement, silencing, and truth

2019 has not, thus far, been a joyful year for Britain. Knife crime – numbers of young people stabbing one another on the streets of our cities – has risen steadily and looks set to continue to do so. Political life has been chaotic, giving a general sense of uncertainty and confusion over the one thing of which we have long been confident – the resilience and reasonable competence of our system of governance. And the sinister political-correctness which over the past few years has increasingly sought control over our lives continues to grow in strength and in nastiness.

FAITH magazine, founded in the 1970s, has long voiced ideas that go against the tide of fashionable thought in Britain: on the possibility of doctrinal certainty in the Church, on marriage, on the truth of the Gospel. We have perhaps rather prided ourselves on this: it can be rather satisfying to affirm certainties and ride against the culture at a time when that culture is concentrating on questioning itself and announcing the impossibility of establishing fundamental truths. The message of the general culture in the era when FAITH magazine first appeared could be summed up in the notion that “there is no absolute truth – there is only my truth and your truth”, with an increasing emphasis on the “my”.

### Clamour

That egocentric clamour has not diminished in the decades of our magazine's existence and it has intensified in all sorts of obvious ways. It is now standard to affirm that “choice” is paramount – from consumer pressure for an ever-expanding range of goods in supermarkets, through to the notion that a child in the womb can be destroyed at will.

But something that we took for granted in the 1970s is fast disappearing: our sense of confidence in our right to challenge the culture and to discuss and analyse trends and ideas. Today, a major philosopher can be sacked from a public position assisting with housing reform because a magazine denounces him – inaccurately – for holding views it deems unacceptable. A police force subjects its members to harangues about the need to affirm the normality of believing that men can “transition” to being women and vice versa. Money extracted from us all in taxes funds lobby groups enforcing the notion that marriage between members of the same sex is an idea that must never be challenged.

The expression “political correctness”, while useful as a general description of these things, fails to do justice to the fundamental wrong that is being done to our freedom to debate and discuss important matters – and to our duty to do so, as intelligent beings with minds and souls.

The desire to enforce homogenous certainty seems intrinsic to humanity: while we relish debate and recognise, at a deep level, its necessity in the search for truth, we also relish power. The Church has not always got this right at a practical level: over time, she came to grasp that punishing or even killing heretics does not destroy heresy – indeed it can help it to flourish. Truth has its own power to triumph and Christ taught us this.

In today's uncomfortable Britain, are we allowed the freedom to debate, discuss and affirm truth? The 1960s and 70s seem rather distant now. When was the last time some one in public life made that formerly rather over-used statement "I disagree entirely with what you say, but I defend absolutely your right to say it"? In fact, that statement was never really true: we do not, and should not, have an absolute right to say whatever we like regardless of the harm it can do. There are, and must be, laws in any civilised society against that. There must be some protection against libel and slander. There is also a reasonable right to privacy – a doctor does not have the right to publicise my medical record, nor my bank the details of my finances. And there are legitimate restrictions on public revelation of information relating to public security, national defence interests, and more.

But where does the current obsession with "hate speech" fit into all this? There is no reason whatever to ban a discussion about whether or not it is possible to "transition" from one sex to another: it is a legitimate area of medical discussion, centred on biological facts. Recent months have seen some sinister attempts to crush ordinary discussion about human realities – a mother who wrote about the wrongfulness of deliberately mutilating a child to facilitate such "transition" was denounced to the police and received a visit from them with the threat of arrest. A teacher faced dismissal for greeting a group of girls as girls – one of them had decided she wanted to be addressed as a boy.

## Historical

Catholics in Britain, with a deep historical memory of savage persecution, have a particular contribution to make concerning freedom of speech. Even after the horror of torture and public execution for the crime of being a Catholic priest was finally over, Catholics faced violence and danger, from the Gordon Riots at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the "No popery" gatherings in the middle years of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

We have something of huge importance to offer today's bleak Britain. Especially on matters concerning the truth about the human person, about men and women and the bond between them, about human life and human loving, about marriage and family, about faithfulness and dignity and kindness and patience and caring for the gravely ill and the unwanted, the Church is a voice that cries out to be heard.

Because of this, FAITH magazine will not bend to fashionable opinions today just as it did not in its early years. We are rather proud of our record: a reputation for "speaking out" with a voice of truth and charity is something to honour. The current Editor is conscious of inheriting a rich tradition. That this is now coupled with fears that previous editors did not have to face – including the possibility of being denounced to the police for affirming truths that are age-old and rooted in our common humanity – is mildly worrying but will not deter this Editor from doing what is right.

## Valour

A powerful image for 2019 emerged this spring: the golden Cross, unscathed, standing firm the badly damaged Cathedral of Notre Dame. In a secularised Europe, the sight and sound of young men and women praying, kneeling, on the streets of Paris, stirred hearts. The Rose Windows of that great church survived the flames to proclaim truth in glorious beauty to fresh generations. The Blessed Sacrament was rescued thanks to the valour of a priest. We join with men and women of all faiths and none in seeing a profound symbolism in all of this, concerning the resilience of goodness, truth and beauty.

It is the image, again and again, of the strangeness of Christ and the unlikeliness of everything connected with the spread of his message, in every era. It is miracles, and Cross and Resurrection, and trusting and holding up and carrying on, and mission and martyrdom and glory and grace. "Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid!"

*Magna est veritas et praevalabit.*



### *From the Aims and Ideals of Faith Movement:*

Faith Movement offers a new synthesis of faith and reason, explaining the Catholic faith in the evolutionary perspective of modern science.

Reflecting on the unity of the cosmos, we can show the transcendent existence of God and the essential distinction between matter and spirit. We offer a vision of God as the true Environment of men in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) and of his unfolding purpose in the relationship of word and grace through the prophets which is brought to its true head in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Lord of Creation, centre of history and fulfilment of our humanity.

Our redemption through the death and resurrection of the Lord, following the tragedy of original sin, is also thereby seen in its crucial and central focus. Our life in his Holy Spirit through the church and the sacraments and the necessity of an infallible magisterium likewise flow naturally from this presentation of Christ and his work through the ages.

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

# A journey from atheism

Philip Vander Elst describes how CS Lewis enabled him to grasp some liberating truths



In my early twenties, before my conversion to Christianity in 1976, I did not believe that our world offered entirely convincing and reliable evidence for the existence and goodness of God.<sup>1</sup>

The universe, I thought, might have always existed, without any need for an external cause to bring it into being,<sup>2</sup> and the argument for God from 'benevolent design' seemed obviously flawed since it could not be reconciled with the existence of evil and suffering.

To quote Britain's best known 20th century atheist philosopher, Bertrand Russell: *"it is a most astonishing thing that people can believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience has been able to produce in millions of years. I really cannot believe it. Do you think that, if you were granted omnipotence and omniscience and millions of years in which to perfect your world, you could produce nothing better than the Ku-Klux-Klan or the Fascists?"* That was said in 1927, in his lecture, 'Why I am not a Christian', to the South London Branch of the National Secular Society, but the same point could have been made in nearly every decade of recorded history. Poverty and tyranny, slavery and war, hatred and violence, have disfigured our world and blighted human life for millennia, and continue to do so. Even if we are lucky enough to live in relatively free, prosperous and peaceful societies, life for all too many is blighted by crime, family breakdown, drug addiction and mental illness. And to this cup of human suffering, of course, must be added disease, disability and death, as well as 'Nature red in tooth and claw'.

*the ultimate source and origin of human consciousness*

## The claims of Christianity

Consequently, however much I hoped, at times, that there was a God, the problem of evil, including the bloody history of religious persecution, made me scornful of the claims of Christianity. I was strongly inclined to the belief that religious faith required the rejection of reason in favour of 'revelation', meaning by that, a 'leap in the dark' based on insufficient evidence or even fraud. Even after becoming a Christian, it took a while before I was able to shake off the embarrassment I felt about admitting to others my belief in

<sup>1</sup> See my personal testimony, From Atheism to Christianity: a personal journey, available at <https://www.bethinking.org/author/philip-vander-elst/page/all>

<sup>2</sup> I failed to understand the cosmological argument for God, whose truthfulness I now recognize and is explored in my paper Does science contradict religion?, available, again, at <https://www.bethinking.org/author/philip-vander-elst/page/all>

God and the truthfulness of the Bible. My emotional hostility to 'religion' in general, and Christianity in particular, was only overcome when I started reading the writings of C.S. Lewis, with whose own journey from atheism to faith I could identify, and about which I have written elsewhere. What impressed me most about Lewis' advocacy of Christianity was his ability to engage with all the strongest and seemingly most insurmountable objections to religious faith, especially that arising from the problem of evil. That, for me, was extremely important, having experienced intense grief and shock when my father, whom I greatly loved, died completely unexpectedly when I was only 17.

## Lewis's challenging argument

As Lewis points out in *Mere Christianity* (and elsewhere), we cannot complain about evil and suffering, and disbelieve in God on that basis, unless we are first convinced that the moral standard by which we judge and condemn our world is an objective one. Just as a line is only 'crooked' when compared with a straight line, so an act, or person, or situation, can only be condemned as 'unjust' when measured against a prior standard of perfect justice from which it deviates. But if evil cannot even be defined as such except in relation to the goodness to which it is opposed, how does this truth affect the debate about God and the problem of evil? The short answer is that it changes everything.

To start with, from where does our standard of goodness, truth and justice come? If, as all too many people claim to believe, it is purely subjective, like our taste in food, clothing, or entertainment, we cannot use it to criticize others or justify our complaints about the universe.

But in that case, of course, our moral argument against God's existence and goodness, based on the problem of evil, collapses. If, on the other hand, we regard the moral standard 'written on our hearts' as an eternally true and objective insight into reality, justifying our conviction, for instance, that murder, theft and oppression are wrong, and love is better than hate, we again face the question: where does this objective insight into reality come from? From what or from who do we derive our sense of moral obligation, as well as our knowledge of Right and Wrong?



CS Lewis

## Human consciousness

It is in relation to this issue, about the ultimate source and origin of human consciousness and moral values, that atheism fails the test of credibility and truthfulness, something I first learned from the opening chapters of the revised 1960 edition of Lewis' brilliantly argued book, *Miracles*, as well from the much simpler and more limited treatment of this issue, for a 'popular' audience, in *Mere Christianity*, his collected wartime radio broadcasts of the 1940s.

Lewis' central argument against atheism challenges us to think clearly about the problem of evil, and other philosophers have reached similar conclusions about the

issues Lewis raises.<sup>3</sup>

If, as atheists insist, there is no God or Divine plan or purpose behind the universe, and humans are purely physical beings – biological machines without souls or spirits – the implications are logically self-destructive for atheism, especially for its rejection of God because of the ills of the world and the existence of pain and suffering. If atheism is true, it means that all our thoughts and values, and all our deepest convictions, including our belief in the validity of logical argument and the existence of mathematical and scientific truths, are simply an accidental by-product of our cerebral biochemistry and the mindless movement of atoms.

### Atheism versus free will

We may think, therefore, that we have free will, and with it, that inner freedom to weigh evidence and judge between conflicting arguments without which there can be no successful pursuit of truth, or acquisition of knowledge, but we are deluding ourselves. In reality, because we are biological machines and the un-designed product of a godless, accidental and mechanical universe, all our reasoning and conclusions are nothing more than the unplanned end result of a long chain of entirely random non-rational physical causes over which we have no control.

In other words, if we have no souls, and no spiritual connection to God as the ultimate source of reason and truth, it follows that our brains, and therefore all our mental activity, is imprisoned within a process of physical determinism that discredits all thinking. We cannot be sure that any of our thoughts correspond to reality, moral or scientific, since we are biologically conditioned to think them regardless of whether they are true or not.

### Atheism self-destructs

By discrediting all thinking, including their own, atheists cut their own throats philosophically. Their view of ultimate reality is therefore self-refuting. Another shorter and simpler way of summarizing Lewis's argument against atheism is to point out that we do not accept the truthfulness of any statement or assertion if it can be shown to be the result of purely irrational causes, like a brain tumour or some emotional crisis. But if atheism is true, *all* our thoughts and chains of reasoning, including, again, our belief in the rules of logic, have a purely non-rational physical cause; therefore we have no reason to believe in their truthfulness, including that of atheism.

The disbelievers in God have sawn off the branch on which they were sitting. Their conclusions are no more credible or meaningful than the print out from an un-programmed computer. The damning admission of a prominent atheist and Marxist scientist ironically enough, shows that recognition of this central truth is not limited to Christian philosophers and thinkers like Lewis.

Many years ago, J.B.S. Haldane, a Marxist scientist and one of Britain's most prominent

20th century atheists, also recognized the logical difficulty of trying to provide a purely reductionist physical explanation of human consciousness and thought. Writing in 1928, he admitted: *"If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motion of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. They may be sound chemically, but that does not make them sound logically. And hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms."*<sup>4</sup>

### Implications

This admission, of course, radically undermines the philosophical credibility of the entire 'worldview' of scientific atheism: the idea that some unguided process of cosmic and biological 'evolution' can offer a complete and satisfactory explanation of the existence of life and the universe, as well as providing an objective basis for moral values. It cannot in fact do so, because all scientific experimentation and knowledge involves that very process of logical reasoning whose existence and reliability cannot be accounted for on atheistic assumptions.

That is why it is a fallacy to argue, as so many atheists do, that the natural sciences – the systematic study of physical Nature – provide a truer and more objective source of knowledge about our world and ourselves than 'Religion'.

### Problem of evil

All this brings me back to the argument against God arising from the problem of evil. If we are only the accidental inhabitants of a random and purposeless universe, and cannot therefore attach any ultimate meaning, truth, or significance to our thoughts and lives, how can we justify all our moral indignation about evil and suffering, and use that as a stick with which to beat religious faith? You may protest, in response to this question, that whether or not we are created beings or just biological accidents, is beside the point, since we can simply choose to value life and attach meaning to our existence. Then, if we do that, the value of life, and respect for it, becomes an entirely objective non-religious foundation for our moral convictions and our hatred of evil. And this in turn means, you may argue, that it isn't actually irrational for atheists to get angry about the pain and injustice they see all around them, and to reject belief in God on that basis.

### Feelings?

But this objection misses the point by evading the following dilemma. Should valuing and respecting life be regarded as a self-evident moral obligation, a 'truth' everyone must acknowledge and a 'law' everyone should obey? Or is it just a subjective expression of our feelings? If it is the former, as most people rightly believe, surely that does suggest that our minds and thoughts have a connection with some spiritual Reality outside ourselves and the material universe. Otherwise there is no escape, as we have seen, from the physically deterministic self-destructive logic of atheism.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed forensic philosophical restatement and defence of C.S. Lewis's argument, see, for instance, Victor Reppert, C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defence of the Argument from Reason, (InterVarsity Press, USA, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964), Professor of Biometry at University College, London, in Possible Worlds (1928), p.220.

## Objective moral standard

In other words, you cannot demonstrate the 'wrongness' of any evil thought or act unless the moral standard to which you appeal when making that judgment has an eternal and objective character whose presence in our lives cannot really be accounted for, if nothing exists except physical matter, space, and time.

If you think about it, an eternal standard of right and wrong, and the sense of moral obligation it generates, has a strangely transcendent quality, because it is independent of time, place, culture, social class, and even physical existence. For example, it remains somehow eternally true that raping a woman, torturing a child, or enslaving another human being, are evil acts deserving punishment, whether we are rich or poor, live or die, and regardless of where we come from and what culture we share. Even if our universe and all its forms of life came to an end tomorrow, the 'truthfulness' of these moral assertions would remain unchanged, their moral 'light' undimmed. 'Truth' would still somehow remain Truth, and 'Justice' Justice, even if nobody were left alive to acknowledge it.

*the certainty of  
our convictions*

## Learning from Plato

Consequently, if we are to take our moral convictions seriously, and therefore justify our indignation about the sad state of so much of our world, we must first recognize that 'Truth' and 'Goodness' are permanent, unchanging and ultimate categories to which we somehow owe unconditional allegiance, as Plato famously believed.

But if this is the case, their eternal, transcendent, and imperative character suggests that the Moral Law 'written on our hearts' is in some sense Divine.

It is obvious, that our awareness of truth and goodness, right and wrong, is inseparably connected with our minds and wills, since we 'grasp' these concepts and respond to them with our intellect. Given that fact, it seems reasonable to conclude that the apparently divine character and status of the Moral Law is also related in some sense to an eternal Divine Intelligence. In other words, truth and goodness are rooted in God and express His essential and changeless Nature. Or to put it another way, God is not just our Creator, but also goodness, truth, love, (and beauty) personified, and therefore the eternal and objective source of all that is precious in the world and in human existence.

*an eternal  
standard of right  
and wrong*

## The liberating truth

In the end, then, we discover the wonderful and liberating truth that we need not despair when our minds are overwhelmed, and our hearts sickened, by the all the evil and suffering in the world. The very fact that we react so strongly and passionately against cruelty, lies, and injustice, and wish to heal the sick, protect the innocent, and comfort the bereaved, is powerful evidence that we are not, after all, biological robots adrift without hope in a meaningless universe.

Rather, the certainty of our convictions and the intensity of our feelings reveal the presence within us of an Inner Light that not only illuminates our minds and softens our hearts, but also challenges us to acknowledge its Divine Source and co-operate in the struggle to put our world to rights, starting with our own selves. To quote Lewis again: *"The defiance of the good atheist hurled at an apparently ruthless and idiotic cosmos is really an unconscious homage to something in or behind that cosmos which he recognizes as infinitely valuable and authoritative: for if mercy and justice were really only private whims of his own with no objective and impersonal roots, and if he realized this, he could not go on being indignant. The fact that he arraigns heaven itself for disregarding them means that at some level of his mind he knows they are enthroned in a higher heaven still."*<sup>5</sup>

*the presence  
within us of an  
Inner Light*

Philip Vander Elst read philosophy and politics at Oxford, is a freelance writer and lecturer, and his publications include **C.S. Lewis: a short introduction** and **Libertarianism: a Christian critique**.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, 'De Futilitate' [On Futility], an address given at Magdalen College, Oxford during the Second World War, Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p.680.

## CATHOLIC HISTORY WALKS: LONDON

### July and August 2019

#### Southwark and the City

Sunday 7th July, 2pm. A walk along the river Thames, and over London Bridge to the birth place of Bl John Henry Newman near the Bank of England. Meet at Church of the Most Precious Blood, O'Meara Street, SE1 1TD. Nearest Tube: London Bridge or Borough.

#### Islington

Tuesday 9th July, 6.30pm. Enjoy this corner of London, with its history, and links to Charles Dickens, and a forgotten Catholic heroine. Meet at St John the Divine Church, Duncan Terrace, Islington London N1 8AL. Nearest Tube: Angel.

#### Westminster

Wednesday 10th July, 6.30pm. Find out why St James' Park is so named. Learn the story of St Edward the Confessor and the monks at Thorney Island, and see the place where St Thomas More was tried. Meet at Westminster Cathedral. Nearest Tube: Victoria.

#### Westminster

Monday 15th July, 3pm. As July 10th

#### Richmond

Wednesday, 24th July, 7pm. From Richmond, with its varied Tudor history, we walk along the river to Grey Court House, the childhood home of Bl John Henry Newman. Meet at St Elizabeth's Church, The Vineyard, Richmond, TW10 6AQ. Nearest station, tube, and overground: Richmond.

#### Richmond

Sunday, 28th July, 3pm. As July 24th

#### Jam, Cakes, History, Heritage, Evangelisation

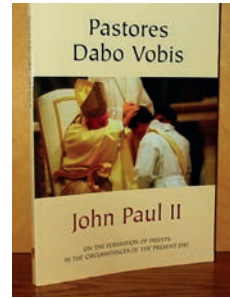
9th to 11th August. A weekend in Walsingham with our lead guide, Joanna Bogle, exploring Catholic culture and history, and how to use it to evangelise. For more details email [dowryhouse@walsingham.org.uk](mailto:dowryhouse@walsingham.org.uk)

<http://www.dowryhouse.org.uk/events-listing/jam-cakes-history-heritage-and-evangelisation/>

<http://www.catholichistorywalks.com>

# Celibacy and The Pan-Amazon Synod

Pastor Ignotus



Debates about clerical celibacy are nothing new. There have been many arguments and challenges over the centuries. It is commonly asserted that celibacy is a “medieval” innovation, imposed on Catholic priests only a thousand years ago. In fact, scholarly studies have demonstrated that, in essence, it can be traced back to apostolic times.<sup>1</sup>

There is record of married priests and bishops in the earliest centuries, however it is frequently overlooked that those who served at the altar were also bound to observe perpetual sexual abstinence. This is what lies behind St. Paul’s writing that a bishop should be the “husband of one wife” (1Timothy 3:2). It does not mean that candidates for the episcopacy in the first generations of the Church were obliged to be married men, but they must not have remarried if they had been widowed. A second marriage might indicate inability to embrace the abstinence expected of bishops after ordination.

*chastity as  
consecration to  
Mission*

The oldest ecclesiastical canons specifying celibacy for bishops, priests and deacons date from the late third and early fourth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Getting married at all after ordination was forbidden for priests on pain of laicisation by very first canon of the Council of Neo-Caesarea (314 or 315 AD). The Council of Nicea (325 AD), aside from its weighty doctrinal considerations, forbade clergy from sharing private living quarters with any female “except only a mother, or sister, or aunt, or such persons only as are beyond all suspicion”.

## Early texts

Far from such provisions being an innovation, these early texts are clearly aimed at correcting lapses from an already established practice. When the heretical Nestorian church in Persia abolished celibacy at the end the fifth century they openly acknowledged they were derogating from received order. The antiquity and ubiquity of this norm is underlined by the fact that Eastern orthodox churches, which do allow marriage before priestly ordination, still forbid it afterwards and do not allow married bishops at all, which is why their bishops are all monks.

<sup>1</sup> *Celibacy in the Early Church: The Beginnings of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West*, Stefan Heid, trans. Michael J. Miller, Ignatius Press (2000).;

Priestly celibacy in patristics and in the history of the Church, Roman Cholij, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccclergy\\_doc\\_01011993\\_chisto\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_01011993_chisto_en.html);

Christian Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, Ignatius Press (1990).

<sup>2</sup> They come from the regional synod of Elvira in modern day Spain (between 295 and 302 AD) and the First Council of Arles in what is now France (314 AD), which was the first organised council of the Western church just a year after the legalisation of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

There are numerous Church fathers who affirm that the demand of perpetual continence for those in holy orders goes back to the Apostles themselves. The first papal decree on the subject is from 385 AD. Later councils and popes passed similar edicts, and celibacy in the sense of not marrying at all became the preferred option for ensuring clerical chastity in the West. The decree of the Second Lateran Council in 1139 AD is the most well-known legislation for Latin rite priests, however it should be clear that this was not something novel but simply the reaffirmation and formalisation of a long-standing and well attested tradition.

## Spiritual motives

These are the facts of the matter, but what are the spiritual motives for clerical celibacy? We know from the Gospels that St. Peter was married—he had a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14–15)—yet his later exchange with The Lord indicates that the twelve no longer lived married lives after following him (Matthew 19:27)<sup>3</sup>. Our Lord himself spoke of those who “make themselves eunuchs *for the sake of the Kingdom of God*” (Matthew 19:1-12).

Jesus, who, of course, was and is celibate himself, told us that nobody marries in heaven (Matthew 22:30). Celibacy is, therefore, a prophetic sign of the heavenly life. As such, it is also a sign of contradiction, challenging the confusion over the meaning of love and sex in our fallen world. Edward Holloway, co-founder of Faith movement, thought that we should not concentrate on this ‘eschatological’ value of celibacy but on priests participating in Jesus’ all inclusive and all-consuming love for God’s people in this world.

“Chastity is ... a sign that sex is not love, nor an essential within love ... However, it is not as a sign that Christ recommends it to us, but as a fact of life, a fact of the highest ‘natural’ perfection of human loving. Jesus Christ never knew the use of sex, but Christ is the perfection of all human love, as He is of human nature, and no love was ever more human or natural than the love of Christ. Indeed, as Son of Man, Christ is the norm of all human love, according to its vocation. In the language of older scholastic theology, sex as erotic function is ‘accidental’ to human loving. I would call it a ‘modality’ in human love, it defines one particular vocation of love. A priest, and even more a bishop, if he will be perfect, is called by Christ to live out Christ’s perfect human love, in Christ’s perfect modality of love, through the perfection of human consecration in love.” (Holloway)<sup>4</sup>

*a renewed  
understanding of  
priesthood*

## Evangelical

St. Paul, with his deep sense of evangelical urgency, encouraged celibacy as a Christian way of life, because those who stay unmarried are “concerned about the Lord’s affairs”, whereas in marriage our “interests are divided”(1Corinthians 7:32). Yet he was also clear that this is not because marriage or sexual union is somehow sinful (1Corinthians 7:28). In fact, it is from St. Paul too that we have the highest view of marriage as a sacramental

<sup>3</sup> St. Jerome notes this tradition as early as 393 AD in *Against Jovinian*, Book 1, para. 26

<sup>4</sup> Edward Holloway, *The Theme of Priesthood*, Faith, volume 24 number 6, November/December 1992

imaging of the union between Christ and his Church (Ephesians 5:30-32).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (313 – 386 AD) linked celibacy directly to the identity and mission of Jesus. As God made flesh, he is neither the product of sexual union nor a generator of new lives through bodily marriage. He belongs to all flesh as Spouse and Life-giver. St Cyril says specifically that “*he who well fulfils the office of a priest of Jesus abstains from a wife*”<sup>5</sup> because priesthood shares directly in the celibate ministry of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church. This same thought lies behind the traditional perception that a bishop, who is deemed to possess the fullness of holy order, is ‘married’ to his diocese.

## Loving

Edward Holloway again weaves together practical and mystical themes in his typically existential and pastoral theology.

“[Celibacy] is the perfect consecration of our lives and energies to Christ and his Church. It is more than celibacy as utility, because it is the love which follows Christ with undivided mind and heart ... It is impossible to be at all times and seasons at the beck and call of Christ in his People, unless you make Him and them the total object of your worrying your work, and your loving ... You cannot have the people of God, and especially the young people coming to you at all times and seasons, with the perfect freedom of Christ, unless you are bound by a different sacramental bond to others ... We belong only to God and his People.

“The vow of celibacy does not call us to emasculation, but to emancipation ... it cannot be tied ... to the demands of any one person, even within chastity ... our loving is always tied to the demands and promptings of Christ, even when vocation calls for separation ... This is chastity as consecration to Mission, to the Church as ‘Bride’, and it redounds into our earlier concept of total consecration - ‘he who can take it, let him take it’ (Mt 19:12).”<sup>6</sup>

## Misperceptions

Although history never exactly repeats itself, popular objections to celibacy are broadly speaking the same in every era—moral failures among the clergy would be avoided by ending celibacy; it would attract more candidates and resolve problems due to lack of priests; celibacy leaves priests out of touch with family life and relationships; it is simply ‘unfair’ or even ‘unnatural’ for a man to have to stay unmarried.

These misperceptions can all be countered.<sup>7</sup> Celibacy is not the cause of sexual scandals and abolishing it would not end them, as the Church of England, for example, is finding to its own cost. Neither is there evidence that it is celibacy that discourages vocations. General loss of faith and lack of solid Christian formation are the real root of the crisis and there is good evidence that where these defects are reversed vocations

increase significantly. And the idea of celibacy being unnatural is answered by the insights discussed above. Is Jesus out of touch, frustrated in his humanity, and unable to love?

## Synod

Nevertheless, there is renewed and increasing pressure in some quarters to make celibacy optional. There have always been exceptions to the norm in the Latin Rite and there are some today, such as with convert Anglicans and in the new Ordinariates. But in these cases, as also with the permanent diaconate, the ancient rule still applies: no marriage or re-marriage after ordination. Exceptions are precisely exceptions. The 1992 Synod of Bishops, having considered the issue, concluded:

*a radically different view of life, love and happiness*

“This synod strongly reaffirms what the Latin Church and some Oriental rites require, that is that the priesthood be conferred only on those men who have received from God the gift of the vocation to celibate chastity (without prejudice to the tradition of some Oriental churches and particular cases of married clergy who convert to Catholicism, which are admitted as exceptions in Pope Paul VI’s encyclical on priestly celibacy, no. 42). The synod does not wish to leave any doubts in the mind of anyone regarding the Church’s firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin rite”.<sup>8</sup>

## St John Paul

Citing this clear commitment in his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, St. John Paul II added the key theological insight already mentioned, that ordination “configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church ... The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her”.<sup>9</sup> While acknowledging that celibacy “is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood”<sup>10</sup>, John Paul II nonetheless taught that that it “enters, so to speak, into the logic of [priestly] consecration.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite this, the subject was brought up again at the eleventh Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2005.<sup>12</sup> Lack of priests in some areas, they argued, could be solved by ordaining “*virī probati*”<sup>13</sup>, by which they meant married men from the local community. This was rejected by Pope Benedict XVI. Yet now the possibility of ordaining such *virī probati* has been put on the agenda of a forthcoming synod of South American bishops to be held in Brazil in October 2019.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992), section 29

<sup>9</sup> *Pastores dabo vobis* *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n.16

<sup>11</sup> General Audience, 17 July 1993, par.2 text in Italian: “Rientra, come s’è detto, nellalogica della consacrazione.” [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1993/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19930717.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19930717.html)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_21\\_xi-ordinaria-2005/01\\_italiano/b31\\_01.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_21_xi-ordinaria-2005/01_italiano/b31_01.html) (in Italian, see *Proposizione 11*)

<sup>13</sup> The term comes from the letter of St. Clement of Rome, to the Corinthians (c.96AD) where it simply meant tried and tested men who succeeded the first generation of bishops appointed by the Apostles.

<sup>5</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures Book 2, Chapter 12, para. 25

<sup>6</sup> Holloway, *The Theme of Priesthood*

<sup>7</sup> A useful resource for this can be found at: <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/common-misconceptions/5-arguments-against-priestly-celibacy-and-how-to-refute-them.html>

### An Agenda?

Appointments to the preparatory council of this “Pan-Amazon Synod” include Cardinal Claudio Hummes and Bishop Erwin Kräutler, both of whom advocate allowing married priests. But there is a bigger agenda behind their proposal. These married men would not become parish priests or missionaries as traditionally understood, they are the existing leaders of “basic ecclesial communities”, a pastoral model developed as part of the Liberation Theology movement, of which Hummes and Kräutler are leading proponents.

Bishop Kräutler is also an advocate of women priests along the same lines, although that is not up for discussion at the Pan-Amazon synod. The strategy is not to seek change all at once, but gradually to shift the understanding of priesthood and the nature of the Church itself, starting at the peripheries. On this model, the gifts of faith and salvation are no longer seen as coming from ‘from above’, but arising from local communities and cultures. Doctrinal and moral truth are no longer univocal and unchanging, because authority lies with individual consciences and group consciousness. And the primary focus of attention is not on the life of grace, but on liberation from social oppression.

*the key  
theological  
insight*

### The transcendence of God

Behind all this lies rejection of the transcendence of God, who is thought of as co-evolving with and within creation. Grace and truth emerge out of human experience, and Jesus of Nazareth is the highest expression (so far) of The Spirit that is immanent in the world on

its journey to producing the fully realised ‘Christ’ at the Omega Point of history. This heresy, which has been gaining ground for decades, is at the heart of the crisis of modern Christianity. Now, by seeking to ordain so-called *viriproabti* in the Amazon region, it is trying to embed itself in the fabric of the Church’s life in the hope that it will then slowly, or perhaps not so slowly, become universal.

*a tacit and  
respectful  
affirmation*

While this way of thinking may not be clearly articulated and understood everywhere, such calls to relax the general rule of celibacy easily chime with the pervasive idea that sex is essential to human loving. As already noted, celibacy is precisely a witness to a radically different view of life, love and happiness. In fact, celibacy is also a tacit and respectful affirmation that Christian marriage is a major commitment in its own right. While it is possible to combine both vocations, convert clergy often attest that this is no panacea.

### A renewed understanding

Blandly asserting that celibacy is just a disciplinary matter so it can easily change—as many do when discussing the issue—is a woefully inadequate characterisation of something which has been integral to the life of the Church from the beginning. It is true that it is a discipline not a doctrine as such, so there has been some flexibility on this as on other disciplines, especially when welcoming good men from other ecclesial bodies into full communion. But the tradition of clerical celibacy touches on and embodies profound truths which cannot be cast aside without undermining essential aspects of faith and harming the life of the Church.

*never  
outdated nor  
impossible*

### Profound truths

The answer to scandals and vocations crises is not to abolish celibacy, but to work for a renewed understanding of priesthood and better priestly formation. Undoubtedly, looking carefully at how we support our priests in spiritual and practical ways would be a very good thing too. On a wider level, we need to form our Catholic youth with fresh evangelical enthusiasm and ambition for holiness. The call to celibacy “for the sake of the kingdom of God” is never outdated nor impossible. It comes from The Lord himself. It describes his own messianic commitment, which always has been and always must be the gold standard of priestly life and identity.

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*Pastor Ignatus is a commentator on current Church events*



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# The Luminous Mysteries – meditations

*We continue our series of meditations, drawn from the works of Blessed John Henry Newman, on the Mysteries of the Rosary. These meditations have been collected together by a Sister of the Benedictine Abbey of St Cecilia on the Isle of Wight.*



## 1. The Baptism of Jesus

When Christ Himself is called a Lamb, this is but his sacred Name, taken from his gracious office; as when St John the Baptist said Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world (John 1.29), he must be taken to mean, that Our Lord does really and literally take away the world's sin, though he is called the Lamb by a figure. (SD 14:186-187)

## 2. The Wedding Feast at Cana

Such seems the connexion between the feast with which Our Lord began, and that with which he ended his ministry. Nay, may we not add without violence, that in the former feast he had in mind and intended foreshadow the latter? For what was that first miracle by which he manifested his glory in the former, but the strange and awful change of the element of water into wine? And what did He in the latter, but change the Paschal Supper and the typical Lamb into the sacrament of his atoning sacrifice, and the creatures of bread and wine into the verities of his most precious Body and Blood? He Began his ministry with a miracle. He ended it with a greater. (SD:37-38)

## 3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom and the Call to Conversion.

I am in myself nothing but a sinner, a man of unclean lips and earthly heart. I am not worthy to enter into His presence. I am not worthy of the least of all his mercies. I know he is all-holy yet I come before him.; I place myself under his pure and piercing eyes, which look me through and through and discern every trace and every motion of evil within me. Why do I do so? First of all, for this reason. To whom should I go? What can I do better? Who is there in the whole world that can help me? Who that will care for me, and pity me, or have any kind thought of me, if I cannot obtain it of Him? I know He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; but I know again that He is all-merciful and that He so sincerely desires my salvation that He has died for me. (PS v. 54)

## 4. The Transfiguration

The Transfiguration is of a doctrinal nature, being nothing less than a figurative exposition of a blessed truth, a vision of the glorious Kingdom which he set up on the earth on his coming. He said to his Apostles *I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God.* (Matt 16.28) Then, *after six days, Jesus taketh Peter James AND John his brother, and bringeth them into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them* (Matt 17.1 etc)... Such is the Kingdom of God; Christ the centre of it, His glory the light of it, the Just made perfect his companions, and the Apostles his witnesses to their brethren. (PS iii,18,265-66).

## 5. The Institution of the Holy Eucharist

When He ascended into the Mount, *His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light* (Matt. 17.2). Such is the glorious presence which faith sees in the Holy Communion., though everything looks as usual to the natural man. Not gold or precious stones, pearls of great price, or gold of Ophir, are to the eye of faith so radiant as those lowly elements which He, the Highest, is pleased to make the means of conveying to our hearts and bodies His own gracious self. (PS v. :148).

## Pilgrimage

A 'Pilgrimage' is a collective noun  
For a mass, a crowd, a group, a line  
Or a straggle of pilgrims.  
Together we flow like a current  
From here, where God is  
To there, where God is.

As we go, we listen, talk,  
Chant, sing, pray, sweat and limp.  
Just as we have set ourselves apart  
From our usual lives  
So the path that we tread  
Is a little to the side of time.  
We age by decades and back again  
By our own calendar of walking and water stops.

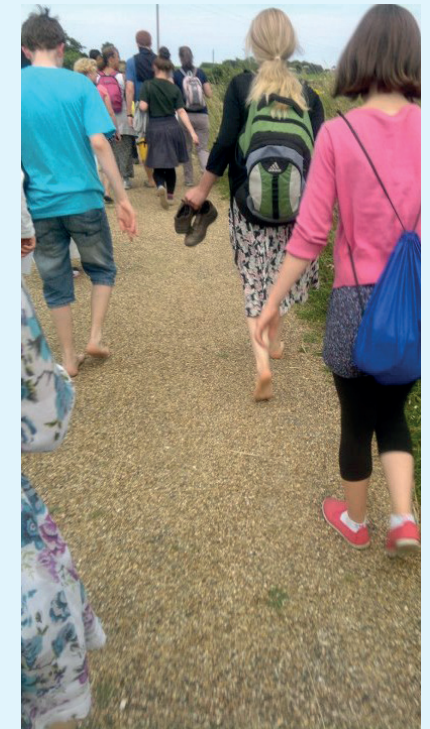
Together we send up a strong incense  
Of hopefulness, helpfulness,  
Tired feet and patience.  
On pilgrimage we remember that shared food  
Nourishes more than the body  
And whoever ministers to your feet  
Touches your soul.  
Jesus knew this  
And on it He based his miracles of love.

Disbanding is like that end of term mix  
Of euphoria and regret  
But still we travel on  
From God who never says goodbye  
To God who waits for us.

**Annette Turner**

***The annual John Paul II Pilgrimage for the New Evangelisation, organised by the Dominican Sisters of St Joseph, takes place each July, walking to Walsingham.  
For information contact:***

***St Dominic's Priory, Shirley Holms Road, Lymington, Hants. SO41 8NH.  
Telephone 01590 681874***



## Interview

# A garden, a book – and a lot of hard work

Joanna Bogle meets Malcolm and Felicity Surridge



Malcolm Surridge is on his knees his wife Felicity alongside. A statue of Our Lady gazes serenely down on them both.

But they are not at prayer. This is a Mary Garden, created by the Surridges at their parish church in the London suburbs, and they are busy weeding, and planning for the next season's shrubs and flowers.

The garden at St Joseph's church in New Malden, Surrey, is a local focal point, a revival of a Medieval tradition, an unusual form of evangelisation – and the subject of a new book.

*A Garden for Mary*, published by Gracewing, is the result of many years of scholarly research, and also practical, hands-on experience.

The research centres on the fact that most of our best-known flowers in Britain have Marian names. Over the years these have been forgotten – or sometimes deliberately obliterated – but there is now a great interest in reviving them. Lilies of the Valley were “Our Lady's tears”, and irises “Mary's sword of sorrow”, recalling Simeon's prophesy. Lavender was “Our Lady's drying bush” and legend told of Mary drying the Christ-child's baby clothes on lavender bushes on the Flight into Egypt. The ox-eye daisy was “Mary's star” and fox-gloves were “Mary's gloves”.

“Finding out the old names, and the qualities associated with them, was a real journey of discovery” said Felicity. “And it made me realise the absolutely central place that Mary once had in English life and culture – everyday life, community life, family life.”

“It's time to reclaim all this. And we have found that there is a tremendous interest. The Mary Garden has become a real focal point locally: people love to drop in, to show it all to their children, and sometimes to leave notes asking for prayers – or their own little posy as a tribute at the base of Mary's statue.”



The project began with a rather weathered statue on a plinth in the small area alongside the church, facing on to the busy Kingston Road. There is a bus-stop nearby, and a low wall – it's a place where people naturally gather. There was a rather scrubby lawn and a path. With the support and encouragement of the parish priest, Father Peter Edwards – to whom the resulting book has been dedicated – and parishioners, the Surridges worked to turn all this into a thriving garden.



Plants, flowers and bushes, all with neat small plaques giving their original Marian names – have been donated by parishioners. It has proved an attractive way of commemorating family members or giving thanks for some special blessing received.

But it has all meant – and continues to mean – hard work.

“This isn't a project that just needed to be started and then left to grow” Malcolm points out, frowning slightly at a tufted bit of lawn that has missed the mower. “You have to keep doing it – there's no time when you can be slack. It's not just weeding, either – some bits have had to be dug over and re-planted.” His illustrations of the various flowers make the book extremely attractive, and there is also much practical advice on how to create a garden from scratch, with useful details and notes.

## Message

Practicality is part of the message. In Catholic tradition, Mary has been associated with healing, and with sanctifying domestic life. Herbs that carry her name are useful ones. The old name for thyme is “Our Lady's humility” and lemon-balm was “Sweet Mary”.

At St Joseph's, the statue of Mary needed considerable repair – Malcolm tackled the job – and the maintenance of the garden has meant year-round attention. But the project has brought interest from overseas, and has also become an unusual form of evangelisation.



"People who travel regularly on the 131 bus – which stops just outside the church – come to know the garden and see its different flowers in the different seasons. We get nice comments about it all. It's a way of communicating the Faith without being pushy – it's not about leaflets, or arguing. But people see Mary, and get the message."

### Welcoming

St Joseph's is a busy parish and the current priest, Fr Uche, presides over a congregation some 1000-strong. The Mary Garden conveys an accurate message of a welcoming church. It's also an example of a project that brings together old and new – the church itself is red-brick, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the bond with Medieval England is not like that of ancient abbey ruins or even a 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic-revival building.

"A Mary garden isn't about nostalgia" says Felicity, dusting off her hands and reaching for another tool to neaten the flower-bed. "It's a hands-on way of communicating the faith, and co-operating with God to make something beautiful. I'd like to think that our book will encourage lots of people to do that."

*Joanna Bogle is editor of FAITH magazine and A Garden for Mary is £9.99p, Gracewing Publishing.*

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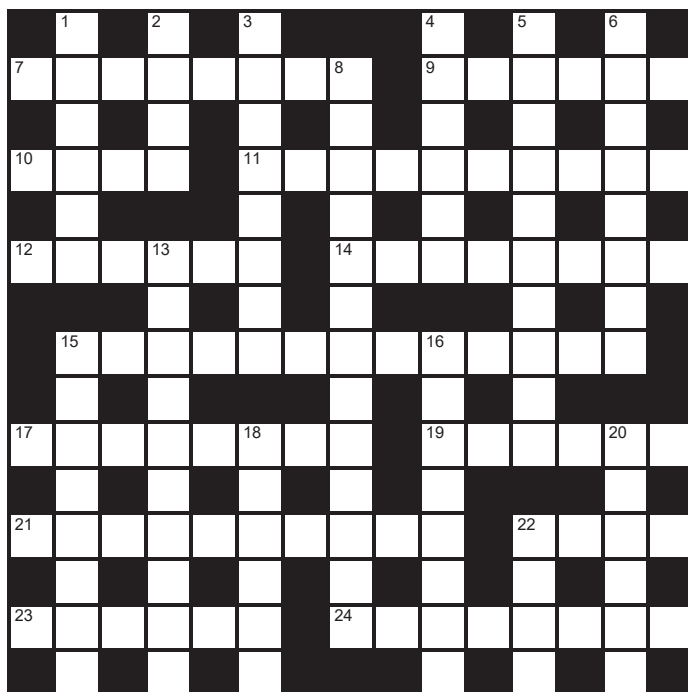
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## CROSSWORD 17 by Aurora Borealis



We invite you complete this crossword. The clues in bold involve general religious knowledge. The others are cryptic clues with secular answers.

A prize will go to the sender of the first correct solution opened from all those received by July 31st 2019. Entries may be the original page or a photocopy and should be sent to 45, East St.Helen Street, Abingdon Oxon, OX 14 5EE. Please include your full postal address.

The winner of crossword 15 is JT of Kent who receives a book prize.

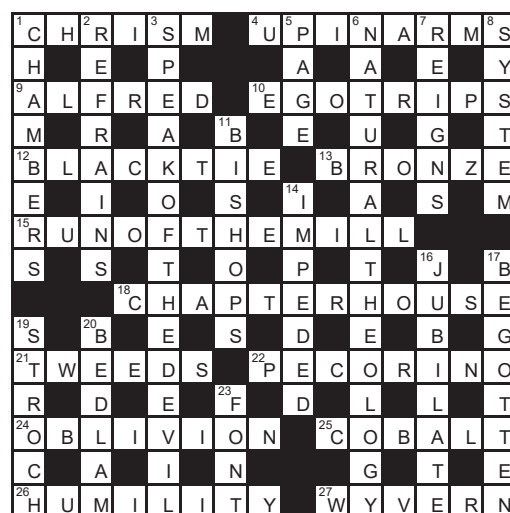
### Across

7. Reserve seeds containing Ecstasy and they make a loud noise! (8)
9. Find bandit where the French over time get first win (6)
10. In a daze, all confused we have enthusiasm (4)
- 11. Government of the Church by the successors of the apostles (10)**
12. Suit came originally from seamstress Paul and David expressly suggested (6)
14. Hind parts of wombat, koala and platypus have passion for southern island (8)
- 15. Formerly the fifth Sunday in Lent (7,6)**
17. Programme finishes early and needs bishop to make a pudding (8)
19. About twice a day peruse something again (6)
- 21. The Order of Preachers (10)**
22. Read here a section of sham book (4)
- 23. Venerable monk from Jarrow (2,4)**
24. A mixture of sea and sun in the first quarter of December makes a good ballerina (8)

### Down

1. Fabricate foundation, perhaps (4,2)
2. Ah, my friend! A real gem! (4)
3. Not before French start to show keen interest will there be a party (5,3)
4. That which cries out "Five old lollies!"(6)
5. For help with climbing, snake goes after good man with odd deep line (10)
- 6. The state of being holy (8)**

8. Going round panel, from door to door it goes (8,5)
9. "Caveat Emptor" - record the French one month before queen (10)
15. Port takes half of supply, with flier around middle of January (8)
16. Odd supper is result of gin being spilt causing mutiny (8)
18. Go on horseback between Britain and Sweden to find wives (6)
- 20. Woman in charge of a convent or abbey (6)**
22. This really is the last word! (4)

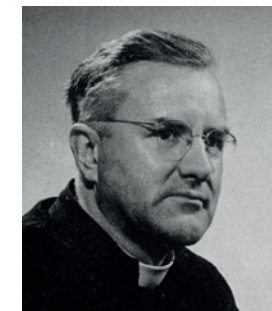


Solution crossword 16.

Holloway on...

## Conscience and the Natural Law Part I

EDWARD HOLLOWAY



It is impossible to treat of "conscience" without coming at once into the domain of *the Natural Law*. Yet, this expression is straightaway a great "turn off", and many read no further when mention is made of "the Natural Law". This is not because of modern controversies in faith and morals which impinge upon the subject. It is because the treatment of the subject, the very concept itself, is so often presented as appallingly dry and hopelessly abstract. One will try to avoid that approach, and consequently the great turn off, while admitting that once again an article is being attempted at the instigation of young theologians. To their needs we try to defer, because their needs are urgent. At the same time, there is no reason why the subject of conscience in relation to the abstract sounding "Natural Law" should be a turn off for everyone else.

*we are made substantially and essentially to the image of God*

Scholastic manuals, whether ancient or modern, do tend to be but little related to the supreme thing which the intelligent Catholic, and Catholic student, wants to know about - the *living root* of conscience, in its relationship to the living and loving God. St. Augustine is excellent on the Natural Law, because whether you agree with him or not, he writes in all topics, from the real, the existential, the approach from real life. He does tend to be very diffuse. St. Thomas Aquinas, although he writes in the essentialist, rather dry shorthand of the medieval schoolmen, is magnificent on the whole theme of the Natural Law.

### Law of Life and Being

Conscience is a judgement, even when it is a vague, implicit judgement - a confused feeling of "not being quite happy about all this". It is a judgement about right and wrong, good and evil, perfect and imperfect, and it is not abstract at all. It goes to the root of our own being, and into the depths of our relationship in life, and in prayer, to God. In the higher degrees of application, it may be a judgement about God loved with more perfect, or less perfect, communion - nothing concerning "sin" at all. This inner judgement which brings happiness or unease may be about the "inspirations" of God, i.e., deeper insights into truth or charity carried out, or refused, in our day to day spiritual life.

Whether the judgement is about basic and binding good and true, or about the loyalty

to God of perfect friendship, *conscience* is always the recognition of a law of life and being. From the Ten Commandments level of “must” to the highest level of “could” in the generous saint, this judgement at once intellectual and emotional rises through grace into communion with the Eternal Law and the Persons of that lawgiver. For the Eternal Law is spoken not in code, but in the being of Him who said:- “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Or again from John: “I am the Light of the world, he who follows me walks not in darkness but has the Light of life” (John 8:12). The light of the spiritual creation is at once transcendent and outside its being and, again through grace and love, immanent to its being. It is then both the law of the soul, and the “draw” upon man (John 6:44) implicit in the recognition that is “conscience”.

*the whole theme of the Natural Law*

### The Spirit that fills the Earth

Theologians in their manuals usually address the Natural Law from the creation of mankind, and that recognition of God’s law in the powers of the spirit which we call the voice of conscience. This is a pity, and because of it they miss a lot of points. Natural Law begins with what in FAITH is so often called *The Unity-Law of Control and Direction*, the mutual ministry of one being upon another which holds in balance the equation of creation. From the beginning, in its first explosion, matter-energy is built upon a *Natural Law* of action and reaction to development and fulfilment. Through it comes the overall ascent of being in Evolution itself. This Law prompts and mutates to higher forms of being, and ultimately to life, and the body of man. It is quintessentially the Law of the good and the true: only through this Law are all natures framed, and they all seek from God their life and fulfilment in due season. Where there is *due season* there is the Law of Nature, i.e., the Natural Law.

This is the law by which natures below man are framed, minister, and are ministered to within Nature, the harmonics of what Augustine and Aquinas called “the Universal Law”, the providence of God. These older masters do glimpse the majesty of that Unity-Law which holds all things in balance under the Law of the good and the true, until it climaxes in the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. They do not develop it. Today we could do better on a larger canvas than theirs. A lovely line in the book of Wisdom (Wis. 1:7), aptly chosen for the Entrance Antiphon of Pentecost Sunday, sums up what is seeking to be said:- “*The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole earth, and that (orb) which contains all things has knowledge of his voice*”.

### Seeking the Good and True

In Him we live and are and have our being. What the ancients called God’s *providence* was the mediation to matter, and in the material order, of the Natural Law. It is the seeking for one’s proper good and true, in the harmony of wise order, from the roots of one’s being. It is also the *finding* of this harmonic law of creation in the natural environment within which *one lives and moves and has one’s being*; for the merely material (and *pace* Rahner, material life cannot “transcend” itself directly into the spiritual). It is deterministic, environmental law. Life below man is not reasoning, but it is reasonably

ruled. Therefore if man was created by a process of Evolution according to the body, all through long ages of the ascent of the brain, Nature in him had sought its good and true, its Natural Law, its times and its seasons in innocence and due obedience. When the spirit was created into the final mutation within the universal order - the brain that needed the spirit to be intelligible even as brain, - man already had knowledge of the Natural Law. Nature in man brought a good inheritance to the soul.

*God is the just judge, and the judge of all that exists*

When man is made, it is no longer true that it is the Natural Law immanent within the environment of matter in which man *lives and moves and has his being*. That law of determinism passes now under the control of the soul, which is like a personal god within man, although that “god” can, as free, disobey the eternal God. It is not exactly true that man overpasses the Natural Law within matter. That Law is synthesized in him with the law of the spirit, just as man’s being is matter and spirit in synthesis. The spirit needs its own law of life and being, which is the thrilling meaning of St. Paul to the Athenians when he says of God: “*in Him we live, and move, and have our being*” (Acts 17:28). God himself is the Environmental Law of life and fulfilment for man. Immediately, we begin to see from afar how the Natural Law, the basic law of man’s nature and his good and true in any order, is about to pass into the order of grace and divinization and culminate through priest, prophet, and Old Covenant, into the Covenant of communion of spirit and of flesh with the Being of God Incarnate. This is the climax of the law of life and being which was spawned in the flash of Creation.

### Conscience a Positive Judgement

Man, through his spiritual soul, the principle in us all of reflective knowledge and free will, has direct knowledge of good and of evil. He knows without demonstration that “good must be sought and evil be avoided”. This is the root of conscience. All know this, because we are made substantially and essentially to the image of God. In God, being, good, and true, are convertible terms because supreme spiritual reality cannot be thought of or defined except as the all-wise, the all-good, and the all-perfect. Wisdom and truth and good define the very concept of God and the actual reality of God. The soul is simple in its nature, so within us, in the synthesis of matter and spirit which is man, the recognition of good and evil, and the power to judge of good and evil, are of the simple nature of the soul. This is the root of conscience in us all.

God is the just judge, and the judge of all that exists, simply because in Him, the true, the good, and his reality itself are all one thing, one living, non-abstract perfection of being: “*Actus Purus*”, i.e., Being God. Conscience in our own being, at the root of our being, is also a judgement proceeding from the simple root of the spirit, because just as God cannot be conceived except as defined through the good and the true, so also no being created to God’s substantial likeness can exist without the habit, i.e., inner capacity, to know the true and the good and to distinguish good from evil. That is why God judges us, and we live in holy, *i.e. filial*, fear of his judgements; that is why willing and unwilling we judge ourselves, - and with prudence, and not to passing of sentence, we judge others. We have power to judge, because we have power to discern.

*direct knowledge of good and of evil*

## Natural Law as Ministry of Well-Being

Pleasure and pain are simple judgements of animal organism concerning a good to be sought, or an evil to be fled from. What is physical in man concurs with the judgement of the soul concerning good and evil. So when conscience “gnaws” us, we sense a response jointly in body and in soul to evil done, to the lie lived. But, as earlier said, the body through its history and pedigree has had knowledge of the Natural Law. Of its own nature the flesh cooperates with the spirit in the judgement of conscience.

The Natural Law as it applies to the body of man, teaches us that all organs must work together perfectly for the good of the whole. If there is excess or defect in any operation or secretion, there

is disease. The same principle applies to the power of the spirit to judge *the due proportion*, the “organic” relationship so to speak, of pleasure to function, and to overall meaning in the right and wrong of life.

*Conscience is  
a judgement of  
conformity to God's  
law*

## Our very spiritual nature

Thus by our very spiritual nature we can, and must, judge that eating for its own sake, alcohol in excess, the pleasures of sense, including the sexual, unrelated to meaning and ministry ... that these things are “wrong” because the whole point of Natural Law is that it is the Law of the wise, proportionate, and fulfilling in every order of being. What is true of the internal workings of the human body upon itself is true of the proportion, the “providence” which governs our seeking, or acceptance, of pleasures in relation to the meaning and ministry which Nature itself has placed upon them. In all aspects and relationships, the Natural Law is the recognition of that law of life and being by which our reality is constituted in its integrity, and in the governance of its fulfilment,

## Sin as Disaster Natural and Supernatural

Sin, the power to rebel against a law of life upon which one is made, and over which one is *not* the master, destroys the harmony of man's nature, both unto God, and unto the balance and due proportion of his own psyche or psychological make-up. The basis of sin is self-adoration. Thus every power of the spirit, especially of the intellect is bent to self-righteousness, self-assertion, *self*-opinion. Alas, we have no self-righteousness; the measure of our righteousness is the Eternal Word, the Logos, the mind of God. The root of sin as arrogance, self-adoration as our natural end and law, is indicated with precision in Genesis, in the temptation of Adam and Eve: “You will not die, the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, you will be like gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). In other words, you are able to do as you like, accountable to yourselves alone. God is accountable to himself alone. God is self-adoration, because God is the ontological measure of all good, of all laws of natural fulfilment. God is *the Law*, by definition of his reality; we are not, nor any angel, nor anything created whatever.

## Original Sin, the Interior Wound

The presence and power of the soul is godlike to the flesh within man's being. The effect of the very first sin is to bring an imposed “law of disobedience” into the flesh and the psyche of man. We cannot now treat of it. St. Paul touches profoundly upon it in the Letter to the Romans, and St. Augustine treats magnificently of it especially in his works against the Pelagians. The Church, unlike a certain modern Jesuit, did not find in Augustine “a flawed genius” but one who expounded clearly, and in detail, what was her doctrine of Original Sin. Augustine expounded, and Aquinas accepted without demur, the effects of concupiscence which follow the loss of original gracious communion with God: addiction to passion for its own sake, the jangling disarray of all our pleasure principles, of which we are sadly aware. Original Sin itself is not concupiscence as disobedience to wisdom. Original Sin is the interior wound, the existence of a principle of intrinsic disobedience of nature to God, by which we lose the immanent justification of grace, and even when redeemed, are unable to ascend in holiness to God in a straight line.

## Natural Law and Positive Divine Law

Conscience is a judgement of conformity to God's law, whether concerning the basic use and proportion of our being, and its pleasures of flesh and spirit, or whether it concerns the measure of the justice and charity we owe to God and our neighbour. The effect of sin is to confuse and coarsen the judgement of the spirit, but sin can never destroy its basic capability. Social pressure, social evil (and guilt in society is *not* Original Sin, either as fact, or as inheritance), passion and the example of others, all these can deeply wound the judgement of conscience. It is imperative for us fallen men that God should reveal, and in revealing underline the perspective of conscience. It is like putting correct lenses to very disordered eyes. St. Augustine is precise upon this: “*so that men could not claim that the law was uncertain, God wrote on the Tablets of the Law what men would not read in their hearts. Assuredly these commandments were written there, but men did not want to read them there. So God thrust them under their very eyes, that they might be constrained to see them also in their consciences. At the voice of God moving in upon them from without, men as it were fled to their inner being, finding the same testimony*”. (Ennarr. in. Ps. 57. n.1.)

*The effect of sin  
is to confuse  
and coarsen the  
judgement of the  
spirit*

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*This is the first half of the Editorial for the January/February 1991 issue of FAITH magazine. Part II will be published in our next issue.*

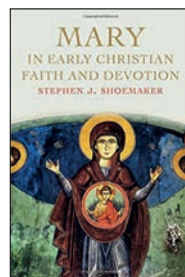


# How the early Christians venerated Mary

*Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion*

by Stephen J. Shoemaker, Yale University Press, 289pp, £21.18

reviewed by Guy de Gaynesford



There are many studies, readily available, of how the four key Marian dogmas of the Church developed through the period of the early Church. There is, however, a lamentable lack of research into the growth of Marian devotion and piety during these centuries. This is explained in various ways, not least because popular piety does not leave behind it a well-defined body of evidence, and because what written evidence has survived from this period was focussed on the more pressing need to explain and defend theological doctrine rather than cataloguing the temperature of pious devotions.

### The faithful's devotion

This dearth of patristic witness, and an ideological conviction in the minds of some more recent scholars who have regarded any devotional attachment to the Blessed Virgin as a sign of deviant papistry in the Early Church, has led scholars, as Shoemaker acknowledges judiciously, to overlook or even to dismiss the indicators of a well-established cult of the Blessed Virgin by the year 400 AD – and, having written off the evidence as irrelevant (or unrepresentative), to claim that the Faithful demonstrated no devotion to Our Lady prior to the declaration of the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD that Mary was rightfully to be called *Theotokos*. Shoemaker sets himself the task of establishing how far

from reality this academic consensus can be shown to be: he calls upon his many years of research into early Christian texts concerning the Mother of God, and presents this, his most recent book, as the natural successor to his 2002 work *the Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*.

### Before the Council of Ephesus

In the absence of published works of piety (a Third-Century version of *True Devotion to Mary* would have been handy!), evidence for a growing cult to the Blessed Virgin will be found somewhat obliquely. There is, for instance, Emperor Julian the Apostate's revealing complaint, made in 362 AD, that the Christians of his time simply would not cease calling Mary the *Theotokos*, or the evidence of Churches built in honour of the Virgin in the decades preceding the Council of Ephesus (in Ephesus itself, as well as outside Bethlehem), indicating that the cult of Our Lady was visible and publicly endorsed. More significant are the texts Shoemaker analyses for what they reveal about the Marian cult. The earliest papyrus text of the prayer *Sub Tuum Praesidium* is dated to the late Third Century and, tellingly, is written in the plural ("despise not our petitions"), suggestive of public, communal, recitation. Its Egyptian origin connects it with the so-called "Anaphora of Egyptian Basil", dated to the early Fourth

Century, in which the congregation is called to invoke the prayers and mercy of "the holy and glorious Mary, the *Theotokos*".

### A 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Mariancentric text

Shoemaker argues that the evidence reveals "a remarkably advanced level of devotion" (p192) to Our Lady by 400 AD. Foremost in his presentation is witness evidence from the celebration of the Church's formal liturgy, in which Bishops and their clergy took prominent part. Thus, for instance, the homilies of St Gregory Nazianzen and St Gregory of Nyssa indicate not only their own personal devotion to the Virgin but also clear evidence of the establishment of liturgical feasts of Our Lady, in Constantinople itself, by 379 AD. St Gregory Nazianzen records his participation in extra-liturgical Marian events, in which apparitions of Our Lady were common. Many will be familiar with the Mariancentric text of the Second-Century *Protoevangelium of James* but its importance here is not in its record of Marian doctrines but in its popularity: not only do we have evidence that it was known and loved throughout the Christian East, but we also know that it was frequently read in the celebration of the Eucharist.

### Evidence of the cult of the Virgin

Most significant, however, is the *Six Books Dormition Apocryphon* – a Greek translation of a Palestinian text, dated to the mid Fourth Century and heavily influential in Arabic and Ethiopian Christian circles of the following several hundred years. Not only does the text speak of the Virgin receiving veneration (during her lifetime) from the Apostles, from Christian disciples and even from the Roman Governor of Judaea, but of her being the focus of the devotion of the angels, of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament, of King David and the saints of heaven following her assumption – she

is welcomed by them, who bow before her and incense her. She is portrayed as the foremost intercessor – the Apostles themselves request her, as she lies dying, to pray for God's mercy on them, and for a blessing for the entire world: Christ replies to her prayers "Everything you have said to me I will do to please you; and I will show mercy to everyone who calls upon your name." (p138).

### Visions and liturgies

Very wisely, Shoemaker does not get embroiled in a historical-critical debate on whether these events are historical or fictional: he argues that their presence in a Fourth Century document establishes beyond reasonable doubt that the cult of the Virgin not only as the Divine Mother, or as a pattern of holiness or discipleship, but as privileged intercessor (whose prayers are considered more effective even than the Apostles) was in full bloom by the mid Fourth Century. The same text has St John the Evangelist appear in a vision to a group of monks from Mt Sinai, and require that they establish three annual liturgical commemorations of Our Lady – after the feast of the Nativity, in May, and in mid-August: once again, the relevance of the passage is not the reliability of the story of the vision, but that it reveals that Fourth Century Egypt was entirely familiar with the liturgical celebration of the cult of Mary within the Church's formal liturgy. It is most likely that these feasts are those to which St Athanasius refers in his letters to Epictetus, and to Maximus, in 370 AD.

### Recent discovery

Perhaps the most definitive indicator of widespread, well-established, fully-authorised, and publicly-celebrated veneration of the Blessed Virgin is found in the recently-discovered *Tropologion* of Jerusalem, a collection of hymns for

the celebration of the Morning Office, Evening Office and Eucharist, many of which date from the Fourth Century. They were widely known, not restricted to use in Jerusalem (one is quoted in a sermon delivered in Constantinople by the priest Proclus in 430 AD). Among them are a collection of hymns in praise of Our Lady, and requesting her intercession: "She who gave birth to God, by word and without seed,/ Let us sing to her, the Virgin Mary,/ Who intercedes for the salvation of our souls." As Shoemaker argues, these hymns give eloquent proof not only of the popularity of Marian devotion, but of the fact that it is not just a matter of individual piety but is also congregational and communal – long before Ephesus, the Faithful were accustomed to organising their expressions of Marian veneration. He is even able to demonstrate that Marian devotion was so widespread that it was not restricted to orthodox Nicene Christians, but was retained within Christian gnostic sects – which suggests they took it with them when they were increasingly

distanced from the Church in the Second Century.

#### Ideological resistance to Mary


Shoemaker makes his case with admirable clarity, and objectivity – and if his conclusion is "provocative", as one academic has described it, this merely illustrates the degree to which ideological resistance to the devotion of Mary is still capable of clouding the judgement of many of our contemporaries. If Shoemaker is to be criticised, it is for the frankly poor quality of his biblical exegesis in the opening chapter – however, this does not compromise the argument of his thesis, which remains confidently presented, and persuasively demonstrated. This is well worth reading.

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Fr. Guy de Gaynesford is Rector of the School of the Annunciation, a Catholic Institute of Higher Education for the New Evangelisation, based at Buckfast Abbey, Devon.

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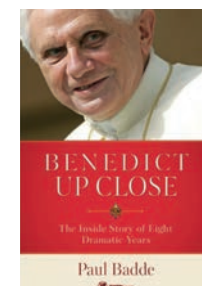
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## Pope Benedict wanted us to look on the face of Christ

*Benedict up Close. The Inside Story of Eight Dramatic Years* by Paul Badde, EWTN Publishing, 241pp, £12.40.

*reviewed by Ian Vane*



When *Benedict up Close* arrived, vacuum-packed and in a jiffy bag, I was in no rush to read it, the furrows of parochial life vying for my attention. Besides, this was a compendium of articles by a journalist on the Papacy of one Joseph Ratzinger – surely then, it would be the usual gripes about the intransigence of Holy Mother Church, and therefore the Papacy, in what we are told by the media is the 21st century, the inference being that the 'shackles of God' should long since have been thrown off. However, although Paul Badde, a German correspondent for *Die Welt* often sets the scene for a public Papal engagement by describing the weather, that, I discovered, would be the limit of the cynical anticipation which I usually have for the media.

#### Within the panorama of history

Badde gets it. He understands what the Papacy and what the Church is about, and this is clear in the sympathetic treatment of his subject: 'For the Pope, the Church is not just an identical unity in the local and historical sense; he is also the primary guarantor of that unity for Her. The Universal Church is not only anchored in the centre of societies, but is also rooted

in the depths of history' (p.132). The opening pages show a personal affection for Badde's fellow-German, which is encouraging. However, rather than falling into the myopia of his title, time and again he presents his perspective within the panorama of history and ecclesiology, and therefore, dare one say, an authentic theology.

#### A soul who has put on the person of Christ

Badde could only be a practising Catholic who is loyal to the Church and the Pope, something which becomes crystal clear in the closing articles. It is this loyalty which becomes evident as he weaves together the office of the Pope laid upon Joseph Ratzinger. What begins to emerge is that Benedict XVI is a soul who has put on the person of Christ – 'It is not I that live, but Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:21) – whether that be identified in Benedict's actions at Yad Vashem (p.145), his address at Westminster Hall (p.167), his critique of Nazi ideology, his ecumenical encounter with the Patriarch of Constantinople (p.72ff), or his meeting with Prince Ghazi in Jordan (p.142), to cite just something of how he has 'put on Christ'.

## Benedict at Auschwitz

For a child like me of the 60s, whose understanding of the Second World War is through the lens of the post-war era, the theological perspective of Benedict, a German who lived in and through Nazism, gave an entirely different understanding of the freedom for which so many died and to whom we should always be thankful and prayerful. It shows again in our time the danger of ideology. On his visit to Auschwitz, Benedict said: 'To speak in this place of horror ... where unprecedented mass crimes were committed against God and man, is almost impossible .... those vicious criminals, by wiping out this people [of Israel], wanted to kill the God who called Abraham, who spoke on Sinai and laid down principles to serve as a guide for mankind ... That God finally had to die and power had to belong to man alone' (p.38).

## The encounter with the living God

This, then, drives us back to the *raison d'être* of Benedict's papacy, articulated in the encyclical *Spes Salvi* with ideas familiar to us in FAITH: 'It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love - a Person.' Here we might recall the question posed by Fr. Holloway: How much is matter, how much is Mind? 'Matter is that which is controlled and directed, Mind is that which controls and directs, and that Mind, that Supreme Mind, we call God!'

'Jesus took "the encounter with the living God" into the world ... But if the encounter with this person is merely "informative" and not "performative" the

Pope assures us, then it has not taken place at all' (p.100). We begin to discover that the life of this apparently 'bookish' theologian is completely centred on the person of Jesus Christ, not simply as a manifestation of God become Man, but the very face of Christ, which reminds us of the phrase oft used by the evangelist: 'Jesus looked at him/her ...'. What does Benedict want for us? He wants us to look at the face of Christ, he want us to allow Christ to gaze upon our face.

## The pontificate, not a biography

Inevitably, observing the Pontificate of Benedict XVI, the sins of the Church cannot be avoided, but Badde again gives the Holy Father's spiritual context to such scandal in his Good Friday prayer and meditation on the Way of the Cross, in which is presented that call to constant conversion on our part and that of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who seeks after each and every one of us.

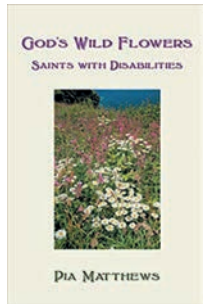
In his editorial note, Badde makes clear his concern is the Pontificate of Benedict XVI and not a biography of Joseph Ratzinger, and we must be grateful to Prof Stefan Heid for asking Badde to compile his articles as a book so that they are not lost as 'documents on contemporary events'. Apart from the need for an index, we are presented with a positive encouragement, whether as priest or people, to seek the face of Christ, since, to cite Benedict quoting John Henry Newman, 'God created everyone for a very particular task ... He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.' (p.169)

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*Fr. Ian Vane is the parish priest of Our Lady Immaculate and St. Philip Neri, Uckfield, and St. John the Evangelist, Heron's Ghyll.*

# Suffering - why me?

*God's Wild Flowers, Saints with Disabilities*, by Pia Matthews, Gracewing, 266pp £12.99

*reviewed by Clare Anderson*



Despite the advances in modern medicine, as we live longer, so we are more likely to encounter pain and disability in one form or another. Chronic illness has always been with us, but in today's world, where physical perfection is less an ideal than a goal, there is a pervading sense of uselessness among the chronically sick. Pia Matthews' book presents a Christian understanding of suffering that does not seek to sanitise or to make light of it. Previous generations had seen illness as a result of sin. Christ's ministry showed this to be untrue - God's glory was and is revealed through healing of the sick.

## 'Why me?'

But what of those who aren't healed? Pia Matthews takes the lives of over a hundred saints and blessed of the Church to show how illness and disability can provide a doorway to sanctity. In nine chapters she covers different forms of disability, with examples from the saints.

The preface details the author's own experience of caring for a severely disabled child. This book is surely the result of frequent meditation about the nature of disability and our response to it which goes beyond the 'why me?' that others perhaps expect:

"Each child is special, whether disabled or abled. 'Specialness' does not reduce children to the same. And in Catholic

thinking, not only is every human being unique, every human being is also a gift. So for me, the 'God, why me?' question raises a much more interesting issue: not why did God pick on me to be the parent of a disabled child, but rather, from the perspective of the person with disabilities, why *me*, me as this gift. Then, unpicking the question further, not why was I born this way, but what is it that you, God, have in mind for me?" (p xv)

## Disability doesn't define a person

It is in precisely the understanding and accepting of God's will, even when it involves suffering, which helps to make saints.

In the introduction we see how the Church determines sanctity in individuals and the long process involved. Holiness is the vocation of all of us, although the path to it is often not self-chosen. Most people would never choose to be sick or disabled and find their situation a cause of anguish and doubt. People do not become saints in spite of a disability or even because of it. Rather, the disability becomes an aspect of a life of heroic virtue. Disability cannot define a person, "the object is to demonstrate that all human beings, whatever their situation, need God's grace to grow in holiness and the saints and blessed are witnesses to this activity of grace." (p xxxv).

## Solidarity

Although the author declares that she does not intend to present a saint with a disability as the answer to another person with a similar disability, this book will provide comfort and a sense of solidarity for many who live with chronic suffering.

The following chapters each begin with a short reflection on the nature of a particular disability or illness, with examples from numerous saints. All aspects of suffering are covered, whether tuberculosis, cancer, amputation or paralysis, as well as intermittent but various ailments (such as Padre Pio suffered), and also those with mental suffering, whether from depression, instability, or intellectual retardation in some way or other.

All the saints one would expect are there, St Therese, St Pio, St Benedict Labre - though who knew that St Thomas Aquinas suffered from the effects of a possible stroke? St Andre Besette and Bl Solanus Casey are predictably among the 'simple and pure in heart', but so also is the wonderful St Anna Pak Agi, a Korean martyr who had learning difficulties which made it a struggle to learn about the Christian faith. "She used to say that if she could not learn about God as she wished at least she could try and love him with all her heart." She liked to meditate on pictures of Christ. Refusing to deny her faith, she was martyred in 1839.

## 'Victim souls'

One of the most difficult aspects to a Christian understanding of suffering is the issue of 'victim souls', the subject of Chapter Four. The complete and selfless embrace of suffering as a gift from God for the benefit of others is the most radical way of accepting the Cross and sharing in Christ's sufferings. This is not a spiritual athleticism but a means of sanctification of oneself and others, and is a specific gift of God, seen as a special mission. Bl Alexandrina da Costa, Catherine Emmerich and St Pio are the most well-known examples.

In restricting herself to saints or those on the path of canonisation, Dr Matthews is confined to discussing the more traditionally known illnesses, like arthritis, eczema, bronchitis, which still pose a problem for modern medicine. More recently diagnosed conditions (perhaps the result of the modern world) such as autism and allergies, are not so easy to match with appropriate saints. Maybe a future volume might include St Therese's sister Leonie, who struggled heroically with what looks like autism?

## St. John Paul II and suffering

Dr Matthews is a lecturer in theology, philosophy and bioethics and brings to the subject much study and reflection. She is saturated in the teaching of St John Paul II, who is perhaps the most important recent thinker in the field of suffering. No study of the theology of the body would be complete without his teachings on suffering, whether his document *Salvifici Doloris* or his letter to the elderly, and much besides. Pia Matthews is a born teacher and communicator who can present the thought of this great Pope in accessible terms yet never over-simplifies or talks down to the reader.

This is both a devotional book as well as a meditation on suffering for the modern world. In the face of the 'culture of death' it is important to offer a positive alternative and this is found here. It is not a scholarly book, but a comforting and stimulating resource for anyone interested in a contemporary Catholic understanding of suffering.

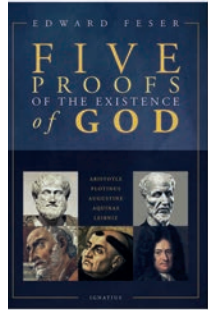
"The stories of saints and the blessed are relevant to all of us, abled and disabled, because in their many different ways their situation helps us and inspires us in our own journey" (p xliii). This is a thoughtful and at times moving book on the subject of an inescapable reality of modern life.

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*Clare Anderson is a Catholic writer and broadcaster and mother of four.*

# God's existence can be rationally demonstrated

*Five Proofs of the Existence of God* by Edward Feser, Ignatius, 330pp, £16.50

*reviewed by Christina Read*



Following on from his defence of Aquinas's natural theology in *The Last Superstition* and *Aquinas*, Edward Feser has written a very useful book on five proofs of the existence of God. No, this is not specifically about Aquinas' five ways but is Feser's own treatment of his top five arguments for God's existence in the history of western thought: the Aristotelian, the neo-platonic, the Augustinian, the Thomist and the rationalist. Rectifying their neglect by contemporary philosophy, he constructs a confident defence of classical theism.

Feser takes a very methodical approach to each proof, firstly setting out a two stage informal statement of the argument ("more discursive and leisurely"), then delineating a formal step-by-step analysis and finally addressing objections to the proof.

## From potential to actual

So, in the case of the Aristotelian proof, which receives the lengthiest treatment, *Stage 1 of the informal statement* of the argument starts by considering the everyday experience of change and demonstrates logically from this the existence of a single first cause, Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover'. Feser does this by considering the readily evident linear series of causes entailed in change (e.g. a cup of hot coffee is cooled by the surrounding air

which was cooled by the air conditioning which was switched on by someone pressing a button etc.), introducing the notion of the actualization of potentials "as a way of making sense of change" (p.26) (Change can only occur if "things have potentials which can be actualized" p.24). From this he uncovers the need for a 'changer' or cause, something already actual that actualizes the potential (for "whatever goes from potential to actual has a cause" p.40).

## Things can only change because they exist

Such linear causal series in which every member of the series has its own causal power are then shown to presuppose hierarchical causal series (the cup of coffee is held up by the desk, which is held up by the floor, which is held up by the foundations, which is held up by the earth) in which each member's power to hold up coffee is derived from the earth upon which the whole series depends. Unlike linear series, hierarchical series of cause are therefore shown to trace down to a first cause from which all the other causes in the series derive their causal power. Change can therefore only be fully comprehended by tracing hierarchical series to their first causes. Change is presupposed by the fundamental question of existence ("things can only change because they exist",

p.28), which, when considered in terms of hierarchical causal series must, like all such series, have a first member “which can actualize its potential for existence without having to be actualized itself” (28); “it just is actual” without any *potential* for existence requiring actualisation. This is pure actuality, (could not in principle have a cause), uncaused cause, Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover” or, Feser thinks more precisely, “unactualized actualizer” (p.27)

It is only in *Stage 2 of the informal statement* that Feser explicitly states this as a proof for the existence of *God*, defending the identification of the Unmoved Mover with God as the ultimate cause of all things and arguing that the other qualities traditionally attributed to God follow on from what he has already set out in *Stage 1*. In the third section Feser’s take on the Aristotelian proof is expressed more formally as a 50 point summary, running from point 1 “change is a real feature of the world” to point 50 “God exists” via a point by point defence of the purely actual actualizer’s immutability, eternity, immateriality, incorporeality, perfection, goodness, intelligence and omnipotence.

### Misunderstandings and objections

The final, lengthy section *Some objections rebutted* effectively addresses common misunderstandings without cluttering the initial argument or creating a profusion of lengthy footnotes. It also provides an opportunity for Feser to expound his view that subsequent philosophical and scientific models do not rebut the Aristotelian understanding of change and causation even if how the principle is applied is affected. Thus almost half the pages of his treatment of the Aristotelian proof are used to defend the reality of hierarchical causal series in the face of objections raised from Hume to Kant, Newton to Einstein, making close reference to developments in physics.

### Making arguments accessible

Feser takes a similar approach with each of the proofs, the neo-platonic starting from the fact that things have parts, the Augustinian from the fact that there are abstract objects (e.g. universals, properties, numbers), the Thomist from the distinction in the things of our experience between *what* they are (essence) and *that* they are (existence) (i.e. the ‘real distinction’), and the rationalist from our experience of the fact that there are explanations for the things we encounter.

The approach helps make ‘God’ arguments accessible to an audience formed in an agnostic, materialistic/atheistic worldview, whilst the methodology of starting with the informal statement and moving through the formal onto the refutation of objections to the proof opens the topic to the lay reader without neglecting a more formal philosophical treatment and the engagement in scholarly debate which pushes forward Feser’s contributions to academic reflection on this topic.

In all this he demonstrates striking explicatory skill, indicative of an effective teacher, starting his consideration of each proof with evident everyday experience such that the shift to specific consideration of God’s existence happens almost seamlessly. The frequent summaries of the argument add to the effectiveness of this approach, helping the reader keep track of the proof so far, whilst also reiterating and reinforcing the main points.

### What God is like

Feser’s detailed examination of all five proofs is followed by a further two chapters. The first develops something touched upon in his treatment of the five arguments - what the proofs for God’s existence might tell us about what God is like. The sixty-eight pages on ‘the

nature of God and his relationship to the world’ sets out with high expectations of what natural theology can tell us not only of God’s existence, but also of his nature. The book then closes with a chapter tackling and dismissing further objections to what natural theology can tell us about the existence of God, such that Feser is confident that the once mainstream position in western thought (irrespective of religious/philosophical persuasion) “that God’s existence can be rationally demonstrated by purely philosophical arguments” (p.15) is shown to be irrefutable.

### Philosophy, not theology

It is great to see the question of the existence of God re-emerging as worthy of serious academic treatment, and if you want a clear, up-to-date Neo-Scholastic statement of the arguments this may

well be it. Feser’s defence of natural theology is exercised strictly in the arena of philosophy; there is no argument for its place in Theology *per se*, no gesture towards a statement of the relationship between reason and revelation, between natural and ‘revealed’ theology. What Jesus might have to do with any of this is completely off-terrain. In Feser’s approach here such matters begin where he leaves off: his stated concern is to get us to the place where such issues can be addressed. Of course what is also missing is the Hollowayan proof from unity ... We look forward to its inclusion in the debate arising from this important return to the question of God’s existence.

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