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Sr Mary Dominic Pitts on a Benedictine nun's joyful wisdom



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Dear Readers

This edition of FAITH magazine has been produced under the extraordinary circumstances of the restrictions on everyday Church life imposed by the attempts to tackle the Coronavirus. We have made a particular effort to give you a good read, with plenty to ponder in what may seem long days.

There will be a great deal of rebuilding of spiritual and cultural confidence in the months and years ahead: some institutions and traditions may not have survived this crisis well. We believe that the Faith Movement will have a lot to offer especially through its work with young people and in nurturing response to vocations to the priesthood. In sending particular greetings to our readers at a tough time, we urge all to help spread a message of courage and hope.

Cardinal George Pell has been declared innocent of the appalling allegations made against him. A unanimous decision of Australia's High Court was made as FAITH magazine went to press. We take this opportunity of paying tribute to his dignity and courage over the time of his unjust imprisonment. Next month's FAITH magazine will have a full feature on Cardinal Pell.

May, Mary, and the Church Today

2020 marks the centenary of the birth of Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II.

A standard media commentary on John Paul II's Marian theology is to state that, as he lost his mother at a young age, his pious father encouraged him in devotion to the Virgin Mary, and thus began a lifelong attachment which revealed itself throughout his pontificate.

This approach, even when adopted with a sense of respect for John Paul's knowledge and wisdom, manages to convey a slightly patronising note.



The reality is that, although John Paul's devotion to Mary certainly owes much to the Marian piety in which he was reared – and the strength it brought to Poles during the terrible years of WWII and the Cold War – there is, much more importantly, a theological insight connecting Mary to the very nature of the Church. This is needed for our times. It was discussed at the Second Vatican Council, owes much to the work of theologians Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac – both influential at the Council – and is perhaps only now becoming better known and understood.

Mary, Vatican II and the Church

The period immediately before the Council was strongly “Marian” in the Church, with the declaration of the doctrine of the Assumption by Pius XII in 1958, named a “Marian Year”. Images of Mary had been popular throughout the Church's history, but a new genre had been created with the 19th century apparitions at Lourdes: a century later images of her as a young girl, a rose on her foot and a rosary in her hand, were everywhere in the Catholic world. The 1943 film “The Song of Bernadette”¹, popularised Lourdes at a time when there was a longing for a spiritual uplift, during and immediately after World War II. The apparitions at Fatima in 1917 included a message calling for prayer and penance for “the conversion of Russia” and were linked to worries over the Cold War and the possibility of nuclear annihilation. Marian devotion was not seen as old-fashioned but was associated with confidence in the Church in a century that had seen two world wars and needed hope.

At the Second Vatican Council, after much debate about a separate document on Marian doctrine, a final decision was to incorporate a specific section on Mary in the document on the Church. This proved to be something of great value.

Archbishop Karol Wojtyla emphasised that the document should speak of Mary's “motherhood” in the Church, a “maternal care that all the sons and daughters of the

¹ Starring Jennifer Jones, 1943, adapted from the book of the same name by Franz Werfel.

Church be conformed to Christ".² He stressed urgency about this, noting that in the original draft of the document "the Church is presented to us more as a teaching society than as a mother",³ and that the Marian presence would correct this.

This was all part of a new insight into the nature of the Church that had begun in the 19th century with a move away from the post-Reformation message that the Church was a "perfect society", a structure with answers to every question and a formula by which all should live, towards an understanding of the Church as a communion, as the Bride of Christ, and also as his mystical Body. Pius XII had developed this in *Mystici Corporis*,⁴ his wartime encyclical emphasising the Church as a loving reality offering a message of hope to a divided, angry and wounded world.

Lumen Gentium

The document *Lumen Gentium* follows the language of Pius XII in speaking about the Church. It states:

"Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission."⁵

Speaking of Mary, the document emphasises her role as subordinate to that of Christ: the tone speaks of a need to answer Protestant criticisms that Catholics worship Mary as a deity, and to reassure these critics that they have been heard and that their fears are groundless.

Then comes an important paragraph in which the life and role of the Church are described, in language emphasising the unity between the Church and Mary:

"The Church indeed, contemplating her [Mary's] hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By her preaching she brings forth to a new and immortal life the sons who are born to her in baptism, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God. She herself is a virgin, who keeps the faith given to her by her Spouse whole and entire. Imitating the mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she keeps with virginal purity an entire faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity".⁶

Mary, Mother of the Church: Paul VI

In closing the third session of the Vatican Council (November 21st 1964) Paul VI solemnly declared Mary to be "Mother of the Church". In 1974 his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* noted that Marian devotion



needed to emphasise, in accordance with the Church's tradition, that Mary should be imitated, "not precisely in the type of life she led, and much less for the socio-cultural background in which she lived and which today scarcely exists anywhere. She is held up as an example to the faithful rather for the way in which, in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God (cf. Lk. 1:38), because she heard the word of God and acted on it, and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples. All of this has a permanent and universal exemplary value".⁷

*she was the first
and the most
perfect of Christ's
disciples*

Enter John Paul

Paul VI's initiative was too often ignored. The arrival of John Paul II brought a strikingly "Marian" figure to the papacy. His understanding of Mary's protective and prophetic role in the Church and in the life of every Christian came into spectacularly sharp focus when he was shot in St Peter's Square on May 13th 1981. As he was rushed to hospital – he was very near to death – he was heard praying "Mary, my mother...". Today, a marble slab in St Peter's Square marks the spot, and a mosaic of Mary high on the Vatican wall carries the words "Totus Tuus", commemorating his prayer.



The fact that the assassination attempt took place on the Fatima anniversary seemed to involve John Paul in the drama of those apparitions.⁸ His pondering of this would result in his consecration of the world to Mary with the world's bishops in 1984 and the dramatic unveiling of the famous "Third Secret" in 2000. But there were other important aspects of his Marian devotion.

Marian Year

John Paul declared 1987–1988 a Marian Year, issuing an encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, and an apostolic letter on women, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. But a particularly significant message in this Marian Year was his teaching on the "Marian profile" of the Church, launched with his address to the Roman Curia in December 1987.⁹ Here he discussed in detail the message of *Lumen Gentium* and Mary, declaring that Vatican II "effected a great synthesis between Mariology and ecclesiology".¹⁰ Quoting St Augustine and St Ambrose, he spelt out the bond between Mary and the Church, centred on her total openness to the will of God, and the way in which her role as mother and protectress flows from this. The Church must be like Mary, utterly and freely open to the will of God in every way: "The Virgin Mary

² Weigel, George, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II*, page 162.

³ Acta Synodalia 1-4, pages 598–599.

⁴ *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Pius XII on the Mystical Body of Christ, 1943.

⁵ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, section 1.

⁶ *Lumen Gentium* section 64.

⁷ *Marialis Cultus*, section 35.

⁸ To add to the extraordinary mix of coincidences, the Turkish assassin's mother's name was Fatma the Turkish form of Fatima. (*Independent*, Jan 13th 2006, "Shooting of John Paul II: The Man who Nearly Killed the Pope").

⁹ December 22nd 1987.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Address to the Roman Curia*, December 22nd 1987, Section 2.

is the archetype of the Church because of the Divine maternity; just like Mary the Church must be, and wishes to be, Mother and Virgin. The Church lives in this authentic 'Marian profile', this 'Marian dimension'.¹¹ And this "Marian profile", he taught, precedes the Petrine profile: the Church is not essentially a structure, it is a great "yes" to Christ.

the Church is not essentially a structure, it is a great "yes" to Christ.

This brings a crucial insight to the reality of the Church, expanding and explaining the teaching in the Marian section of *Lumen Gentium*. It is one that is essential for clergy and laity alike to grasp, and is perhaps of particular importance for anyone working in what could perhaps be called the Church's bureaucracy, or "Civil Service". As one lay commentator notes:

"Speaking to men who understood themselves to be working at the centre of the world's Catholic reality in Rome, the Pope reminded his curial collaborators that the Petrine Church of authority and jurisdiction they embodied, like the Pauline Church of proclamation and evangelisation, and the Johannine Church of contemplation and prayer, takes its purpose and meaning from the prior and even more fundamental Marian Church: the Church formed in the image of a woman, Mary, whose assent to Gabriel's message in Luke 1.38 was the first act of Christian discipleship, in that it made possible the incarnation of the Son of God."¹²

Understanding

From where did John Paul get this understanding of the pre-eminence of the Marian profile of the Church? From the Scriptures – her assent in Luke 1.38, her "Do whatever he tells you" at Cana (John 2:5), her presence at Calvary (John 19:26). But also from the scholars who, especially in recent times, have sought to explore this as they pondered the mystery of the Church. Hans Urs von Balthasar notes that Mary's acceptance of God's will, given in freedom, was absolute and unconditional: "it embraces not only the spiritual but also the bodily faith of the one being made use of – and this bodily faith will from now on be called fertile virginity – for otherwise than in such a faith, through it, and with it together, the Word of God would not be flesh."¹³ And what applies to Mary's body must also apply to the Church "the church body from which and for which everything will be formed unto Christ."

"Do whatever he tells you"

Pope Benedict XVI summed this up "Between Mary and the Church there is indeed a connatural relationship that was strongly emphasized by the Second Vatican Council in its felicitous decision to place the treatment of the Blessed Virgin at the conclusion of the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*."¹⁴

Relevance

The Marian feminism taught by John Paul in the light (very appropriate term!) of *Lumen Gentium* is an important contribution to ecclesiology and one which has special resonance for our times. Women are not the same as men, and after emphasising this in *Mulieris Dignitatem* in 1988 – of which more later – John Paul went on to proclaim in 1999 some notable women as co-patrons of Europe: St Birgitta of Sweden, St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).

For Christians, God's original covenant love for his people, the full expression of it in his relationship with his Church, and our living it in marriage uniting man and woman, all connect and are fruitful. Thus John Paul's "Theology of the Body" was more – much more – than merely a re-statement of traditional sexual morality, but sought to show how an authentic understanding of matrimony teaches theology.¹⁵

Understanding

The Church is not an "it", but a "she", and this is fundamental to our understanding of our relationship to God, to the Church, and to one another. It also sheds light on the male priesthood, and on how we should view this, especially in the light of recent controversies and the Anglican Communion's decision to ordain women.¹⁶

One commentator has noted:

"The priest symbolises Christ. Woman, no matter who she is, is a bride and as such symbolizes the Church. The fact that we are at a point where the significance of feminine identity is so largely misunderstood or even disregarded, indicates that our very notion of Church is in peril. For many, the Church has ceased to signify bride and mother. For these people, she has, in a very real way, lost her personality. She has become an "it", a mere institution rather than a living being."¹⁷

The Church

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*,¹⁸ John Paul wrote about the huge significance of Mary's role in the Incarnation, which he characteristically italicised: "*the central event, the key event in the history of salvation*".¹⁹ He invited men and women to study the true nature of the Church:

"The Second Vatican Council, confirming the teaching of the whole of tradition, recalled that in the hierarchy of holiness it is *precisely the 'woman'*, Mary of Nazareth, who is the 'figure' of the Church. She 'precedes' everyone on the path to holiness; in her person 'the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle' (cf. Eph 5:27). In this sense one can say that the Church is both Marian and Apostolic-Petrine."²⁰

¹¹ John Paul II, *Address to the Roman Curia*, December 22nd 1987, Section 2.

¹² Weigel, George, *The End and the Beginning*, page 471.

¹³ Von Balthasar, Hans Urs, "Mary- Exemplar of the Church" in *The Von Balthasar Reader*, Page 219.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, homily, 25th March 2006.

¹⁵ See West, Christopher, *At the Heart of the Gospel* and related works.

¹⁶ For more on this, see Butler, Sara, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church*, pages 84–86.

¹⁷ Pia de Solenni, *Catholic Culture*. www.catholicculture.org/library/view.

¹⁸ Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem: on the dignity and vocation of woman, on the occasion of the Marian Year*, August 15th 1988.

¹⁹ *Mulieris Dignitatem*, section 3.

²⁰ *Mulieris Dignitatem*, section 27.

John Paul II writes in *Redemptoris Mater*: “from Mary the Church also learns her own motherhood: she recognises the maternal dimension of her vocation, which is essentially bound to her sacramental nature... If the Church is the sign and instrument of intimate union with God, she is so by reason of her motherhood, because, receiving life from the Spirit, she ‘generates’ sons and daughters of the human race to a new life in Christ.”²¹

And finally...

Warm thanks to Pope Francis who – with some courage – has reaffirmed the Church’s teaching on women and the priesthood, with a valuable insight into the topic, which actually takes us all more deeply into this profound mystery of the Church as Bride and Mother: “Jesus Christ appears as the Spouse of the community that celebrates the Eucharist through the figure of a man who presides as a sign of the one Priest. This dialogue between the Spouse and his Bride, which arises in adoration and sanctifies the community, should not trap us in partial conceptions of power in the Church. The Lord chose to reveal his power and his love through two human faces: the face of his divine Son made man and the face of a creature, a woman, Mary. Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother. As a result, we do not limit ourselves to a functional approach, but enter instead into the inmost structure of the Church. In this way, we will fundamentally realize why, without women, the Church breaks down...”²²



Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs

Service to the Church and humanity

And, praising “strong and generous women who, undoubtedly called and prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed and acted as missionaries”, he urges that we should not clericalise women, or ignore their own specific and central part in the mission of the Church which they own by right. He rejects a “reductionism that would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders. But that approach would in fact narrow our vision; it would lead us to clericalize women, diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective”.²³ Calling for women to be brought forward so as to be able to offer their real strengths in the service of the Church and humanity, he entrusted the Amazon project, as with all the Church’s work, to Mary. To which we can all add: YES! AMEN!



²¹ *Redemptoris Mater* section 453.

²² *Querida Amazonia* 101.

²³ *Querida Amazonia* 102.

Christian courage in the face of persecution

by John Pontifex



“During my detention, I held the hand of Christ. It is thanks to him that I have stayed standing. Do not be afraid.”¹

The words of Asia Bibi – spoken in an interview she gave this February to Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need – provide a glimpse into the trauma one woman suffered. Hers was a story of terrible injustice which gripped the world’s media.

Her 10 years behind bars made Asia’s struggle to regain her freedom a *cause celebre*. And her case is all the more notable for the fact that Asia was the first woman in Pakistan sentenced to death for blasphemy. Central to her conviction, as became apparent in the protracted court proceedings she endured, was the fact that Asia is a Christian. She suffered because of her faith.



For this reason, her story and the worldwide attention it garnered is unique in the sphere of news reporting on human rights abuses. Rarely if ever has the media rallied to the cause of a persecuted Christian.

In highlighting the significance of the Asia Bibi story, this article sets out to demonstrate that, while it was remarkable that she should finally win back her freedom, there is as yet no breakthrough in the wider struggle for the defence of Christians and other oppressed religious minorities in Pakistan. They routinely experience egregious persecution and yet it is largely ignored by the West.

As a Catholic charity committed to the cause of supporting persecuted Christians, Aid to the Church in Need is working to enable justice for people who, like Asia Bibi, have been accused of blasphemy, not least the 30 or more Christians currently behind bars.

Context: Islamisation of society

To understand Asia Bibi’s story and the scale of the threat for those facing blasphemy

¹ John Pontifex and Thomas Oswald, ‘PAKISTAN – Asia Bibi: My faith has saved me’, ACN News, 27 February 2020, [<https://acnuk.org/news/pakistan-asia-bibi-my-faith-has-saved-me/>] Accessed 14 March 2020 as were all sites cited below, unless stated to the contrary.

accusations, it is necessary to chart the rise of Islamism in Pakistan and its increasingly dominant role within the State and society.

Asia Bibi was sentenced under Article 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), which imposes the death penalty for blasphemy against the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad.

Article 295C is part of a series of amendments to the PPC that were introduced in the early to mid 1980s in the time of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who became President of Pakistan in 1977. By putting in place what came to be known as the blasphemy laws, President Zia set Pakistan on a path that placed the honour of Islam at the pinnacle of the country's system of law and order, imposing the harshest crimes for offenders.² Article 295B, for example, imposes life imprisonment for offences relating to defiling the *Qur'an*. Zia went much further than his predecessor in committing himself to establishing an Islamic state and *Shari'a* Islamic law. Indeed, the primary policy of Zia's government was "the Islamisation of institutions".³ In so doing, Zia can be accused of going against the spirit of Muhammad Ali-Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan and first premier.

*criticism by
human rights
observers*

Madrasahs

When Pakistan first came into being in August 1947, following the partition of British India, he had proclaimed: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state." ⁴ Among the many other Islamisation initiatives President Zia-ul-Haq undertook was state sponsorship of religious *madrasahs* (Islamic schools). At the time of partition in 1947, there were a reported 181 *madrasahs* but the numbers grew exponentially during Zia's time, rising to 2,801 at the end of his 11-year presidency.⁵ The *madrasahs*, which banned television and radio, came in for criticism by human rights observers for creating a climate of tension and sectarian hatred between different groups of Muslims (notably Shi'a, Sunni and Ahmadi) and against non-Muslims. Reports suggest that there may now be 30,000⁶ *madrasahs* in Pakistan. Other research gives a figure of more than 35,000 *madrasahs* with a total of 3.5 million students enrolled.⁷ Research of *madrasah* students indicates they are more intolerant than other student groups.⁸ Aid to the Church in Need receives frequent reports that societal mistrust and sometimes contempt for

² 'Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan – The World's Most Draconian Law?', The EurAsian Times, 23 June 2017, [https://eurasian-times.com/blasphemy-law-pakistan/]

³ M Dawood Mhoammadi, 'Causes of General Zia ul Haq's Islamization Program', South Asian University, 11 November 2017, p. 2 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325653742_Causes_of_General_Zia_Ul_Haq's_Islamization_Program]

⁴ Shahzeb Jillani, 'The search for Jinnah's vision of Pakistan', BBC News, 11 September 2013, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24034873]

⁵ Zenra Naviwala, 'Religious Education in Pakistan's Madrasahs & the Facilitation of Child Trafficking: A Flaw in Western Perceptions', [https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/anthropology/21a-445j-slavery-and-human-trafficking-in-the-21st-century-spring-2015/assignments/MIT21A_445JS15_Religious.pdf]

⁶ Islamuddin Sajid, 'Modernizing madrasah: Pakistan's response to tackle extremism', Anadolu Agency, 25 May 2019, [https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/modernizing-madrassa-pakistan-s-response-to-tackle-extremism/1488916]

⁷ 'Report says over 35,000 madrasahs operating in Pakistan', Pakistan Today, 31 July 2015 citing Umair Khalil, HIVE, 'The Madrasah Connundrum – The state of religious education in Pakistan' [https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/07/31/report-says-over-35000-madrassas-operating-in-pakistan]

⁸ Ibid; survey by Tariq Rahman

Christians and other minorities fuels abuse of the blasphemy laws; the rule of law is often compromised by the power of the mob. Again and again, attacks on Christians and other minorities sparked by blasphemy allegations show a determination by intolerant Islamist groups to take the law into their own hands and carry out summary justice. In the mind of such groups, the mere suggestion of an offence of blasphemy obliges observant Muslims to take it upon themselves to ensure the honour of the Prophet of Islam is upheld at all costs. And the execution of this form of justice sends out a further signal that Christians and other minorities are tolerated provided they strictly uphold the dignity of Islam.

All this helps to explain how it came to be that for Asia Bibi a day that started out like any other ended in complete catastrophe.

The Asia Bibi story

On the morning of 14th June 2009 Asia Bibi and a group of fellow women labourers set off to begin work harvesting berries in the Sheikhpura district, 30 miles west of Lahore.

As the heat of the summer sun grew stronger, Asia offered to fetch water for the party of workers. Two of them rejected her offer. In the witness testimony she was to give later, Asia explained what happened that fateful day:

"They refused [the water], saying that, since I am a Christian, they will never take water from my hand. Over this, the quarrel ensued and some hot words were exchanged between me and the... ladies. The [ladies] then approached [Imam] Qari Saalam. The [ladies] were conspiring with Qari Saalam got a false, fabricated case against me."⁹

It was alleged that she had made blasphemous statements against the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad, comments the prosecution were to describe as "defamatory and sarcastic".¹⁰ The prosecution would later claim that she confessed her crime but it then emerged that she had done so only when a large crowd gathered round her and threatened to kill her. Asia insisted she was innocent but to no avail. She was found guilty under Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code – defamation of the Muslim Prophet – and on 8th November 2010 the Lahore High Court sentenced Asia Bibi to death by hanging.

Freedom

It would take more than eight years for Asia Bibi to win back her freedom. Others were to give their life for daring to suggest justice may not have been done in this case. Salman Taseer, the Minister of the Punjab, who had publicly intervened in her case, was assassinated by Mumtaz Qadri, one of his bodyguards, on 4th January 2011. Almost exactly two months later, Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for Minorities and, like Asia, a Catholic, was shot dead as he was being driven to work in the capital, Islamabad.

⁹ 'Statement of the appellant recorded under Section 342 Cr.P.C.' given in Criminal Appeal NO.39-L OF 2015 Against the judgment dated 16.10.2014 of the Lahore High Court, Lahore passed in CrI.A.No.2509/2010 and M.R.No.614/2010, p.20 [http://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/web/user_files/File/CrI.A._39_L_2015.pdf] accessed 10 April 2019.

¹⁰ Mehmal Sarfraz, 'Blasphemy case: Pakistan Supreme Court overturns Asia Bibi's death sentence', The Hindu, 31 October 2018 [https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/blasphemy-case-pakistan-supreme-court-saves-asia-bibi-from-gallows/article25377126.ece] accessed 9 April 2019.

After five postponements, Lahore High Court finally heard her appeal on 13th October 2014 but it was refused. Undaunted, six weeks later, Asia's lawyers submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan, citing "glaring contradictions" in the witnesses' testimonies.¹¹

It would be eight months before the Supreme Court admitted her appeal. During the course of 2015 and 2016, the appeal hearing was postponed three times. Finally, on 8th October 2018, the appeal hearing went ahead and on 31st October the Supreme Court sensationally quashed the conviction. The judges found that her "alleged confession... resulted out of coercion and undue pressure"; they noted the "inordinate delay of about five days"¹² in lodging the First Instance Report (FIR) and highlighted "many discrepancies/inconsistencies in the statements".¹³



Dramatic story

But it would be another six months before Asia Bibi would taste freedom. Enraged by the Supreme Court's decision, the Islamic Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) party led protests that caused "gridlock across the country"¹⁴. In response, the new government of Prime Minister Imran Khan compromised, preventing Asia from leaving the country. An appeal against the Supreme Court's decision was allowed to proceed. But its October 2018 verdict was upheld and in May 2019 Asia's wish to leave Pakistan was granted and she joined her family in Canada where they had been offered asylum. Seeking asylum in France in February 2020, Asia Bibi and family travelled to Paris and there they met President Emmanuel Macron. A book on her story 'Enfin Libre' ('Finally Free') was launched, reigniting press interest in her dramatic story of justice achieved against all the odds.

¹¹ 'Pakistan court upholds Asia Bibi death sentence', BBC [online], 16 October 2014 [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-29640245]; Madeleine Davies, 'Asia Bibi: no release without international pressure, lawyer says', Church Times, 5 December 2014 [https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/5-december/news/world/asia-bibi-no-release-without-international-pressure-lawyer-says]; Mehmal Sarfraz, 'Blasphemy case: Pakistan Supreme Court overturns Asia Bibi's death sentence', The Hindu, 31 October 2018 [https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/blasphemy-case-pakistan-supreme-court-saves-asia-bibi-from-gallows/article25377126.ece]; 'Asia Bibi', Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission [https://humanrightscormission.house.gov/defending-freedom-project/prisoners-by-country/Pakistan/Asia%20Bibi] accessed 16 April 2019.

¹² See Criminal Appeal NO.39-L OF 2015 Against the judgment dated 16.10.2014 of the Lahore High Court, Lahore passed in Crl.A.No.2509/2010 and M.R.No.614/2010, §10-11, 13, 15 [http://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/web/user_files/File/Crl.A._39_L_2015.pdf]

¹³ Ibid., p.32.

¹⁴ John Pontifex, 'Will Pakistan's blasphemy laws ever be reformed?', Catholic Herald, 16 May 2019, [https://catholicherald.co.uk/will-pakistans-blasphemy-laws-ever-be-reformed/]

Other blasphemy cases

Against the backdrop of Asia Bibi's triumph is the plight of countless other cases of blasphemy in Pakistan – past and present. In the 30 years since the laws were amended to become what they are today, the Catholic (National) Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), a Catholic organisation in Pakistan supported by ACN, has recorded details of 1,560 victims of blasphemy.¹⁵ A breakdown of the individuals, according to religion, demonstrates the degree to which faith minority groups are disproportionately targeted. Majority Muslims, who are 95 percent of the population, make up only 50 percent of blasphemy cases (777 individuals). Minorities, notably Ahmadis, make up the rest. With 232 victims, Christians account for 15 percent of cases, even though they represent less than 1.5 percent of the population¹⁶.

Victims

To put it mildly, the case against many such victims is questionable. Particularly notable among the cases is that of Shagufta Kausur and her husband, Shafkat Emmanuel. Shagufta's profile is very similar to that of Asia Bibi. An illiterate Christian woman, she too was placed on death after being found guilty of blaspheming against the Muslim Prophet.¹⁷ Even though reports indicate that neither she nor her husband speak English, Shafkat is accused of using her phone to text a message in English to an imam containing blasphemous content. At the time of writing, a verdict in their case was due to be heard in April 2020.¹⁸ An examination of many of the cases shows that accusers of blasphemy are likely to have an ulterior motive – a vendetta or an altercation over an asset such as property. When Nadeem Samson, a Christian man from Lahore, was arrested following a blasphemy allegation in late 2017, it emerged that there was a long-standing dispute over property involving his family and a Muslim man. The case of Farhan Aziz, a man from Gujranwala, in the populous Punjab province, once more centres on a blasphemous mobile phone text but again ulterior motives are attributed to his accuser amid reports that the 26-year-old Christian had demanded the return of money he was owed.¹⁹

In trips colleagues and I have made to Pakistan as part of our work with Aid to the Church in Need, concerns have been repeatedly raised that the blasphemy laws are routinely abused; without proper enforcement, checks and balances, they provide a convenient club with which to beat minorities. Only a few individuals need to be targeted for the threat of a blasphemy allegation to send fear and trepidation throughout the

*blasphemy
laws are
routinely abused*

¹⁵ Cecil Shane Chaudhry et al, 'The price and locale ignorance: Blasphemy Victims 1987-2019', Catholic (National) Commission for Justice and Peace', March 2020.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Asif Aqeel, 'Asia Bibi's Cell Now Holds Another Woman on Death Row for Blasphemy', Christianity Today, 10 May 2019, [https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/asia-bibi-lawyer-malook-shagufta-shafkat-blasphemy-pakistan.html]

¹⁸ 'ASIA/PAKISTAN – Christian couple sentenced to death for blasphemy: appeal verdict in April', Agenzia Fides, 28 February 2020, [http://www.fides.org/en/news/67480-ASIA_PAKISTAN_Christian_couple_sentenced_to_death_for_blasphemy_appeal_verdict_in_April]

¹⁹ Cecil Shane Chaudhry et al, 'Prisoners for blasphemy charges 2010-2019', Catholic (National) Commission for Justice and Peace', March 2020.

ranks of all those who belong to disenfranchised faith communities. I remember meeting Yusif Said, a Christian buffalo tradesman, who was accused under Code 295B of the Penal Code, of defacing or damaging text containing verses of the *Qur'an*. Rather than leaving it to the police and the courts, the mob took justice into their own hands; they hounded Yusif from the town and set fire to the town's Presbyterian church, the Catholic church, the houses (presbyteries) of the clergy from both churches and a convent. The message to the community could not be clearer; being a Christian puts you in the line of fire. I met Yusif at a safe house where he was living in hiding. He told me: "I know that a lot of my problems would disappear immediately if I changed my faith. But I would rather be beaten and put to death than change my faith. It is Christ's love which has saved me."²⁰

ACN – reaching out to help victims of blasphemy

- And it is this expression of faith, so typical of the many Christians that we meet on our travels to Pakistan, that emboldens Aid to the Church in Need to act in whatever way we can to support them. The charity is committing to the following:
- Supporting the National (Catholic) Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP). An agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, the NCJP provides legal and para-legal aid, supporting Christians who need lawyers and whose family need food, medicine and schooling in the absence of bread-winners arrested for alleged blasphemy crimes.
- Supporting women forced into hiding as a result of sexual crimes. Refuge centres have been set up for women desperate to escape abusive relationship, often involving abductions, forced conversions and rape by Muslim men who consider Christian women to have no rights.
- Providing catechesis and Christian education to Christian communities living in pseudo-feudal working conditions, labouring at brick kilns and other factories, many of them paid very poorly and forced into debt to provide food for their families.

*blasphemy
laws are
routinely abused*

In January 2020, with Aid to the Church in Need's help, the NCJP secured a huge victory for justice when, as a result of a legal appeal, a conviction was overturned involving more than 40 Christian men from Youhanabad, a district outside Lahore, who were jailed for allegedly lynching two Muslim men.²¹ The deaths in spring 2015 followed a mass uprising in which Christians in Youhanabad protested against alleged police inaction in the case of suicide bomb attempts on two churches in the district packed with Sunday worshippers. Aid to the Church in Need went further, agreeing to fund a programme of rehabilitation devised by Catholic Archbishop Sebastian Shaw OFM of Lahore. As well as trauma

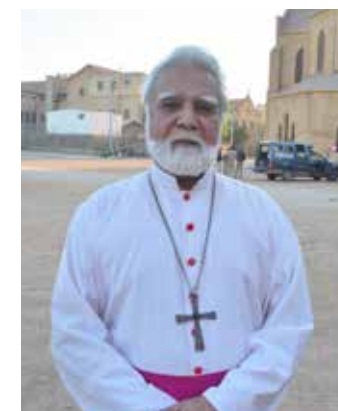
counselling, the scheme, approved in February 2020, involves funding for business start-up initiatives. In a break with standard ACN projects, the scheme also involves the erection of a basketball court to enable the Christian men and others in the local community to find a new outlet involving physical exercise, team building and community building.²²

This project builds on the work ACN undertook to restore St John's Church, Youhanabad, following the bomb-blast. I was fortunate to be able to visit the church soon after it was repaired by ACN. Father Francis Gulzar, the vicar general of Lahore Archdiocese and parish priest of St John's, told me that ACN's support had helped the community recover from their trauma. He said: "What would I have done without you."

Essential

An essential part of ACN's work involves encouraging communities deeply traumatised by false blasphemy accusations which so often have unleashed mob violence. The charity's decision to make Pakistan a priority country for aid reflects the urgent need to demonstrate to the persecuted faith communities that they are not alone.

In his Foreword for ACN's 2019 'Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith', Cardinal Joseph Coutts, Archbishop of Karachi, Pakistan, wrote: "In recent years, there has been a growing intolerance in society, aggravated by the growth of militant and extremist Islamic groups such as the Taliban and others." He added: "The government provides armed police protection, whenever we request it for church services or gatherings. But militant groups have become difficult to control, thus leaving us in a state of constant tension, knowing at the back of our minds that somewhere at some time there is going to be another attack – where or when is anybody's guess. Yes, we do have the freedom to believe and to practise our faith, but we have to be ready to face the wrath of those elements in our country who have a different mind-set. The words of Jesus to his disciples are there to remind us what His followers should expect: *'If they persecuted Me they will also persecute you.'* (John 15:20)."²³



John Pontifex is Head of Press & Information, Aid to the Church in Need (UK)

For more information about Aid to the Church in Need and how to support suffering Christians in Pakistan, visit www.acnuk.org

²⁰ John Pontifex, 'Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2005-2006', Aid to the Church in Need (UK), September 2006.

²¹ John Pontifex, 'PAKISTAN: Justice and freedom at last', ACN News, 30 January 2020, [<https://acnuk.org/news/pakistan-justice-and-freedom-at-last/>]

²² John Pontifex, 'PAKISTAN: A sporting opportunity awaits', ACN News, 6 March 2020, [<https://acnuk.org/news/pakistan-a-sporting-opportunity-awaits/>]

²³ John Pontifex and John Newton, 'Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2017-19', p. 7 [https://gallery.mailchimp.com/25a175338ce0562b9d08ed926/files/049a8d93-6780-4659-9488-3a77ee9397ef/ACN_Persecuted_and_Forgotten_2019_W.pdf]

The Synodal Way?

Fr Hans Feichtinger expresses concern



The Catholic Church in Germany has begun its Synod, or rather “Synodal Way”. A new term and concept of “Synod” was chosen as traditional synods were thought to be not inclusive and not innovative enough, insufficient for the present crisis. The “Synod” will focus on four topics: power and separation of power in the Church; sexuality and partnership; priestly existence/celibacy; women in church ministry and offices: so it's all seen as being about sex and power.

These topics have been selected on the basis of a study commissioned by the Episcopal Conference on the causes of sexual abuse of minors in the Church. According to that study, minor abuse is related to celibacy, Church teaching on (homo-) sexuality, and abuse of power in male-only, clerical environments. As the study itself admits, however, comparative analyses of other environments and institutions, somehow similar to the church, are not available. This fact undermines radically what we can learn from the study, as a bishop pointed at the Synod. Is the whole enterprise built on sand?

Fixated

At the Synod and beyond, many German Catholics feel that finally the time has come to talk about these issues. But these topics are not at all new, and the Church in Germany is not “finally” talking about them but “still”. Many cannot remember a time when German Catholics were not fixated on these issues.

The Synod is off to a bad start, or as a cardinal put it: “basically, all my fears have come true”. Since the Synod has decided that its decisions need not be in conformity with the doctrine of the Church, many if not all bets are off. The underlying theology of the Synod appears vague, but empirical data (or what we declare as such) are certainly being raised to a theological authority that can match, or where necessary even trump, Tradition, and probably also Scripture, should our exegetical methods fail to produce the interpretation we need. The Synod is mostly interested in “being credible”; for that reason authenticity is a priority, but it also seems to think that *what* we believe, and *in whom*, needs to be updated in order to make the Church today more credible. So this is not about authenticity as the new orthodoxy, but also about new doctrines.

*many if not all
bets are off*

Selection

Besides the introductory study and the foundational theology, the selection of participants is tendentious. The Synod consists of all bishops in Germany (ordinary and auxiliary) and an equal number of delegates (lay, religious and clergy), the latter selected from diocesan councils, Catholic associations and other institutions of established Catholicism in Germany. As a priest friend wrote to me just this week: in the parish, people do not care or know much about the Synod, but his lay pastoral assistant talks about little else.

But no lay bashing, please: clerical *and* lay synod participants are left-leaning, and as such exaggerating what the majority of Catholics in Germany believe, not contradicting it. The Synod deals with concerns of a bourgeois church that wants to subdue traditional Catholic teachings and practices to its own ideas and principles. The Synod wants to bring about “real change”, to start and do things which, generously, Rome and other churches “need not go along with”: if that is not de facto schism, what is? What its leadership is to the Church in Germany, the German Church is to the Church universal – not the good sourdough the Gospel speaks of. In order to figure out where the road taken by the Synod will lead, no hypothetical slippery slope arguments need to be made; you can see the results of such changes in where Anglican and Protestant mainline churches are today. If the Synod wants to take empirical data into account, here they are.

Yet, while many of the majority positions at the Synod may not be totally at odds with how most Catholics feel in Germany, the Synod's composition is mirroring the actual Catholic base much less than we are led to believe. The four topics (or rather the two, power and sex) are mostly elite, clerical concerns, pushed by clerics, Church employees, high-level volunteers and other functionaries. In Germany, this intra-ecclesial world is so big, and so well connected to power in politics and society, and Church employees are so numerous, that it is actually possible to confound that world with the actual world. This is an elite bubble, but a very big one. Only in Germany would the defence minister and the leader of the governing party publicly demand the abolition of celibacy.

*well connected to
power in politics
and society*

A recommitment to Christ

In any case, a synod cannot simply be about democratic decision making; a synod is not supposed to seek majority decision but consensus, and not even consensus of participants only, but consensus as recommitment to Christ and his Gospel, assenting to the truth revealed to, and preserved in, His Church. That language you will hear rarely at the Synod. Instead, you will hear many references to the “the base” from people actually speaking for the elite, for themselves. On the other hand, this elite has an authentic concern for Church members; in Germany, however, this group is very different from those who go to Mass. Church members in Germany are principally those registered as Catholics with the state, those who pay the infamous church tax. Those 28% of the total population fund the life of the church, but less than 10% of them(!) attend Mass on Sunday. It is understandable that the Church is interested in not alienating its donor

base, which largely mirrors a general population that has abandoned central convictions of Christianity like faith in the resurrection, the need for salvation and grace, the reality of sin, not to mention the sacraments and many commandments. Debating celibacy in a room where faith in resurrection to eternal life is not a given will not really work.

At the Synod, as in the Church generally, concern for victims of abuse is strong, and concern for prevention is real. One young synod participant even called the Church an association of abusers: that is problematic, and it could backfire. It also begs the question whether the participant wants to be seen as church member only when it fits. The above-mentioned study itself, besides all its tendentious analyses, affirms that, when it comes to abuse prevention, by now the Church is a model institution. Should we not be amazed that this was accomplished by a hierarchical, clerical, allegedly sexually repressed Church, while other groups and institutions, that have none of these defects, have not come so far. Again, the concern for victims is real, but clearly other interests are in play here, and they are dominant.

other interests are in play

What does the Synod want?

The crucial question is: what does the Synod want? A popular answer is: connect to people “today”, redefine Christian and priestly lives for “today”. This answer *can* be understood in an evangelistic sense, but interestingly that is not obvious, and not necessarily the case. In order to connect, are we moving ourselves and others, are we adjusting our methods and approaches, or are we adapting the faith? What the Synod has said up to now sounds more like accommodation than evangelisation.

more like accommodation

After the decision to launch this Synod had been taken, Pope Francis surprised the German bishops with his letter to Catholics in Germany reminding them that evangelism must be the main goal. As the Synod starts, this seems largely forgotten. Instead, one participant said in no uncertain terms that the Synod “at least” has to introduce female deacons. Despite the desire to be “theologically strong”, the Synod actually is dominated by political thinking: at the outset, demands are being formulated, bargaining positions are being occupied. How is this different from Trumpian deal-making strategies? How is such a strategy adequate to the Synod’s own topics? As one bishop correctly observed: the question of power is crucial – he is not wrong: certainly, and sadly, the question of power is central in what the Synod has as its topics. And you could turn this around: if the Synod is going to succeed, it will recognise the supreme and life-giving authority of Scripture and Tradition, instead of looking for ways of mitigating and accommodating that authority to “where we are today”.

the main goal.

Truth and fidelity?

This means, of course, that the deeper issue is about truth and fidelity. Power in the Church, starting with the Magisterium of the pope and the bishops, is about fidelity to the Apostolic faith and to its continued proclamation, not to maintaining the Church’s

institutional hardware and societal position. When it comes to efforts of evangelisation, the track record of German dioceses is abysmal, despite all their financial and theological resources. The Synod is set on continuing the *hermeneutics of discontinuity*. The mantra is ever the same: we need to discontinue practices and teachings of old for the sake of connecting to people today, for being able to accompany them through their lives and work for peace and unity in the world. These are good goals, of course, and working for the survival of the Church as institution is not a bad thing either. But the focus is far off: without concrete fidelity to Christ, connection building “would bring about the union of all, but only to their destruction” (Pius XII). Evangelism without doctrinal fidelity is not evangelism. Synods disconnected from Sacred Tradition and biblical truth do not connect us to the real Jesus, but to one made to our measure. Let us be very clear: anyone demanding categorically “at least female deacons” is careless about Apostolic succession and faith.

the focus is far off

If the Church in Germany wants to have a future, it needs to get over its dependency on perceived social relevance, on institutional continuity and its connection to societal power. None of that is a primary goal for evangelisation; instead they all depend on actually doing the work of evangelisation, in every generation, and certainly in 2020. It is remarkable how Pope Francis has spared the Germans, holding back from criticising a rich church.

Sins

The shock of clerical abuse of minors has affected the whole Church, and some German bishops in particular. The shocking aspect of abuse always is that something very good is being abused for evil purposes. That means, the abuse is evil, not the thing or the relationship that is being exploited, most certainly not the person. The Synod needs to remember that this applies to the hierarchical structure of the Church, and to other things that have been abused. The sins of the disciples are no proof for the need to change doctrine or discipline.

If the Synod continues to believe that the teaching and tradition of the Church cannot be binding for its decisions, it will mean that the pope’s authority will not, either. This position is coherent, of course, and this coherence is typically German, but it makes the underlying errors and the foreseeable erroneous results even more devastating.

For the Church in Germany and beyond, the repentant king David would be a good model to imitate (2 Sam 11–12): Once the prophet Nathan had him confront his sin, David is moved to contrition and repentance, ready to face the consequences. He does not seek exceptions from, or adaptations of, the divine commands to his royal misdeeds. Instead David relies on God’s mercy, and accepts the divine punishments. Forgiveness and renewal are always possible. Reform of the Church today has to follow a penitential logic, one that does not seek accommodation but that makes its discipline tendentially more demanding. Such a reform may at first widen the divide between Church and

the light of the Gospel

world, but doing so it will attract people to the light of the gospel which is more purifying, more liberating, more forgiving and more comforting than any human endeavour and experience ever can be. This alone will authorise and motivate for mission. Unless the Synodal Way goes in that direction, it is doing the opposite.

Healing and conversion

Immense pressure still is applied to make sure that all bishops participate in the Synod, and on *how* they participate, pressure from both outside and inside the church, most of all peer pressure from the episcopal conference and its ultra-political opinion makers. In many respects, however, the Church in Germany lives an outdated and broken system. How much good can be reached *inside* this particular structure? The needed healing and conversion will require much disruption, unwanted as that always is. The Synodal Way is the culmination of a long history of German alienation from authentic church renewal, going back to before Vatican II. As the Synod displays with shocking clarity, the Germans, well-funded and theologically supercharged, have immunised themselves against inspiration from other churches, against direction from Rome, and against reforming impetuses from within. Not by chance some of those who have warned against where this leads, have also been Germans, e.g. Cardinals +Scheffczyk, +Meisner, Brandmüller, Müller and Cordes, along with Benedict XVI.

The real question

The Synod has begun by continuing what the Church in Germany has done for decades: it talks about itself, and it is looking for ways to be less different from its surroundings. As the Synod unfolds, we must take to heart what Pope Francis once said about himself: we cannot be afraid of schism, not afraid of *whether* it comes or *when* it comes. Unless the Synod finds its way to doctrinal fidelity, schism will be the result. Maybe some bishops and delegates will be able to inspire and redirect the Synod, or else the time will come to walk away and let the whole thing implode. The question really is the one Jesus put to his disciples (John 6:66–68): “Do you also wish to go away?” In Germany and elsewhere, we all, faithful, priests, bishops and the pope, need to answer unconditionally with Peter: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

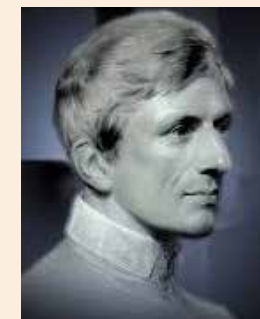
Msgr. Hans Feichtinger is the pastor of St Albertus and St George's and Adjunct Professor at St. Paul University in Ottawa.

A Newman meditation for our country



Arise, Mary, and go forth
in thy strength into that
north country, which
once was thine own,
and take possession
of a land which knows
thee not. Arise, Mother
of God, and with thy

thrilling voice, speak to those who labour with child,
and are in pain, till the babe of grace leaps within them!
Shine on us, dear Lady, with thy bright countenance,
like the sun in his strength, O stella matutina, O
harbinger of peace, till our year is one perpetual May.
From thy sweet eyes, from thy pure
smile, from thy majestic brow, let
ten thousand influences rain down,
not to confound or overwhelm,
but to persuade, to win over thine
enemies. O Mary, my hope, O
Mother undefiled, fulfil to us the
promise of this Spring.



from 'The Second Spring' by St. John Henry Newman

Carmelite Novices Formation Meeting: 'Who do you say I am?'

The Novices and Novice Mistresses from Dolgellau Carmel in Wales, from Quidenham, Notting Hill, Lithuania and Iceland met for our annual Initial Formation Meeting. It is a good opportunity to connect with one another, build friendships and receive quality input. Here are some highlights from each of the main talks.

Jesus through the eyes of our Carmelite Saints

Fr Matt Blake OCD helped us to look at Jesus through the eyes of St John and St Teresa. He gave us her main description of prayer as a 'friendly conversation with the one who we know loves us'. Jesus wishes to repeat the Incarnation in each one of us. He gives Himself totally to the one who gives herself totally, holding nothing back.

St John tells us to fix our eyes on Him; to have a habitual desire to imitate Christ and to bring our life into conformity with His. He is the motivation of every choice we make. It's all for Jesus. How narrow is the way that leads to life. Following Christ, we were reminded, means denying self: 'The Cross is the supporting staff that eases the load'. Fr Matt painted a picture of asceticism not as a negative thing, but as a way of changing the inclination: its whatever you need to do to set yourself free. What that is going to look like in practice is going to be different for each one of us, depending on what it is that binds us. If you hold on to even just one thing, you're not free. Love is the spur and knowing that only Jesus answers the soul's deepest longings. The soul 'has left herself and all things *for Him*.' (*Spiritual Canticle* 11,1). St John reassures us 'If the soul is seeking God, so much more is God seeking the soul'.

St Teresa of Avila: Encountering Christ in Prayer

Sr Jo from Ware Carmel gave us a great synthesis of Teresa's teaching on prayer: 'we should occupy ourselves in looking at Christ who is looking at us'. Jo recalled St Teresa's emphasis on the need for proper preparation, approaching God through the humanity of Christ, an awareness of Who it is we are speaking to, and intentionality: we should go to prayer fully intending to make contact with God. Prayer for Teresa is "simply a friendly and frequent, solitary conversation with Him who, as we know, loves us". The closest Teresa comes to giving us a method of prayer is being present to Christ in a particular Gospel setting, looking at Him.

Come and See Weekends

For women who are interested in tentatively exploring vocation to any form of religious life, or to contemplative life, in particular a series of 3 workshops are being hosted at Dolgellau Carmelite Monastery in Wales. There will be input from a speaker, and the chance to meet Carmelite sisters and share in the sisters' cycle of prayer, while staying in our flat/bungalow. You can attend just one, or the whole series. Book through our website www.carmel-dolgellau.uk (under construction) or by phone. More info about enclosed contemplative life is available on our youtube page 'Carmel Wales'.

'Their eyes were opened' (Lk 24.15) – 17-19 July 2020 – with Sr Lynne Baron FCJ

'They set out at once' (Lk 24.33) – 9-11 October 2020 – with Carmelite Sisters

by a Carmelite Sister

Interview

Stand-up comedy, books and a newspaper

Joanna Bogle talks to Greg Watts



Greg Watts is a Catholic writer whose books include *Labourer in the Vineyard*, a biography of Pope (now Emeritus) Benedict XVI, the first to be produced following the 2005 papal election. He is currently editor of *The Pilgrim*, the Southwark diocesan newspaper.

Appointed in 2011, he recalls telling Archbishop Peter Smith that he didn't want a paper with "photos of people eating sausage rolls in a parish hall" or too many pictures of bishops and priests. "We both agreed that we wanted articles on education, family life, spirituality, Church history and so on."

The title *The Pilgrim* was chosen to reflect the importance of Southwark's pilgrimage sites, including the great pilgrimages to Canterbury made famous by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* which begin in Southwark. "You could say that the most famous pilgrimage in English history began in what is now the Borough High Street and ended at Canterbury Cathedral."

Watts grew up in rural Derbyshire and after holding various jobs, including chimney sweep and bingo caller, felt a call to serve the Church and went to study at the Jesuit centre, Campion House, in Osterley, Middlesex.

Stand-up comedy?

"I had two fantastic years there, where I met a great bunch of guys and had some inspirational teachers, most notably Jim Smith, a layman, who really got me excited about literature and writing. Eventually I realised that writing, not priesthood, was my vocation. I think editing the college magazine helped me to come to this conclusion."

I realised that writing, not priesthood, was my vocation

"After leaving Campion, I moved to London's bedsit-land, working in an office for a national company while doing stand-up comedy and writing in the evenings. I was useless as a stand-up and got booed off the stage at a couple of pubs I performed at."

Newsdesk

"Anyway, I eventually got accepted on to a degree course in English and history at what is now the University of Roehampton. While there, I wrote and produced some plays and began sending off articles to Catholic newspapers, including *The Universe*, which, to my

surprise, offered me some shifts on the news desk. It was a steep learning experience! Just before I graduated in 1989, the editor offered me a full-time position as a reporter. And that was the beginning of my career in journalism."

John Pridmore

His first book was *Catholic Lives*, a collection of interviews with people from different backgrounds who had become Catholics. He has since completed a total of seventeen books, including the best-seller *From Gangland to Promised Land*, which he ghosted for ex-gangster John Pridmore. He is now working on a novel "satire about a prosperity gospel preacher, set against the invasion of Iraq in 2003."

Along with many writers and broadcasters, Watts is concerned about freedom: "We live in weird, and increasingly angry, times in Britain. Beliefs that most of us accepted as normal, for example that God created male and female, are now being aggressively questioned. Freedom of speech is under attack, even in universities, of all places. If someone says the wrong thing on Twitter, or refuses to toe the line on gay issues, there are calls for him or her to be sacked or even prosecuted."



Witch hunts?

"I often find myself thinking about Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, which was about a witch hunt in Salem, but also about McCarthyism in the 1950s in the US when all sorts of people were being accused of being Communists and hauled before a hearing."

"And then you have the eco fundamentalists with their preaching of the ecological apocalypse. They want to take us back to pre-industrial times. If they had their way, we'd all be living in caves, eating plants, and creating energy with a piece of wood and a stick."

Need to communicate

"I'm not going to say anything about what I think about how the Church should be responding to this bonkers and worrying society that is emerging. But I will say something I've been repeating for years: priests need to be taught how to preach, how to communicate with a congregation. All too often, what Catholics hear in a church on Sunday fails to enlighten or inspire them."

All too often what Catholics hear in a church on Sunday fails to enlighten or inspire them

He is emphatic about the need to communicate well and believes that seminaries must train men specifically in doing this: "There's no excuse for mediocre or lazy preaching nowadays. There so much material out there – books, You Tube, podcasts, and so on – that show you ways of communicating effectively to an audience."

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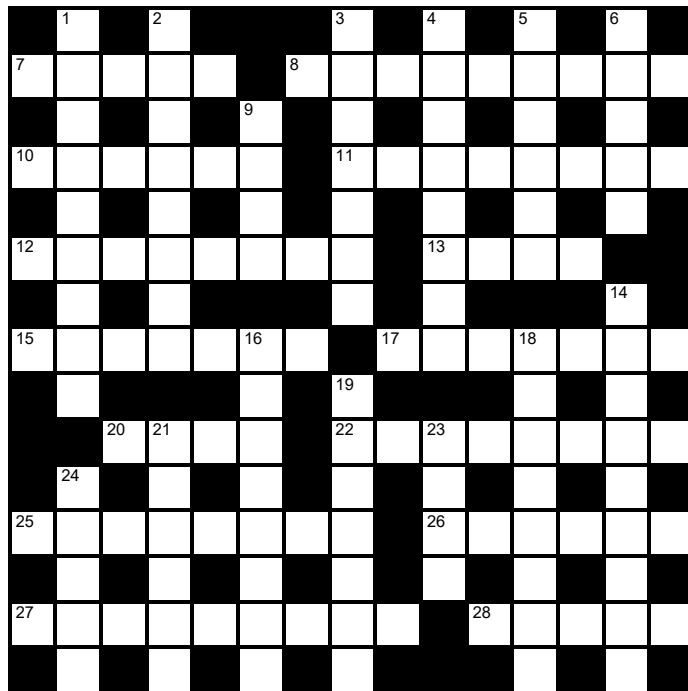
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CROSSWORD 22 by Aurora Borealis



We invite you to 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 by January 31st 2020. Entries may be the original page or photocopy and may be sent to 45, East St.Helen Street, Abingdon Oxon, OX 14 5EE. Please include your full postal address.

The winner of crossword 21 was ?

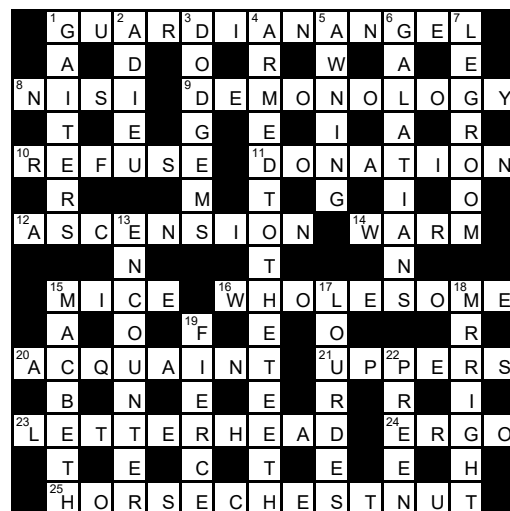
Across

7. Old western in dull matching financial arrangement (5)
8. The outward characterises of something, ie not its substance (9)
10. Very slim family are in southern New York (6)
11. Popular joint half town owes something to (2,4,2)
12. Boosts proceeds (8)
13. River a Parisian finds an object of mystery (4)
- 15. One of the great basilicas of Rome (7)**
- 17. Rerum Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII (7)**
20. Secular left: an improved crowd at first (4)
22. A vehicle goes in behind schedule on an individual basis (1,2,5)
25. Immured, bricked up, find somewhere to study (3,5)
- 26. Blessed Frederic Founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society (6)**
27. Conquer maiden perhaps with fling (9)
28. Cellar bound (5)

Down

1. Talk about cod and half of hake cooked. Outclassed and ending up here (6,2)
2. Pots and pans press cargo (8)
3. Obscure decline (7)
4. In former days, beat the girl's piggy, almost (8)
- 5. Member of one of the orders of the presbyterate (6)**

6. Virginia, for example, has cheap stuff in Kent and Surrey (5)
9. So you're not coming at the start? Agree! (4)
14. Game for a figure of fun? (4,5)
16. Sounds like Noah's boat lamp is in play (3,5)
- 18. "My father was a wandering Deut. 26 (8)**
21. Two chaps would make a good royal mate (6)
23. A cat - microscopically small (4)
24. Diver very full of energy (5)

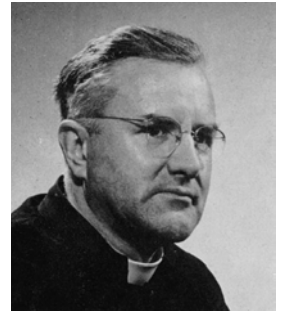


Solution crossword 21

Holloway on...

Looking at the problem of evil - Part I

EDWARD HOLLOWAY



It is said that the only real and intelligent objection to belief in the existence of God, is the problem of evil. Many will be inclined to agree. Certainly any discussion among younger teenagers about the goodness of God and the power of God will eventually drift to the demand "If there is a God, why does He let it all happen?" If, on the plane of moral evil rather than physical or 'natural' evil, one replies with the real freedom of the free will and the real power of personal sanctifying grace to sweeten and transform our personalities if we will allow Him, the rejoinder comes, "Well, yes, but if He is almighty why does He not stop me from sinning and going to hell?" One has heard of a certain seminary professor who teaches his students that "God cannot be called *almighty* because of the problem posed by evil, but *unsurpassable*, yes, certainly". I hope the good God feels flattered at being so put at the top of the class, even if not quite in a class of His own. One is not surprised to learn that the same honest man is unsure of any real distinction between matter and spirit, or between God and his creation. It would follow.

God cannot square the circle

In a mere article we will ponder what perhaps we may understand and can answer concerning the problem of evil, without losing pages on what we cannot. We will do better to keep to the old categories of *almighty* God and *eternal* God, because as God is utterly and totally Being, "pure act", and the transcendental source of all dependent reality, these ancient categories of natural theology are going to be true. Failure to penetrate "mystery" is not due to incompetence in God's being but in ours. One remembers back to youthful days, at St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst, during the last war, and to a theologian of some distinction (Fr. Bernard Leeming, S.J.) remarking: "I think the solution of the ultimate problem of moral evil, Fathers, the allowing of the damnation of the spiritual creature, is insoluble to the finite mind. We can only point to the enormous evidence for a Good God, and the complete coherence of the order of his providence for our good. In that, as in the Sacred Heart, we can take our confident refuge".

Fr. Bernard may have been right about the ultimate impenetrability of the mystery of grace and salvation. If he is right (and of this one is less than sure) then the mystery resides in the nature of God and the majesty of God, which even in the order grace we cannot fully penetrate. We have to avoid the neat Calvinist solution of arbitrary predestination, so very logical to the finite mind. We have also to worry that Catholic schools of thought which teach that "God can always and efficaciously will the salvation of the most deliberate

Failure to penetrate "mystery" is not due to incompetence in God's being but in ours

sinner ..." but of course "according to the modality of free will" may not be saying the same thing as Calvin. In all the aspects of our post-scholastic but pre-conciliar theology, we need to be careful about admitting cheerfully the infinitely more perfect worlds and orders that God could have created but didn't. We may be saying that God can always make an infinite number of ever more perfect circles ... and of course keep them square. We do not know whether some of the postulates theologians make arbitrarily in the name of the omnipotence of God, are simply incompatible with the order of the divine wisdom.

God and "Necessity"

At the root of the so-called "problem of evil" is one great, necessary lack of determination on which this writer at least suspects all else hinges. It is that God cannot will us, or our being, or our finality (which is the same thing as our fulfilment) with an intrinsic, metaphysical necessity. God cannot will the angel either, with an intrinsic necessity. God can only will Himself — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — with a necessity which is absolute, because God alone, in his own essence is the unique and only Reality which is "necessary". If God shall decree to know, will, and want anything other than Himself — the spiritual creature made to His, to God's, own spiritual image and substantial likeness — then that creating, and the communion of that calling unto God, must be an offer, a gift, in God, and in the creature, a desiring in the order of the intrinsically unconstrained.

*The creature
will discover its
happiness only in
God*

Matter is constrained and predetermined of its nature; it has no one lasting "ego" and fulfilment as men and angels have. It cannot commune with God, even as it cannot offend Him. The spiritual creature, angel or man shares as spiritual in God's own self-recognition, self-love, and in that self-determination which we call "freedom". Its fulfilment will lie in its cooperation with God, as God seeks it and desires its love. There will be God's one truth, not any truth, God's one order of goodness, not anything the creature likes. The creature is not its own happiness; it will discover its happiness only in God, in a recognition free from the fundamentals of its being. It will not find God without the seeking and prompting of God; yet its own response is known as "free" from the root of its dignity as spiritual. The spiritual creation does not have to obey from very nature and definition as matter does. It can adore and will itself to its own destruction. Yet, come to think of it, do we have any evidence from the pages of the Gospels that, in any confrontation with Christ, the "unclean spirit" ever asked for its own annihilation?

Creation as Community

If God creates within an order, a ministry of being, spiritual creatures must be expected to act upon one another in a community of knowledge, love, and influence. This presumption must apply to the angels as well, but upon that order of being, so little known to us in detail, we will not linger. The proposition certainly applies to human kind — from the first dependency of our being conceived, to the last grace ministered to us at the hand of another, in Christ's name, the last prayer whispered in our ear by loved ones, as we die. Thus, we are at all times a society of friends, gathered around the Person of God. It is inconceivable if we are capable of refusing the relationship which defines our

"righteousness" within the very being of God, that our life-ministry upon others should always be for good and never for evil! The alternative is to say that to be "good" God must always create an order in which it was morally if not metaphysically impossible to reject Him at all. Such a concept is opaque, for it does not cohere with any exercise of "freedom" as we know it on earth, nor with that inner sense of joy in obedience to God as "loved Person" which we sense when we obey the voice of conscience. It does not fit in with that sense of saying "no" with "darkness all surround" which we experience in the deliberate refusal of God's known will.

There is one point of difficulty to which to confess, in this matter of the "freedom to sin" of the created spirit: the "special privileges" of Our Lady. In an earlier meditation for the Immaculate Conception (FAITH Vol. 14. No. 6 1982) one suggested that her immunity from Original Sin was not really a special privilege in any event, because if Christ is predestined as the meaning and climax of all creation, then Mary, as willed before Eve, was not intrinsically liable to Original Sin but only extrinsically by physical descent in time. Likewise, while God cannot will anything by an intrinsic necessity except Himself, the role of Mary in God's plan is as close to a work within the Divinity as is conceivable for any creature, touching as it does the union of natures in the Person of Christ. The love with which Mary is loved by God for Himself in his divine ordinance is the nearest thing one can get to a grace which, in the subject receiving it, makes deliberate sin, mortal or venial "metaphysically" impossible and actually morally inconceivable from its sheer degree of communion with the Being of God — a degree that is which makes all else unlovable and undesirable which is opposed to the beauty of God. If there is an order of dependence in being, all of it the utter gift of God, there is no possible intrinsic reason why we should all expect or require of God the status and privileges of Mary. There is no point in being jealous of the Blessed Virgin: of all of us it is true "What hast thou, which thou hast not freely received, and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou had'st not received it?" (I.Cor. 4:7)

*There is no point
in being jealous of
the Blessed Virgin*

The Mass: God's Holy Communion with all Creation

We really do not know when we talk of it being in the power of God to create a spiritual order in which truly and freely no creature would ever sin, whether we are talking about an order which is possible at all, or again an order in which all the other characteristics which bind together our ministry of love, service, action, and communion would be really and freely manifested to the glory of God. What we must require of God, if God decrees to create an order and communion, a "society of friends" between Himself and mutually to one another, is that the order so created shall mirror to the fullest degree we can conceive, and beyond the fullest we can conceive, all the attributes of God, including most essentially the mercy, comprehension, understanding and forgiveness in love, of God. Such an order we do know and experience in the Incarnation of the transcendent God and the redemption of mankind, in the whole gamut of His work.

Sometimes we forget that the redemption is a work done and still doing in the Person of Jesus, God and man. As a work it is manifest in Christ's resurrection, teaching us that our fallen flesh is membered to a victorious personality and a glorious and immortal

body. Whatever, through the pressure of sin, evil communion from others, pain, and ignorance, cannot be repaired or even healed a little in this time, is still covered by that living, personal, continuing redemption which consummates beyond the grave what could not be operated here. Of this, through time, but into eternity, the Mass, in which not a man but Jesus re-presents Himself among his people as One ever offered and ever offering, is the most moving of signs. One thinks of it every time one raises the consecrated Host to the people. Then, borne to the hands of God, by the angel who ministers the gifts of men to the Father (Eucharistic Prayer I), He who is our peace with God is given back to us as the pledge of peace and our peace with each other. Then, in Him and of Him we eat the Bread of Life at the common table of Our Father and grow in wisdom, age and grace personally and as a People before God and men.

The redemption is a work done and still doing in the Person of Jesus

Of such an order of creation, dignified in the first moments of its spawning by the decree of the Incarnation, redeemed not by one act, but by the living communing of the same Son of God and of man, I am not willing to say that God could have done more, God could have done better. What we can see is that all good, even to our personal reception into the bosom of God at the moment of our death, is a work and a communing. From the moment of the “Big Bang” through to the intercession for us of Christ and his saints, we are in the presence of one continuous ministry, in which we create or destroy in the order of being, of reality, for ourselves, and upon our brothers and sisters.

Rupture of Unity-Law of Creation

Christians, including Catholics, have forgotten the doctrine of Original Sin: within that doctrine, intelligently and coherently understood, is the actual answer to the problem of evil within the order of creation and within the actual order of our lives as a ministry one to another, as God has constituted that universal relationship. That order includes — or better, is founded upon — the Incarnation of The Word, as the source and life-principle of the angelic order, and of the life of our own order, as Son of God and Son of Man. (Colloss. 1:16-17). Therefore the reluctance to speculate about an infinity of better orders of being which God could have made but did not. There is no conceivable crowning of the universe that betters the making and fulfilling of Angels and of Men in Christ, Sacrament of All Creation. The order within which such a Gift is decreed must be supremely worthy of the unique majesty of the Gift.

Concerning man’s life and order, the doctrine of original holiness teaches that all human life and being is a communion and a ministry of one upon another. Before the advent of man, this community of the *inflowing of being by one thing to another* (which is the best definition of causality) was true of that ‘community’ which is the entire material cosmos. In the theology which inspires FAITH, it is often called “the Unity-Law of Control and Direction”. Yet, this law of ascent in one ministry of development, truth and goodness is manifest in matter only as the foil which sets off greater jewels embedded. The first jewel is the nature of man, and his creation in original holiness. In man this Unity-Law continues unbroken in

A jewel beyond compare crowns the making of man: the Incarnation of God

a higher but now free and spiritual order for the perfecting of the sons and daughters of God. A jewel beyond compare crowns the making of man: the Incarnation of God as the Christ, the Holy One who is the summit of the Unity-Law in person, in the continuity of one unbroken, coherent economy of creation. The Incarnation of God in Christ is not simply an event, but also an activity: the summit of the creative Law, through which God makes all things, maintains all things, and brings all things in balance to their perfection. We human beings are always too a living and a causal part of that one “creation in community”, for better or worse, for good or for degradation (see Col.1: 16-26. Eph. 4:1-13. Hebrews 2:7-16).

Every aspect of human life damaged

Original Sin then, that overlooked but vital doctrine of the reality of our state, and the introduction into the material universe for the first time of “the problem of evil”, teaches the rupturing of that living *holy communion* of good, by which from the first pair men were to minister life and fulfilment to one another through Christ. It is not some abstract order of good which is ruptured; these free and spiritual creatures themselves are appallingly wounded in the depths of their beings. They cannot, and even within God’s order of redemption they do not, respond to God with the fulness and fairness or beauty and good as they should. The good we minister is never perfect, and in many the ministry of their lives, as a work and impact upon others, is a ministry of evil, of destruction of peace and order.

In the economy of God in which we actually live, this is the whole answer to “the problem of evil”. Every institution of human society is wounded and lessened by the disharmony and greeds of sin, that “law within my members” that contradicts the Unity-Law, “the law of God” — a Law which being of life, and working only to the fulfilment of life, “delights me according to my inward man” (Rom. 7:22-24). At the time of a certain British air disaster caused by the wickedness of men, we heard a lot about God’s permission of this sort of thing destroying people’s faith in his existence at all! One understands the grief, and the disorientation of loss, the numbing pain of horrible, unexpected sorrow. But yet, in itself, how small, and unconsciously selfish the complaint. We seek that the providence of God should always work to spare our little local utopia of happiness, when the burdens and the same causality which caused the evil, fell upon the only-begotten Son of God’s delight — who was not spared, but tasted death for all, and gave Himself, rising again, as the certainty of our renewal and lasting joy (Col. 1:24).

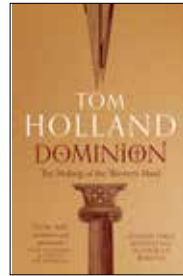
Every institution of human society is wounded and lessened by the disharmony and greeds of sin

This is the first part of Fr. Holloway’s Editorial for FAITH magazine, May/June 1989. It will be concluded in our next issue.

The Christian revolution that made our world

Dominion: The making of the Western Mind by Tom Holland, Little, Brown, 594pp, £25.00

reviewed by Richard Whinder



This is an important book: a work by a best-selling author which attempts an objective overview of the history of Christianity and its influence on the Western world. It represents a considerable achievement, and it deserves to be read. Almost everyone will find something new in these pages, while committed Christians will find their faith affirmed – if occasionally challenged as well.

The classical world

In some respects, the author, Tom Holland, could be described as a sort of 'anti-Gibbon'. Edward Gibbon, the author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, famously fell so much in love with ancient Rome (or, at least, with an eighteenth century English gentleman's idea of what ancient Rome might have been like) that he ended up rejecting the Christian faith in which he had been raised. Holland has taken the opposite path. He made his name with scholarly and popular works on ancient history (*Rubicon* on the Roman republic, *Dynasty* on the House of Caesar, and several others) and knows the classical world as well as anyone. But whereas Gibbon was entranced by that world, Holland found much there that repulsed him. The brutality and cruelty, the naked worship of power, the contempt for the weak and less fortunate – the more he learned of the ancient world, the more he came to appreciate the Christian 'revolution' which brought an end to classical civilisation and ushered in the world we still live in today.

Desolation

It is important to note at this point that Holland is not himself a practising Christian. In his book, he is occasionally sceptical in dealing with the Sacred Scriptures and irreverent in recounting the lives of the Saints. But he is a fair and sympathetic critic. Towards the end of the book, he writes movingly of his godmother, Deborah, who obviously incarnated for him many of the great Christian virtues. Moreover, his own experience has taught him that Christian values are not only precious, and to be cherished, but that the lack of them can lead to desolation. His work as a film-maker took him to Iraq in the wake of the devastation wrought by the so-called Islamic State. There he witnessed what can happen when every vestige of Christianity is absent – men crucified, women enslaved, children massacred, life made barren. He came to value all the more a religion which has dared to claim 'God is love'.

Many facets of Christianity

The book is structured in a broadly chronological fashion, over three sections: 'Antiquity' (the classical world) – 'Christendom' (the Middle Ages and Renaissance) – and 'Modernitas' (which takes us right up to the present day). Within this over-reaching structure, however, Holland leaps about, bringing in all manner of historical events, striking anecdotes and colourful characters. The Marquis de Sade and Henrich Himmler, St Paul the Apostle and St Catherine of Siena, Cluniac monks and Quakers, St Robert

Bellarmino and Nelson Mandela – all these and many more fill the pages and in doing so cast new light on the many facets of Christianity which the author chooses to explore. Occasionally the sheer profusion can be almost bewildering, but Holland is master of his material, and the overall effect is never less than fascinating.

St Augustine and the Beatles

Standing, as he does, outside the formal structures of the faith allows Holland a certain objectivity, but there are of course weaknesses with this approach as well. The book proves conclusively that the Christian faith and Christian values have permeated every aspect of the Western world and exercise a continuing effect. But Holland never offers any criteria by which we might judge genuine developments from corruptions. It is telling that the very first page of his book contains a quotation from St Augustine ('Love and do what you will'), followed immediately by one from the Beatles ('Love is all you need'). Now, it may well be true that the Beatles could only write those lyrics because they had grown up in a world steeped in the Christian faith – but can their song really be counted as an expression of Christianity?

Authority or incoherence

More serious questions arise. At one point Holland argues that those who sought to extend marriage to same-sex couples could claim to be motivated by 'Christian' values (love and compassion). But a practising Catholic will rightly object that sexual relations outside the marriage of male and female are clearly condemned by the New Testament (a point Holland himself makes elsewhere) and that same-sex 'marriage' is plainly contrary to the Sacramental order established by Jesus Christ. What this book ultimately demonstrates (although the author never makes the case) is that Christianity is desperately in need of a teaching authority – a 'Magisterium', in fact – if it is not to collapse into incoherence and self-contradiction.

Human values

One final point. This book's importance has been generally recognised and it has been widely reviewed in the national press. Often, however, the reviewers have been secularists who (while acknowledging the author's scholarship) have sought to cast doubt on the central tenet of his book. What Holland claims as 'Christian' values, these reviewers say, are in fact simply 'human' values – love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance – these and the like are nothing else than the default setting of human nature. One has to wonder if these reviewers have actually read the book, since Holland demolishes the argument so completely. Few know the classical world better than he, and he has seen just how new and shocking Christianity was in a society whose gods were Jupiter and Mars – and how alien Gospel values still are in societies where Christianity has never taken hold.

True happiness

Yet those secular reviewers do have a valid point – albeit not the one they thought they were making. Granted that the Christian faith was an earth-shattering novelty to the world of late antiquity, it remains the case that the Gospel did find a ready reception there and has done ever since in many different times and places. Down to our own century, cultures as diverse as Europe, South America and Africa have all welcomed with enthusiasm the 'Good News' first preached two thousand years ago on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. What explains this seemingly universal and (as Holland shows) ineradicable appeal? Is it not that the Christian faith reveals the most profound truth about human nature itself? The truth that we are made, each one of us, in the image and likeness of God, and that our only true and lasting happiness will be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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The cry of a Cardinal's soul

The Day is Now Far Spent by Robert, Cardinal Sarah,
Ignatius Press, 349 pp, £16.50

reviewed by Mark Vickers



Coming just three years after his magisterial tome arguing for a rediscovery of the power of silence, one speculates why the Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship felt the need to speak out again, offering the Church another substantial volume. It is a question which the Cardinal anticipates, and answers. Christians are disorientated. 'The Church is experiencing the dark night of the soul.' Daily the Cardinal finds himself asked for help and advice. It requires courage to analyse and articulate the deep-seated causes of the current spiritual crisis. Courage is not something which Sarah lacks.

A 'conversation'

Like *God or Nothing* and *The Power of Silence*, this work is structured as a 'conversation' with the French journalist and author, Nicolas Diat. (Indeed, it is presented as the third panel of a triptych.) However, there is little of the freshness and interplay of personal dialogue which marked the more famous precedents of Pope Benedict's interviews with Vittorio Messori and Peter Seewald. In this book Sarah gives very lengthy responses; there are protracted quotations, particularly from St John Paul II and Pope Benedict. The material is excellent, but one feels that an interview format has been imposed on a series of essays and commentaries. It might have read more easily if it had not.

Bishops' complicit silence

There are no elephants in the room for Cardinal Sarah. Where he identifies a threat to the salvation of souls, the holiness of the Church and the survival of civilisation, he will fearlessly call it out.

Sarah begins with the Church, readily acknowledging that many wounds are self-inflicted. He acknowledges the shameful of clerical abuse. He acknowledges the presence of clericalism, and a preference for activism. He is particularly scathing of his brother bishops and their too-frequent complicit silence. Bishops must learn again to be catechists, 'faithful teachers of divine truths.' Failure to do so produces confusion, and will result in a day of reckoning. Bishops must accompany and provide spiritual paternity to their priests.

Neither partisanship nor doubt

Priests and people are castigated when they deny doctrine and morality, when relativism constitutes an intellectual betrayal of Christ. There is profound need to abandon 'socio-political issues,' to return to personal sanctification and the proclamation of the Gospel.

Sarah encourages personal conversion, fidelity and prayer. He urges his fellow Catholics to give way to neither partisanship nor doubt. Doubt, division and ambiguity are the work of the Devil. In these troubled

times, he proposes the lives of saints and holy religious as role models for us all. Young people need heroes – hence the success of the World Youth Days instituted by St John Paul II.

Celibacy and 'second class priests'

The Cardinal has reflected further on priestly celibacy with Pope Benedict in *From the Depths of Our Hearts*. But in *The Day is Now Far Spent* too, Sarah does not hesitate to address the issues raised by the recent Amazonian Synod. The priesthood, celibacy, the Cross and the truth 'are closely connected realities in Jesus.' Sarah says that he has too much respect for the indigenous peoples of the Amazon to offer them 'second class' priests. Instead, he invites each Latin American diocese to send a missionary priest to the area. He clearly recognises that there could be no possibility of restricting disastrous innovations to the Amazonian region.

Radical break with God

There follows a lengthy and desperately sad survey of the Western world, a world which has lost its way, its identity and its hope. The chapter headings indicate the problems: 'Hatred of Man,' 'Hatred of Life,' 'The Errors of the West,' 'The Funeral March of Decadence,' etc. It is a long catalogue of woes: commercialism, cynicism, hedonism, individualism and globalism. The West refuses to acknowledge the consequences of its radical break with God. Man has lost any sense of his divine origin and destiny. No wonder, he laments, the increase in youth suicide. As Europe threatens to implode, Sarah fears that Islam may have the last word. Europe must heed the warnings. One cannot reject all moral norms and survive. An opulent and compromised Church is failing in her duty to preach the truth in charity and protect civilisation.

The western elite

The Cardinal is not afraid to identify those whom he believes are capitulating to the threats he describes, and in doing so it is clear that the book was produced first for a French audience. He deprecates the violence used against the *gilets jaunes* protestors and denounces President Macron's condemnation of large families. By contrast, he declares, there is something of a will to protect Christian civilisation in Russia and the Visegrad nations of Eastern Europe, who thus attract the scorn of the Western elite.

Overall, it is a bleak picture, an apocalyptic prophecy of civil war, social collapse and cultural suicide, in the face of which 'Christians have abandoned their mission.' Unsurprisingly, Diat asks the Cardinal whether there is any cause for hope.

Return to adoration and prayer

Part IV of the book is entitled 'Rediscovering Hope,' but tellingly it constitutes less than 15% of the content. There is no 'programme' to combat the dangers which beset us, because that would presuppose human solutions. The answer is a renewal of faith, the exercise of the Christian virtues. We must return to adoration and prayer. No, of course, Sarah is not without hope, but 'hope is not smug optimism.'

The Cardinal begins by informing us that 'this book is the cry of my soul.' It is a disturbing read. But isn't that the role of the prophet? Diat contends that Sarah is indeed a prophet because he is a man of deep prayer with many friends in heaven.

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Wisdom beyond monastery walls

The Joy of God: Collected Writings of Sister Mary David, Bloomsbury Continuum, 188pp, £12.99, \$18.00 USA

reviewed by Sister Mary Dominic Pitts



To understand this remarkable collection of spiritual writings, one must know something of the writer, Benedictine Sister Mary David Totah. Her spirit is that wonderful paradoxical blend of lighthearted fun with deep spiritual insight. She exemplifies the finest response of human nature to Jesus Christ, the author of Truth.

One key to understanding her joyful spirit is the fact of her growing up in a community of Palestinian Christians in Louisiana, a childhood and young adulthood full of “companionship and fun.” After earning degrees at Loyola in New Orleans and at the University of Virginia, she took an associate professorship at the College of William and Mary, but another vocation had already slipped into her soul. During postgraduate study at Oxford, she had visited the strictly enclosed Benedictine Abbey of St. Cecilia on the Isle of Wight. The future Sister Mary David “knew: here is my future . . . In May 1985 she entered the monastic enclosure, cheerily proclaiming her intention to remain within it ‘for ever’” (xii-xiii).

Not on ourselves

Within ten years Sister Mary David was made novice mistress and remained in that capacity from 1996 until her death in 2017. Therefore, much of the collection in *The Joy of God* consists of spiritual advice and encouragement given to her novices in the religious life. In light and affectionate language, Sister Mary David assures them that their anxieties and daily struggles are normal “growing pains” that, paradoxically, usually indicate a true vocation. Her advice

is imbued with the sense of humor so necessary in community life; she urges her young charges not to take themselves too seriously, *not to worry*. At times she counsels patience with oneself; at other times, “a bit more humility” (16). In one of her deep insights, Sister writes, “The important thing . . . is that this awareness [of not being holy or pure enough] should make us focus on God, his mercy, his work in us—and not on ourselves . . . We must keep our eyes fixed principally on Jesus and refrain from looking at our imperfections” (109-110).

Painful pruning

Although *The Joy of God* is written for the benefit of religious sisters, its contents nevertheless speak to the hearts of all Christians, for who is not “Called to Joy” and invited to “Journey to Joy,” as the book’s two sections propose? A chapter entitled “Search” ponders the call to a vocation, equally applicable to religious and to laypeople, all of whom, during times of difficulty, must keep in mind their total and irrevocable self-gift. Likewise applicable to every Christian, “Growth” treats of the freedom that comes from spiritual work—the pruning, “sometimes . . . painful,” by the Gardener required after the initial exuberance of entering into religious life or marriage (47).

Our fragile selves

The chapter on “Mercy” was a surprise to this reader, who expected it to be an encouragement to show mercy to the other sisters in the convent. True, this personal

virtue is necessary for healthy community life: “Difficult sisters have their part to play in helping us to achieve this” (108). However, the main theme of this chapter is for the reader to *accept* the mercy that Jesus shows to us on account of our fragile and weak selves in spite of, indeed, because of our limitations and suffering. “God is better served in our weakness and struggle,” Sister writes. “Remember too that many are being helped in ways known to God alone by our difficult fidelity” (107).

Saint Peter

This reader was struck by the recurrence of Saint Peter as the central image of many of Sister Mary David’s Scriptural quotations. Almost every chapter includes a reference to him, no two alike. In our “Search,” as we seek to know God’s will for us, she observes that “we cannot fulfill our calling as followers of Jesus without learning to go where we would rather not go” (14). In “Decision,” the question is put to us as well as to Peter: Do you love me more than these? “And from the lips of Peter comes the most beautiful declaration of love . . . ‘Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.’ And Jesus says to him a second time: ‘Follow me’” (37). In “Endurance,” Sister Mary David recalls that Peter is required to lower his nets more than once before the miraculous catch of fish (85). In “Mercy,” Sister quotes at length an observation by St. Augustine, part of which bears quoting here:

Notice that man Peter, who was the symbolic representative of us all: now he’s trusting, now he’s tottering; one moment he’s acknowledging Christ to be immortal, the next he’s afraid of his dying . . . In that one apostle, that is, in Peter, first and chief in the ranks of the apostles, in whom the Church was symbolized, each kind of member had to be symbolized too, that is to say, the strong and the weak; because without the one or the other, there is no Church. (p. 110)

Suffering

Patience and perseverance are likewise advised in “Endurance.” Sister Mary David advises a novice, “Make up your mind not to indulge in any more ‘what ifs’; looking

ahead in this way is contrary to reason and faith. Endlessly going round in circles . . . is a way of escaping pain. [But] we know from Christ’s Cross this is not the way to handle pain. Suffering can be embraced, transcended, *used*” (87).

Sister Mary David was to live this spiritual truth that suffering can be used to reach heroic sanctity. In 2012 she was diagnosed with cancer that had advanced far enough to have become inoperable. For the next five years she endured chemotherapy and the increasing weakness that kept her from the services to her community that she had always offered so freely and cheerfully. Nevertheless, in the last chapter of the book the infirmarian describes how Sister Mary David continued to attend Masses and community exercises for many months longer than should have been possible, to the astonishment of her physician.

Confidence in God

One of the final chapters, “Darkness,” is not dated and does not include any specific references to her illness. Yet one senses in this chapter her increasing detachment and her “living from moment to moment”—in short, her reconciliation to the Will of God (133). A final reference to Saint Peter shows her confidence in God, whatever may come: “Peter’s jumping into the water was a great act of trust. Then Jesus gives him a chance to make an even greater act of trust by allowing him to sink. He wants to be able to say to us, ‘How great is your love! How great is your faith!’” (125).

The final chapter of the book, “Acceptance with Joy,” comes full circle to the title of the book. It is evidence of the great act of trust that she made when the Lord said to her, “Come!” Like her beloved Saint Peter, Sister Mary David was lifted up by Jesus’ outstretched hand, rewarded by the great faith and love that she had shared with her religious sisters and which now sustained her in turn. Readers of *The Joy of God* may likewise be edified by the decade of correspondence by a cloistered nun whose wisdom and encouragement reaches so far beyond monastery walls.

Sister Mary Dominic Pitts, O.P., is a Dominican Sister of the Congregation of Saint Cecilia in Nashville, Tennessee.

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.

THANK YOU TO OUR PRIESTS

As we were unable this year to hand out our traditional "thank you" cards to priests at the Chrism Masses in Southwark and Westminster, we take this opportunity to extend the thanks of Catholics in Britain to all our priests, for the service given to the Church and to us all.

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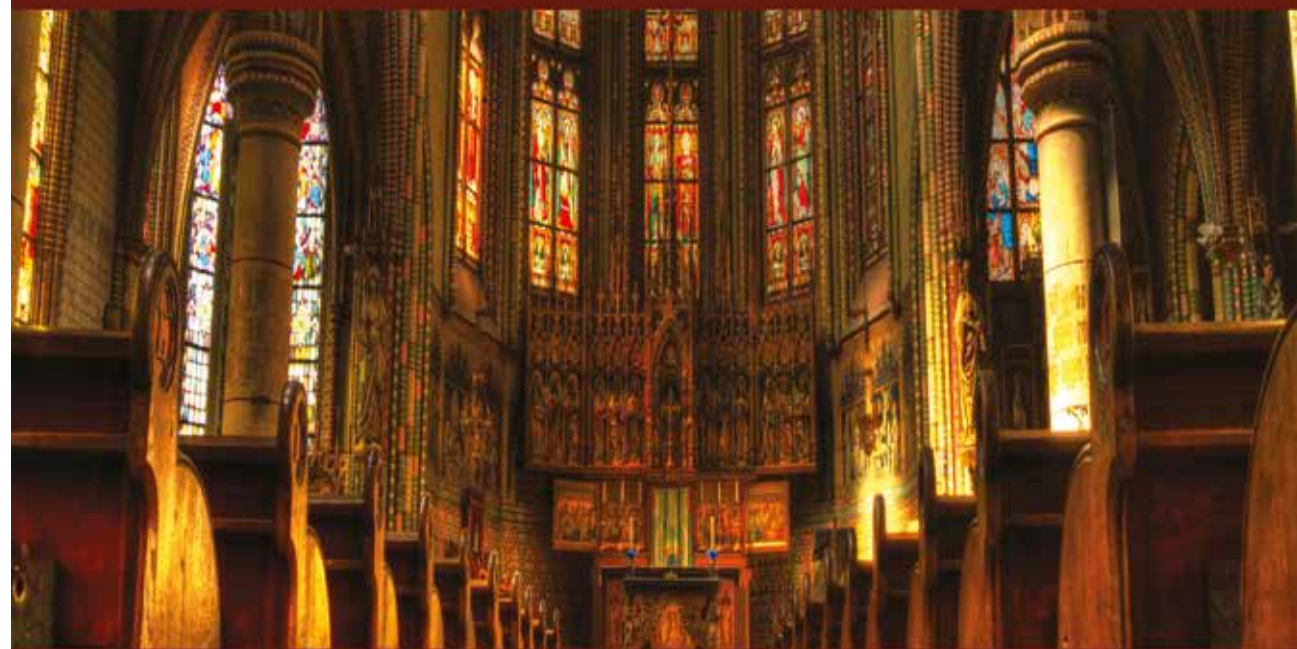
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