

# FELLOWSHIP OF CATHOLIC SCHOLARS QUARTERLY

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**PRESIDENT'S LETTER** ..... Bernard Dobranski

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## ARTICLES

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Aristotle and the Science of Nature: Unity without  
Uniformity* by Andrea Falcon ..... Jude P. Dougherty

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

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## EX CATHEDRA

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# Fellowship of Catholic Scholars

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**Reminder:** Membership dues will be mailed out the first of the year and are based on a calendar (not academic) year.

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The paucity of in-depth editorial comment on Pope Benedict's address at the University of Regensburg, aside from the quotation of Emperor Manuel II ("Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as the command to spread by the sword the faith he preached") and the Muslim reaction to it, is not surprising for two reasons: First, after the outburst and violence engendered by the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, also deemed offensive by Muslims, the media is certainly leery of unleashing a similar backlash with a frank discussion of certain tenets of the Koran that may condone "jihad" or holy war on non-believers. The Pope's point is that since the writings of the Prophet are not subject to rational scrutiny, they are open to an interpretation permitting violence. This, he says, is contrary to God, who is love, and to true religion. Second, and this is by far the deeper reason, the greater part of the Pope's presentation deals with a similar disconnect between faith and reason in Western society, which has likewise caused evil and dehumanization.

Benedict provides an historical exposé of the roots of this break in the West. He points to classical Protestantism's "sola scriptura" – the separation of faith from philosophy, liberal Protestantism's demythologizing of scripture by 19<sup>th</sup> century schools of higher criticism, and the relativism of modern scientific materialism as the main culprits. The first offends humanity because it does not permit a moderating system of metaphysics to measure faith's assertions and practice. The second denies supernatural revelation from God and its concomitant truths concerning man. The third limits humanity because it commodifies persons, denying any truth about man other than what is calculable by mathematical outcomes. This lack of balance between faith and reason lends itself either to a bifurcated human person making belief esoteric and, thus, separate from daily life and alien to civic participation, or, in the latter cases, totally devoid of transcendent grounding. For Benedict, it is obvious that these errors provide permission for "jihad" which, for him, goes beyond Islamic terrorism to all false religions and philosophies which

identify themselves as such by attacks on human freedom and the destruction of human life.

Benedict's remarks were well calibrated. He has trodden where others have feared to go. He identifies the root of evil, violence and terrorism. The pundits of the Western world would certainly rather avoid this discussion since it, in many cases, challenges the contemporary ethos of which they are the major contributors. This is especially true in Europe, which Benedict believes has lost its Christian soul. The Pope also fears that the rising of Islamic populations in European countries and the decreasing native population may further endanger the dignity of human persons and the social progress that only freedom of thought and religion can bring.

The Pope does not base his case on an academic hypothesis. The lack of religious freedom in the Middle East has already decimated indigenous Christian cultures there. And the hegemony of a theology unconnected to human reason has caused a lack of creativity and the ensuing poverty which has perennially gripped the region. Benedict also chastises the other extreme of atheistic materialism since its commodification of human life is equally lethal. Without a God who guarantees absolute moral truths about man which can be discovered in the natural law through the use of reason and enlightened by a faith which enhances understanding, human dignity cannot be assured. Current legislation permitting abortion, euthanasia and eugenics in embryonic research and selection are but a few examples of the evils wrought by unfettered science. If man is only what science can measure, then his horizons become limited and he becomes ultimately dependent for his worth on

those elites who define what is human. This is the sad state, as Benedict sees it, of Western Europe.

The Pope has not apologized for his remarks. He has said he was saddened by the reaction they caused – church bombings, protests, a break in diplomatic relations with some Arab states and even some calls for Benedict's death. This violent response on the part of radical Islam has effectively made the Pope's case. On the other hand, the lack of a detailed analysis of Benedict's address by the Western media is proof that they are equally threatened by the truth he teaches. The press is merely using the Muslim furor to divert the challenge that Benedict has presented to them. This speech is not only Benedict's opening salvo on radical Islam, but an attempt to reclaim Western civilization. It is his formula for saving humanity.

We, the members of The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, are in a unique position to begin the dialogue that the Pope proposes with our separated Christian brothers as well as non-Christians. To that end, we as individuals can begin a discussion with Protestants, Jews and Muslims regarding the Pope's remarks concerning the nexus of faith and reason in our respective traditions. Perhaps local conversations and collected scholarly data can serve as building blocks for presentations at a future Fellowship conference. Further, it is possible that an inter-religious element could be added to such an event. In doing so, I believe, we can aid Pope Benedict as "Co-workers of the Truth." ✠

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# Democracy and the Thin Veneer of Civilisation

by M. A. Casey  
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The growing suspicion with which nineteenth century thinkers came to regard religion led to it being treated as a form of ideology. But over the course of the twentieth century it became clear that sometimes it is more illuminating to treat ideology as a form of religion. The work of Leszek Kolakowski on Marxism, Ernest Gellner on nationalism, and Emilio Gentile on fascism (among others), has shown how these movements assumed many of the dimensions and functions of religion for their followers, despite often being expressly anti-religious, or at least anti-Christian, in their rhetoric. This dynamic is most apparent in the great totalitarian ideologies of national socialism and communism, which Eric Voegelin and Raymond Aron described respectively as “political” and “secular” religions. Gentile’s careful taxonomy of political religion has been particularly important in clarifying both what the concept means and its usefulness for understanding the totalitarian phenomenon<sup>1</sup>. The interesting question is to what extent the treatment of ideology as a form of religion can or should be applied to democratic political movements and what it might reveal about the nature of democracy.

It is important to be clear on the sense in which the word *religion* is used in this context. Describing an ideology as a political religion is not a matter of using a metaphor or drawing an analogy. It is not a reference to the role that the residues of a repudiated faith might play in giving form to the political ideas of an individual or a culture. Nor is it concerned with the politicisation of traditional religion or the political mobilisation of religious forces, both of which might be said to underlie religion’s return to prominence in politics internationally and also domestically in Western countries such as the United

States and Australia. An ideology or a philosophy of life is not a religion unless it takes on the attributes and functions of religion, and it is only in cases such as this that treating an ideology as a political religion is justified.

To understand the meaning of the word *religion* we could consider religion not as a natural kind which can be defined by reference to a shared essence found in all its instances, but in terms of family resemblances. It is on this basis, for example, that Buddhism is counted as a religion even though it acknowledges no god to worship. The nature of family resemblances is that members of a family will share different attributes with each other but no one member will possess all the attributes of the family<sup>2</sup>. Christianity, for example, may well be the most complete form of religion, but the attributes of animism or ancestor worship are unknown to it.

Political religions are the product of two factors: anthropological necessity and secularisation<sup>3</sup>. The anthropological necessity is the permanent nature of the religious instinct in human beings. Two arguments for this might be evidenced. Anthony O’Hear has observed that “there is in our nature as self-conscious but finite beings an ontological tension which naturally expresses itself religiously”. At the heart of this is our experience as thinking creatures of “both the infirmity and transcendence of reason”. Reason subjects all beliefs and practices to corrosive scrutiny, but is unable to replace them. At the same time the self-consciousness that reason operates within, and which enables us to step outside ourselves to test a situation against a particular standard, clearly implies “a transcendent aspect to reality”. The experience of constantly coming up against the limits of reason while being driven by the possibility of a truth which transcends them finds its “natural fulfilment and concrete expression” in religion, which with its “intimations of human limits and their overcoming mirrors very precisely our nature as thinkers constrained by finitude”<sup>4</sup>.

A second argument from the logic of reason and

experience which suggests that religion is inherent to human nature is advanced by Germain Grisez, John Finnis and Joseph Boyle. They reinvigorate the classical view that the contingent reality of human life implies a source in something which is not contingent, and which explains why contingent reality has come into being when it need not exist at all. "Aware of this more-than-human source of meaning and value, most human persons also are acutely aware that they are not in complete harmony with it", an awareness that arises both from our wrong-doing and from the vulnerability that comes from our weakness before the forces of the natural world. The way to pursue harmony with a "more-than-human source of meaning and value" is not clear, however, and this leads people to "seek to know what they can about this transcendent source, learn how to get along with it, and to put into practice what they learn". Two important conclusions follow from this for these authors: that "the duty to seek religious truth, embrace what appears to be that truth, and live according to it" is one of "the natural responsibilities of human persons"; and that the desire to integrate the different aspects of a person's life under a single purpose ultimately leads to a religious commitment, without which integration or unity of life "cannot be established"<sup>5</sup>.

There are three important points to highlight from these arguments when it comes to considering political religions, or perhaps more precisely one important point with two aspects that require special emphasis. The main point is that religion is something which arises naturally, and so irresistibly, in human beings from the experience of reason on the one hand, and the experience of finitude and contingency on the other. The arguments which O'Hear and Grisez Finnis and Boyle offer for this should be treated as an account of what it means to say that the need for religion is an inherent part of human nature, although obviously there is much more to say on this matter. One aspect of this that should be specially noted is the role that reason, both in what O'Hear describes as its infirmity and its transcendence, plays in driving the religious instinct to its fulfilment. Another is the emphasis which both O'Hear and Grisez, Finnis and Boyle place on the logic of experience and reason directing us to a *transcendent* reality.

The second factor explaining the emergence of political religion is secularisation. This term refers to the process which has led to the gradual increase in the number of people in the West without traditional religious affiliation or beliefs, the steady diminishment of religious control or influence over the major spheres of life, and the increase in both the separation of the state from religion and state regulation of religious or formerly religious activities<sup>6</sup>. Although secularisation is a well-established term in the human sciences and not likely to be discarded, it is not entirely unproblematic and the developments it is applied to might be described with greater accuracy as a process of modernisation and de-Christianisation. Urbanisation, industrialism, rationalisation, the centralisation of government and politics, and the stupendous economic growth of the West which has made it possible for material abundance to supplant scarcity as one of the defining conditions of human existence, have all played their part in diminishing the importance of religion, and Christianity specifically, in modern society, as has the apparently endless process of structural and functional differentiation which underlies each of these elements.

The course of history in nineteenth century Europe (the United States, with its differing conditions and its series of "awakenings" is a different story) makes it clear that secularisation meant de-Christianisation rather the withering away of religion in general, although of course this process was neither linear nor uncomplicated. The transfer of religious attachment from transcendent to human objects, and particularly political objects, became conspicuous with the French Revolution. From this time up to the first world war different political religions took shape. Some were confined mainly to small groups of intellectuals and writers, but this was not the case with the major political religions based on either socialism, nationalism or, especially towards the end of the century, nature (what we now call the environment). While the appeal of these political religions was considerable the still predominantly Christian disposition of the population at large during this period exercised a powerful moderating and limiting influence. In Ireland and Poland, for example, nationalism and Catholicism regularly went together, and in Britain Welsh Methodism, Scottish Presbyterianism, and the Catholicism of Irish

immigrants played an important part in defining the Labour Party's approach to socialism<sup>7</sup>. More generally, Christian presuppositions were still strong enough even in those who no longer worshipped to make cults of Reason, Science, or Vegetarianism seem suspect, if not faintly ridiculous.

Secularisation as it unfolded, therefore, did not mean the desacralisation of life but the "metamorphosis of the sacred"<sup>8</sup>. The growing complexity and confusion of life under the process of modernisation made it more and more difficult to grasp the totality of the world people lived in, so that in encompassing modernisation, secularisation sustained and sometimes intensified the need for religion<sup>9</sup>. It is for that reason that early in the twentieth century Benedetto Croce claimed that the problem of modernity is above all a religious problem:

Religion is born of the need for orientation as regards life and reality, of the need for a concept that defines life and reality. Without religion, or rather without this orientation, either one cannot live, or one lives unhappily with a divided and troubled soul. Certainly, it is better to have a religion that coincides with philosophical truth, than a mythological religion; but it is better to have a mythological religion than none at all. And, since no one wishes to live unhappily, everyone in their own way tries to form a religion of their own, whether knowingly or unknowingly.<sup>10</sup>

The return of the mythological that Croce evokes is well observed. Max Weber considered that modern life was characterised "by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'", but speaking these words in the year the first world war ended it was perhaps clearer than before that this did not entail the certain triumph of reason. Following Nietzsche, Weber spoke of a return to "polytheism" in the wake of Christianity, referring in the first instance to the conflicting spheres of activity and value that modernity had brought into being. "Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces"<sup>11</sup>. We must include among these the impersonal forces of politics, which were already demonstrating their capacity to appeal to myth in the absence of philosophical truth.

Following and adapting Gentile, the key elements

of a political religion are in place when a political movement "more or less dogmatically" confers "sacred status" on an earthly entity or idea and treats it at once as a foundation of collective existence, "the main source of values" for individual and communal behaviour, and "the supreme ethical precept of public life"<sup>12</sup>. The totalitarian variant of political religion is distinguished by integralism and intolerance, the sanctification of violence in the service of human regeneration, the denial of individual autonomy, the primacy given to the community and self-sacrifice, and distinct rituals and mass liturgical celebrations. Democratic political religion, in contrast, makes explicit appeals to inclusiveness and tolerance, repudiates violence, recognises individual autonomy, and does not have a pronounced ritualistic and liturgical dimension. It is directed to the modification of human nature and society rather than to the revolutionary regeneration of humanity, and pursues its ends where possible through judicial and administrative coercion and more generally through capturing the "commanding heights" of the culture. The attitude to traditional religion in both cases is hostile.

Political religion is different to civil religion, which is typically a "civic creed" designed to foster unity and collective identification. Civil religion will sacralise a secular entity such as a country, and will often include an acknowledgement of a deistic god. It has a stronger ritualistic and liturgical element than democratic political religion and has a less qualified commitment to individual autonomy. Civil religion "appeals to spontaneous consensus in the observance of its ethical commandments", unlike democratic political religion which works through "enforceable understandings". Civil religion maintains a clear distinction between church and state and exists "side by side with traditional religions". Perhaps most importantly, it is intended to be acceptable to a variety of political ideologies and to operate as something above and beyond them<sup>13</sup>. Civil religion is meant to be a religion for everyone, whereas both democratic and totalitarian political religions assign a critical role to a saving elect in the struggle against malevolent forces.

When the historic political religions of totalitarianism and the contemporary versions at work in democratic societies are taken into account it

becomes apparent that secularisation is best seen not as the necessary condition of modernity but as one of its paradoxes. A new point of interest for considering secularisation is the dynamic which underlies the apparent displacement of the religious by the secular, and in one sense compensates for it, whereby people come to treat particular political ideas and values as matters of religious belief and action. Looking back over the twentieth century in the light of this it appears that the hey-day of the version of the secularisation thesis which emphasised the inevitable withering away of religion did not last long, only for about thirty years between the end of the second world war and events such as the rise of the Moral Majority in the United States and the revolution of Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran in 1979. Even then its apparent validation during this time was only possible by overlooking the powerful appeal that communism continued to have as a political religion, and the emergence out of this in the 1960s of a new democratic political religion focussed on rights, anti-discrimination and multiculturalism. Pierre Trudeau's 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is one of several important markers here, although its significance at the time was not well understood.

A range of ideologies in democratic societies are capable of taking on aspects of political religion, including radical variants of feminism, environmentalism and free market economics. The main candidate for a democratic political religion in the present context incorporates some of these elements and is known in different places by names such as secularism, multiculturalism, or radical liberalism. It centres on the sacralisation of ideas like human rights, tolerance, and anti-discrimination and works through a number of issues. Homosexuality is one of them, and on this issue it has made enormous ground over the last decade. A token of this political religion's preferred possibilities for the future was provided by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's 2003 *Goodridge* decision, which held, among other things, that there is "no rational reason" for opposition to same-sex marriage and that this opposition could only be explained by "persistent prejudices" against homosexuals<sup>14</sup>. As several commentators have observed, this raises the prospect that querying the gay-rights agenda will be treated in the same way as racial prejudice; that is, as a matter of unconscio-

nable bigotry which disqualifies those who suffer from it from full participation in the public square<sup>15</sup>.

This example highlights a critical question about the relationship between political religion and reason. It is not that a reasoning process is not used to justify such claims, and there can be no question at all about the strict adherence on the part of proponents of democratic political religion to the logic of their presuppositions. But underneath this it is clear that political religion relies less on reason than on myth. There are two senses of myth that need to be taken into consideration.

Firstly, the sense in which it was theorized by Georges Sorel in *Reflections on Violence*. For Sorel myth does not describe a reality. Its function is to provide the sense of clarity and certainty necessary for action<sup>16</sup>. In a culture riven by relativism and the adamant denial of any transcendent foundations, resorting to myth is effectively the only way of preserving concepts such as justice and human rights. Because it is no longer possible to give a reasoned account of why these ideas are good it is necessary to appeal to people's wishes and desires for there to be such a thing as justice. Problems of definition are resolved by providing a symbolic representation of injustice ("authority", "patriarchy", "racism", "homophobia", etc.) against which to mobilise with a series of rights-claims. It is not, of course, that injustices do not exist. In fact, real injustices are indispensable to allow what is overwhelmingly an appeal to the symbolic to assure itself that it has an anchor in reality. But beyond the particularities of any specific issue the critical concern in this analysis is with the substitution of mythical and symbolic ways of relating to the world for reasoned reflection. Sorel observed that people living in a world of myths "are secure from all refutation"<sup>17</sup>. An example of this is the talismanic nature of "abortion rights". Once this idea is invoked evidence from reality (for example, of the nature of partial-birth abortion, or of the dangers of RU-486) loses all the persuasive power that it would normally have. The mechanism at work here is exactly that of an "article of faith" in secularist caricature: a dogma is pronounced and adherents cease thinking and obey.

The second sense in which myth is important is in the way it provides meaning, or in fact, what is more or less understood as an illusion of meaning.

In the classical world myth and religion did not belong to the order of reality as such. The gods were a creation of the state, instituted to subserve culture, morals, and the political order. They were the deception and self-deception that made these other things possible. Myth is all the more necessary in a situation of relativism. In a world characterised by a “plurality of norms”, where the individual is free to create and deify his own values and rights, and where any resolution of competing “truth-claims” is apparently beyond the capacity of reason, life in common increasingly depends on myths which not only elevate certain “god-values” over others but provide a proximate sense of the meaning and goodness of life.

There is an underside to this which must also be kept in view. Sorel observed that the beliefs of people who engage with the world through myths do not depend “on reasoning or any education of the individual will; they depend upon a state of war”<sup>18</sup>. This partly explains the vociferous intolerance of those preaching the faith of tolerance and committed to overthrowing symbolic representations of unfreedom or oppression. But it also points to the nihilism which lurks beneath the strange disavowal of reason by highly educated people who believe in and depend upon modern technology and science, but who prefer the consolations of myth to the possibilities of truth. Dostoyevsky and Conrad tellingly dissected nihilism in the nineteenth century, and their findings about the rancour and hatred of life evident within it, and the social and personal pathology feeding it are indispensable today, not least in making sense of the self-hatred which leads some people to readily identify with the enemies of their own society. Nietzsche’s account of nihilism is also important, especially in its analysis of how it becomes an attitude to life generalised throughout the culture once Christianity is dispensed with.

It is important to recall how the West was set on the long trajectory of reason and freedom. The appearance of Christianity in the ancient world was decisive to this. From the beginning, as the former Cardinal Ratzinger has argued, Christianity based itself not on the poetry and presentiment that gave rise to myth but on philosophical rationality. It was not content to rely on a social or political justification and to worship in the absence of truth. Instead

it appealed to knowledge and to the rational analysis of reality, displacing myth “not by virtue of a type of religious imperialism but as the truth which renders the apparent superfluous”<sup>19</sup>. The West today refuses to countenance Christianity’s “claim to reasonableness”, but a consequence of this has been the displacement of reason by myth, and the rise of irrationalism at the heart of democratic life.

Modernity has not been the end of religion. Rather it has demonstrated the tenacity of the religious impulse, both in the persistence and growth of traditional religions and in the appearance of new religious forms. The emergence of a democratic political religion, and the substitution within democratic societies of sacralised ideas and entities for faith in transcendence, and of mythical and symbolic ways of relating to the world for reasoned reflection, have enormous implications for the future and the viability of democracy. While an unfettered instrumental rationality keeps democratic civilisation going, to survive and to serve human flourishing civilisation has to be more than a thin veneer. A deep culture of reason is one of the things that makes this possible. A religion that completes the work of reason is another.

### Endnotes

1. See for example, Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (1993), trans. Keith Botsford (Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 1996).
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. & trans. G. E. M. Ungers & Rush Rhees (Blackwell: Oxford, 1953), par. 66.
3. Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers* (Harper Collins: London, 2005), 10.
4. Anthony O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1997), Chapter 2, esp. 23–27.
5. Germain Grisez, John Finnis & Joseph Boyle, “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends”, 32 *American Journal of Jurisprudence* (1987) 99–152, at 141–43.
6. Cf. Nikki R. Keddie, “Secularism and its Discontents”, *Daedalus* 132:3 (Summer 2003), 16.
7. Burleigh 262–63.
8. Emilio Gentile, “The Sacralisation of Politics”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1:1 (Summer 2000), 28.
9. John Keane, “The Limits of Secularism”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 January 1998.
10. Cited in Gentile “The Sacralisation of Politics”, 31.
11. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (1919). In H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (eds. & trans), *From Max Weber* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 148–49 & 155.
12. Gentile “The Sacralisation of Politics”, 18.
13. *Ibid.* 24–25.
14. Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, *Hillary Goodridge & Ors. vs. Department of Public Health & Anor*, 18 November 2003 (<http://www.mass.gov>).

gov/courts/courtsandjudges/courts/supremejudicialcourt/Goodridge.html). Writing for the majority, Chief Justice Marshall held that “the marriage ban works a deep and scarring hardship on a very real segment of the community for no rational reason. The absence of any reasonable relationship between, on the one hand, an absolute disqualification of same-sex couples who wish to enter into civil marriage and, on the other, protection of public health, safety, or general welfare, suggests that the marriage restriction is rooted in persistent prejudices against persons who are (or who are believed to be) homosexual. ‘The Constitution cannot control such prejudices but neither can it tolerate them. Private biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them effect’ [Palmore v. Sidoti, 466 U.S. 429, 433 (1984) (construing Fourteenth Amendment)]. Limiting the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage to opposite-sex

couples violates the basic premises of individual liberty and equality under law protected by the Massachusetts Constitution.”

15. Maggie Gallagher, “Banned in Boston: the coming conflict between same-sex marriage and religious liberty”, *The Weekly Standard* 11:33, 15 May 2006.

16. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (1908), trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme (1914, revised Jeremy Jennings, 1999), (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1999), 28.

17. Ibid. 30-31.

18. Ibid. 207-08.

19. Joseph Ratzinger, “Christianity: The Victory of Intelligence over the World of Religions”, *30 Days* 1 (2000): 35-36.

## St. Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy

by L. J. Elders S.V.D.

Even since Vatican II there has been a lively discussion about our liturgy. At the end of the council a powerful group of liturgists felt that this particular moment might offer a chance to introduce changes, to correct some oddities, to do away with excrescences popular devotion had introduced in the course of time. These specialists wanted the liturgy to be sober, logic and consequent, close to what they assumed had been its origins. The changes they succeeded in introducing, the impetus of the general movement of reform once started surpassed their boldest dreams, and certainly also those of the vast majority of the council fathers: an enriched lectionary, a simplified introductory part and offertory, a variety of eucharistic prayers, a more active participation of the congregation, lay people doing the first reading(s) and the altar placed closer to the people and the celebrating priest facing the congregation, etc. Above all the introduction of the vernacular and the disappearance of Latin, the traditional liturgical language, completed the changes. Some years later several bishops wondered whether this result was what they had wanted. Many groups of Catholics felt a certain nostalgia for the Tridentine liturgy, some went into opposition and many were under the impression that liturgical celebrations had become shallower: there was so much talking and explaining done to make the faithful understand everything, that as a result

the sense of mystery waned, numbers in church attendance drastically dropped and private praying at home also declined. Part of these changes are probably due to the changing way of life after the nineteen sixties, the affluence as it has come to Western countries, the pervasive technological civilization and the ever growing secularization. In this situation it might be helpful to reflect on the essentials of what liturgy is and what we want to attain by rites and celebrations. As a small step towards this renewed study I propose to reflect on St. Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of this issue.

### St. Thomas Aquinas and the liturgical reform

How does the sacramental theology of St. Thomas relate to the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II? Is *Sacrosanctum concilium* a reaction against a formalistic and narrowminded theological vision of the sacraments in general and of the Eucharist in particular. The Council of Trent re-affirmed against the Protestant reformers the efficient causality of the sacraments as signs of divine grace, but some other aspects were not put forward, such as that the sacraments contain the mystery of salvation in its entirety, build up the Mystical Body and are a cult offered to God. Father Luis Salerno o.p. published an excellent study in which he shows that precisely these aspects, which Vatican II has put forward, are found in the works of St. Thomas, whose theology had also provided the Fathers of the Council of Trent with the

formulas and exact terms to explain the nature of the sacraments and their causality<sup>1</sup>. Fr. Salerno reminds us of the rise of the theology of the mysteries of the faith (*Mysterientheologie*) inspired by Dom Odon Casel, who wanted to add a vitalistic and experiential dimension to the classical theology of the sacraments. The advocates of this current attempted to overcome the separation between a certain rationalism, which assumes a fracture between our thought and words on the one hand and concrete reality on the other. But for St. Thomas our thought precisely interiorizes and even becomes the intelligible contents of concrete reality, so that there is no such fracture.

### **Divine cult and liturgy according to St. Thomas**

St. Thomas did not write a special treatise on liturgy, but has some profound considerations about it in his theology of the sacraments in the Third Part of the *Summa theologiae*. Moreover an aspect of the study of the liturgy come in under the heading of the cult that man owes to God, his Creator, dealt with by Aquinas in the treatise on the virtue of religion in the Second Part. This virtue makes us give to God what is due to Him<sup>2</sup>. The acts of this virtue are part of man's returning to his Creator. Because of God's infinite greatness and transcendence we must offer Him special signs of veneration, respect and gratitude and submit us to Him, who is our origin and end. The cult which we offer comprises interior and exterior acts, in conformity with our human nature; the interior acts are most important<sup>3</sup>.

These general remarks concern natural man. In the Old testament the divine cult was further determined by the ceremonial prescriptions whose purpose was to protect Israel from paganism and to prefigure the cult Christ would offer. In the New Testament this divine cult is essentially the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, its commemoration in the Eucharist and its efficacious causality in the sacraments. A commemoration is a symbolic act, a sign. Therefore, one may define the liturgy as a complex of signs which express and at the same time bring about the sanctification of man by God and, from our side, are a cult of God in that we participate in the priesthood of Christ<sup>4</sup>. By signs we mean perceptible things and actions which signify spiritual and divine realities. Some signs are common

and used by all, such as offerings, attitudes of respect and adoration, purification rites, but others are special, such as the sacraments. Divine providence has given us sensible signs to signify what belongs to the order of God<sup>5</sup>. St. Thomas points out that our sanctification is the work of God and that therefore the signs of the sacraments, which bring this sanctification about, are not a human invention but were established by God. Father Salerno, in his study mentioned at the beginning of this article, notes that the *Constitution Sacrosanctum concilium*, following a lead of the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, stresses precisely these points, put forward by St. Thomas.

### **The essentials of the sacramental order determined by God**

In the *Summa theologiae* II, 25, 4 the third objection of this article 4, reminds the reader that God surpasses us to such a point that we should not do anything else in this field than that which God himself has established, implying that the Church and its ministers should not add anything. St. Thomas agrees with this objection as to its essential point - the matter and form of the sacraments - but writes that there is some room for initiatives and freedom in the administration of the sacraments. However, the cult of the community must be worthy and reasonable, and for that reason the Church supervises, the *usus Ecclesiae*<sup>6</sup>. Thomas points to the Eastern Rite, which differs somewhat from what we do in the West and acknowledges a certain historical evolution in the practice of the sacraments<sup>7</sup>. He writes that the Apostol James and the Church of Jerusalem further determined the liturgy, as did some 300 years later Saint Basil<sup>8</sup>. He notes, however, that we should not multiply the rules in order not to make things burdensome for the faithful<sup>9</sup>. The more abundant divine grace is, the less use there is for prescriptions. And it is understood that in private devotions there is freedom,

In another text Aquinas writes that in the celebration and administration of the sacraments we must take into consideration that they are to perform the cult of God and bring about the sanctification of man. This sanctification is reserved to God and for that reason we cannot decide what will sanctify us. In this way it has been decided without us which things to use: water, oil, bread and wine, the imposition of hands, etc. This

has not made it more difficult for us, since in respect of the matter and form of the sacraments we are dealing with things within reach of all or, at least which can be easily obtained<sup>10</sup>. They are things which correspond with some basic aspects of man's life.

### **The complementarity of the matter of the sacraments and of the words we use**

A second fundamental idea of St. Thomas is that of the harmony between and the complementarity of the words and the matter of the sacraments. God directs us to spiritual realities by means of sensible things in the sacraments and, in Sacred Scripture, by means of words which express a certain similarity<sup>11</sup>. But in those rites which man has instituted there is no such prefixed necessity. What has been determined by the Church and the faithful serves the purpose of promoting the devotion of the participants, but these further determinations must remain subordinated to the substance of the sacraments. Aquinas speaks of a certain solemnity, *quaedam solemnitas*, which may be added<sup>12</sup> and which helps to show the greatness and depth of the mysteries which are celebrated. Meant are words, vestments, gestures and hymns which give expression to the faith and increase devotion<sup>13</sup>.

### **Christ the main minister of the sacraments**

Most important of all is the fact that Christ is the main minister of the sacraments and of the cult we offer, since our rite is in its entirety derived from the priesthood of Christ<sup>14</sup>. The liturgy performed by Christ is the model of our cult, or rather, what we do is partaking in the adoration of the Father by Christ, in his thanksgiving and expiation of sins. Christ is the main minister of the sacraments, both because of his divine nature and because of his humanity. In so far as he is man, he is the basic instrumental cause of grace, while the priests who administer the sacraments are secondary ministers and the sacraments themselves are the instruments which they use<sup>15</sup>. In the *Summa contra gentiles* St. Thomas says that Christ is the one who baptizes, forgives sins etc.<sup>16</sup>. These words illustrate the active presence of Christ in the liturgy, and not only because he is the cause of grace, but also because the pascal mystery is present.

### **How can holy mass be identical with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross?**

In order to explain that the mass is the incruental sacrifice of Christ, as he suffered and died for us on the cross, St. Thomas points out that the mass represents the passion of Christ and makes us share its effects<sup>17</sup>. But the sacrament is a sign. How can it possibly be identical with the true and historical sacrifice of Christ? The answer is that the Eucharist represents the passion of Christ by re-enacting, re-actualizing his surrendering himself to the Father. Past human actions continue to be present in the eternal and unmovable now of God's eternity. In his omnipotence God can use the interior and historic offering of Christ, that is his obedience and love, so that it becomes actualized in the Eucharist and reaches us<sup>18</sup>. In this interpretation it is not so much the historical act of Christ, offering himself, which becomes present, as its efficacy which proceeds from the very same love of our Savior.

### **The liturgy of the mass representing Christ's redemptive passion**

With regard to what the priest does, St. Thomas says that he must represent the passion of Christ in his gestures and words during the mass: gestures of supplication, signs of the cross, bowing with reverence, genuflections. He does not explain the ceremony of the lavabo by a reference to the Old Testament, but by its religious signification. Likewise he does not explain the use of incense in the solemn celebrations by the parallelism with what was done in the temple of Jerusalem, but by its intrinsic symbolic value. He discards decidedly any imitation of the ceremonies of Israel<sup>19</sup>. In the liturgy one has to do with something more spiritual, which nevertheless conserves a visible aspect because of man's nature.

St. Thomas divides the celebration of the Eucharist in four parts:

- 1) the preparatory section which comprises the introit, and also the collect;
- 2) the instruction: the first reading, a canticle, the gospel, the profession of the faith;
- 3) the celebration of the eucharistic mystery in the strict sense, which unfolds in three stages.  
—the offertory  
—the consecration. This part begins with preface the communion. This part comprises the Our

—Father, Libera nos, Agnus Dei and thanksgiving;  
4) the end of the celebration: prayer and  
benediction<sup>20</sup>.

The faithful are not excluded from the central part of mass. On the contrary, mass is celebrated for the community: the collect supposes the continued presence of the people; the readings are in view of them. At the end of the offertory the priest invites them with his *Dominus vobiscum* to participate in the ceremony and at the end of the canon the faithful show their assent and recite the Our Father. The presence of the faithful becomes very visible in the reciting or singing of the Introit, the Kyrie eleison, the psalm between the readings, the offertory song, the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei and the antiphon during communion.

As Fr. Quöex has noted, “representing the redemptive passion” is the main argument of Aquinas to explain the gestures of the celebrant<sup>21</sup>. In this connection St. Thomas explains that in the sacraments something may be signified in two ways: by means of words and by acts. Together these produce a perfect signification. In the Eucharist the words signify both what is related to the passion of Christ, represented in this sacrament, and what refers to the Mystical Body, which is also signified. Other things, related to the celebration of the Eucharist, are also indicated by the words which are used<sup>22</sup>.

In his replies to the difficulties raised against this explanation, Aquinas writes that the hand washing is done out of reverence for the matter of this sacrament, and for its symbolism, sc. purification from sin. The priest makes three times the sign of the cross over the bread and the wine to signify the passion of Christ in its three stages, and he repeats these gestures when he says *benedictam, adscriptam, ratam*. The multiple signing of the cross, is explained by their reference to the cross, from which this sacrament and its fruits proceed. Whenever the latter are mentioned the priest makes the sign of the cross. After the consecration they recall the efficacy of the cross.

Extending one’s arms during mass, evokes Christ on the cross. To lift up one’s hands means that the prayer is being directed to God. During the

celebration the priest turns repeatedly to the people, to remind them that Christ appeared several times on the day of his resurrection. The breaking of the host signifies the tearing apart of the body of Christ during his passion, and also the Body Mystic in its various predicaments and, finally, the distribution of grace which derives from Christ’s passion. The priest places a particle of the host in the cup to indicate symbolically the Christians who share in the sufferings of Jesus, or, the joy of the blessed, which is also prefigured in this sacrament, immersed as they are in the bliss of the love of Christ. In a following section St. Thomas speaks of the purification of the cup, of the preservation of the consecrated hosts and of solemn celebrations<sup>23</sup>. One of the effects produced by the Eucharist is the unity of the Mystical Body<sup>24</sup>. The sacraments make us more devout and instruct us<sup>25</sup>. Our rites and cult are also a profession of the faith<sup>26</sup>.

### **The presence of Christ**

As we pointed out above, according to Aquinas Christ is the real minister of the sacraments<sup>27</sup>. This is precisely what *Sacrosanctum concilium* says, sc. that in a special way Christ is present when the liturgy is performed. His causality touches all places and times<sup>28</sup>. With Salerno we may describe as follows St. Thomas’ doctrine of the presence of Christ in the sacraments: 1) Christ is present in as much as the salvation he brought is commemorated by the rite of the sacraments<sup>29</sup>; 2) He is also present in so far as he works this salvation through the sacraments to which he communicates his power<sup>30</sup>; 3) Finally, Christ is present since through the sacraments we participate in the pascal mystery, which is the exemplary and efficient cause of our salvation<sup>31</sup>. This means that St. Thomas considers the grace we receive in the sacraments as our incorporation in Christ and as related to the history of salvation. With regard to the Eucharist St. Thomas distinguishes a triple signification: the sacrament refers to the past, in that it commemorates the passion of Christ; it also signifies the present, the unity of the Church; finally this sacrament points to the future since it prefigures and anticipates the beatitude in heaven<sup>32</sup>.

## Endnotes

1. "San Tommaso e la Costituzione sulla Liturgia", in *Sapienza* 18 (1965), 264-284.
2. II-II, 81, 2.
3. II-II, 81, 7.
4. III, 60, 5. See G. Walsh, "Liturgy in the Theology of St. Thomas", in *The Thomist* 38 (1974), 557-583.
5. *Summa contra gentiles*, III, c. 114.
6. Cf. C. Borobia, "La liturgia como lugar teológico en la teología sacramentaria de santo Tomás", in *Miscelanea P. Cuervo*, Salamanca 1970, 229-254.
7. III, 80, 10 ad 5.
8. III, 83, 4 Sed contra.
9. I-II, 107, 4.
10. III, 60, 5.
11. L.c., ad 1: "Deus est qui nobis significat spiritualia per res sensibiles in sacramentis et per verba similitudinaria in Scripturis".
12. III, 64, 2 ad 1.
13. Cf. F. Quœx, "Thomas d'Aquin, mystagogue: L'expositio missae de la Somme de théologie (IIIa, q. 83, a. 4-5)", in *Revue thomiste* 105 (2005), 179-226.
14. III, 63, 3: "Totus autem ritus christianae religionis derivatur a sacerdotio Christi".
15. III, 64, 4.
16. S.c.G., IV, 76.
17. III, 83, 1: "Duplici ratione celebratio huius sacramenti dicitur immolatio

- Christi. Primo quia... imago quaedam est representativa passionis Christi, quae est vera eius immolatio... Alio modo quantum ad effectum passionis: quoties huius hostiae commemoratio celebratur, opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur
18. III, 62, 4: "Virtus salutifera derivatur a divinitate Christi per eius humanitatem in ipsa sacramenta".
  19. III, 83, 5 ad 1: "Non eodem modo observatur sicut tunc".
  20. The text of the *Summa theologiae* differs somewhat from an earlier treatment in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. See P.-M. Gy, *Avancées du traité de l'Eucharistie de S. Thomas dans la Somme par rapport aux Sentences*, in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 77 (1993), 219-228; F. Quœx, l.c. (n. 12), 212-214.
  21. L.c., p. 218.
  22. III, 83, 5.
  23. L.c..
  24. III, 73, 3.
  25. III, 66, 10.
  26. III, 63, 4 ad 3: "Cultus divinus est quaedam fidei protestatio per exteriora signa".
  27. See also III, 64, 3.
  28. III, 56, 1 ad 3: "Quae quidem virtus praesentialiter attingit omnia loca et tempora. Et talis contactus sufficit ad rationem huius sacramenti".
  29. III, 60, 3: "rememorativum eius quod praecessit, scilicet passionis Christi".
  30. III, 62, 5: "Cuius virtus quodammodo nobis copulatur per susceptionem sacramentorum".
  31. III, 56, 2 ad 4.
  32. III, 73, 4. Cf. Salerno, o.c., pp. 131 ff.

# Is Christianity a Religion?

## *The Role of Violence, Myth and Witness in Religion*

by Paul O'Callaghan

Is Christianity a religion? In principle the reply should be in the positive. Christianity would seem to include all the most characteristic elements normally attributed to any religion: a sense of the Sacred, the presence of the divine in the life of humans, awareness of dependence on a superior power, a tripartite structure made up of beliefs, ethical practice and cult.<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Church has frequently recalled the need to respect the free choice all human beings should enjoy in religious matters.<sup>2</sup> Obviously the Church applies this in the first place to itself. In that way, of course, it recognizes itself, implicitly at least, as a religion, as one more among the rest.

However, certain authors are of the opinion that Christianity should not be considered a religion at all. Among them, the Calvinist theologian Karl Barth († 1968) stands out.<sup>3</sup> According to him Christianity and the Christian Church is none other than the result of the "Christ-event", that is the saving work of God through his Son incarnate, Jesus Christ, to which the only possible response is personal faith. Religion, conversely, according to Barth, is the result of the effort humans make to save themselves, it is the 'elevation of humans to the divine'. In other words, whereas religion for Barth always takes human initiative as its point of departure, Christianity begins with divine revelation. Only in Christ, he says, may we encounter the word that God speaks of himself. Hence, Christianity is simply extraneous to the ambit

of 'religion'. For Barth, religions are comparable to Christianity more or less as human action is related to divine. Doubtless, this expression of God's absolute priority and of human passivity is typically Protestant. However, it may be noted that the Catholic author Romano Guardini († 1968) upholds a similar position, in distinguishing between Religion and Offenbarung, between religion and revelation.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear, of course, that Barth insists on the non-religious character of Christianity for positive reasons. He intends to state that Christianity disqualifies other religious forms as substantially inadequate and incomplete, just as Christian theologians have done before him. Indeed, as Augustine and the Fathers of the Church said, Christianity is not just a religion; it is the *vera religio*, "true religion", because in it God has wished to give definitive fulfillment to the religious aspiration present in the human heart by means of his revelation in Christ.<sup>5</sup> In a dialectic and somewhat polemic way, Barth insists that Christianity provides the only way in which humans can live in communion with the Divinity.

From what has been just observed, an important question emerges. Are the following two affirmations compatible with one another: that Christianity is a religion, and that it is the true religion? Christians wish to be respected by others because they profess their religion as one more among many. But they also affirm that Christianity is the only true religion, with full-blown universalistic pretensions. Would it not be more consistent to opt for one or the other, saying either that it is one more religion among the rest, or simply that all other religious forms are objectively deficient, in that they are incapable of mediating the saving power God wished to communicate to humanity? In any case, even if we avoid coming to such extremes, two poles for our reflection have been identified: that Christianity presents itself as a religion, and at the same time as the true religion. While sharing many elements with other religions, it nonetheless attempts to purify them and bring them to fullness.

The dilemma just mentioned has become particularly pressing over recent decades. It is clear that pretensions of superiority of one religion over another can give rise to violent, intolerant reactions.<sup>6</sup> If a particular religion makes wide-ranging truth claims,

applicable to one and all, it is clear to those who practice it that others should submit themselves to it. Those who do not do so are in error, and should be brought back to the truth, even with energetic means. Religion in other words is endemically linked with violence. By way of example, we may mention the Egyptologist Jan Assmann, who argues that whereas the religions of Egypt and other polytheistic peoples were pacific in character, a root of intolerance runs through Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is what he calls the 'Mosaic distinction', the paradigm of recurring conflictuality among monotheistic religions.<sup>7</sup> At a different level, Richard Dawkins claims that religion in whatever form is the very opposite to all that is represented by the Enlightenment and by science, and is destined to gradual extinction as science develops.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper we have no intention of analyzing this urgent question. It is too complex and too close to us. However, an important element has emerged in the foregoing discussion in respect of our understanding of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. It refers to the role of violence in religion. On occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986, Pope John Paul II, in the presence of representatives of many different religions, explained that any religion is disqualified from being considered as such if it does not promote peace, or if it attempts to justify its growth and development by violent means.<sup>9</sup> In other words, it does make a difference what religion a person belongs to, because every religion must adjust to a common criterion: its capacity to promote peace and avoid violence. In the coming pages we shall consider whether or not Christianity is a religion of peace, and in what way.

Turning back to the more fundamental question, if we wish to affirm that Christianity is not only a religion, but rather the true religion, two paths are possible.

The first is strictly theological in nature in that it is based on the faith that Christianity is "God's own religion", the definitive self-revelation of the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Pierangelo Sequeri and others have insisted on this side of things taking an unapologetic "Christocentric" approach to Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> Sequeri says that Christian faith 'refers to the insuperable position of

Jesus Christ as the subject-actor of constitutive revelation, and not merely as the historical object of an established faith, open to further interpretation; this is so in respect of the knowledge of the divine that we have (which would be otherwise unimaginable), in respect of the recognizable accessibility of the fact that it is actually taking place (otherwise non-evident), and in respect of giving support of its proclamation of truth (otherwise going beyond our hopes).<sup>11</sup>

The second path is more anthropological in character, more modest and obviously subordinate to the first. It attempts to demonstrate the value of Christianity in terms of the anthropology it gives rise to, indeed of the humanity it gives rise to. This is so among other reasons because Christianity may give no space whatever to violence, to the destruction of humans, to the denial of truth about them. Rather it provides for the fullest possible realization of all human values and of humanity itself. Violence, if in any way it comes to be associated with Christian faith, is linked exclusively to sin which the Spirit of Christ, through the Church, strives to expose and redeem. Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the 2006 World Day of Peace confirmed the same idea in another way: if there is to be peace in the world, he said, if all violence is to be avoided, the truth about man and the world must be accepted: 'peace is to be found in truth'.<sup>12</sup>

In the forthcoming pages on the anthropological outworkings of the Christian religion, we shall concentrate on three key terms present in all religious dynamics: violence, myth and witness.

## **1. Religion, Violence and Salvation**

The first question we must ask is the following: how does violence become involved in religion in the first place?

**Violence and Salvation** It is clear that religions generally consider themselves as ways to salvation, to human fulfillment, liberation, happiness, harmony, belongingness, identity. By right they should involve no violence. But religions are ways to salvation, for the simple reason that humans in their present situation are perceived as not being fully saved, nor fulfilled, nor liberated, nor happy, nor belonging. Re-

ligious life is sought after by humans as a liberating otherness, as a target to be reached, usually through fatigue and purification. And it is precisely within the process of overcoming otherness and enslavement and disunity, that different forms of violence may make their presence felt. Certainly Christian faith holds that the power of God comes to man to save, to liberate, to harmonize. But the process may be painful and frustrating, though full of hope because in real terms the process is a short-lived one: nihil violentum durabile, the Latin proverb reads: 'nothing violent lasts forever'. Besides, given that religion is a phenomenon that develops and expresses itself always in social terms, it is all the easier for violence of one kind or another to be involved.

**Violence and Sin** Doubtless, the "violence" encountered within religious life is attributable principally to human sinfulness, that is to the very lack of salvation that religious life attempts to overcome, often through painful purification. In the Gospel Jesus spoke of presence of the grain and the weeds (Mt 13:24-30) as an expression of painful side of conversion as the kingdom of God gradually acquires maturity. In the communication of the religious message, in its propagation to others, in the effort of personal assimilation it requires, the possibility of violence easily arises. That is to say, violence may be involved in religion as a means but not as the end, in transmission but not in fulfillment.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, religion, in its all-out battle with human misery, at times seems to be indistinguishable from the very roots of the violence it strives to overcome.

The role of human sinfulness as the prime source of violence within the religious phenomenon is clearly explained in Scripture. God made man in his image and likeness, to dominate 'over the fishes of the sea and the birds of the air and over all the living creatures that move on the earth' (Gn 1:28). Man was constituted as God's ambassador before creation, so that the universe would praise its Creator through him. In falling from grace, however, man abused the power given him and began to oppress other creatures, improperly imposing on them his own ideas, culture and will. Humans should by right have moderated and directed their God-given capacity to dominate through simple rationality, through

their upright behavior, through respect for the created realm.<sup>14</sup> However, when they are not prepared to do this, they may go as far as to use religion itself, as a universal and supra-rational point of reference, to justify their abusive action. Throughout history the word 'religion' has served as a cloak for mistakes and blunders of the worst kind. The 'sacred' has been often used for justifying abuse and profanation. For this reason it is all the more necessary to distinguish carefully between religious spirit in general, which arises from the human aspiration to infinitude but can give birth to a variety of spurious para-religious phenomena that are more or less violent in character, and true religion, in which the Lordship of God over creation is fully respected and expressed.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. From the Absolute to the relative; from the relative to the rediscovery of the Absolute

From an historical standpoint, the scientific study of religion in recent centuries is marked by two factors. Firstly by the phenomenon of conflict between Christians, principally during the wars of religion in the 17th century, waged in the name of Christ and of Christian truth. Secondly from the need to respond to the challenges and concerns arising from the encounter of Christianity with other cultures and religions. The phenomenon in question is associated originally with the modern process of colonization, and doubtless today it is of enormous importance. The living confrontation of Christianity with other religious forms is not, of course, a novelty. A significant part of the theology developed by the Fathers of the Church arose in the context of the faith's encounter with a wide variety of existing religious phenomena.<sup>16</sup> Besides, from the point of view of content, the modern study of religions has developed in two directions. On the one hand, the scientific nature of such a study has inevitably occasioned the search for common elements present in all religious phenomena. In that sense, as often happens, method has left its mark on findings. On the other hand, the outcome of this has been the tendency to reduce religion to some particular aspect of human life, within a process of the "localization" as it were of the human "religious gene".

The process of reductionism which marks an important part of modern studies of religion is of particular relevance. Indeed, during the modern period religion is no longer perceived as an absolute point of reference, as it always had been, especially among the great monotheistic religions. Religion is considered rather as one more aspect of human life, what is more, as a sectorial element of human life. To use an expression of Gianfranco Morra, during this period 'religion is explained by means of non-religion'.<sup>17</sup> It is no longer considered as referring to the Absolute. Nowadays, perhaps for the first time in history, it is not uncommon to hear people say, "I am not a religious person". This phenomenon, normally called secularization, is an important feature of the times we live in.<sup>18</sup> We may add that the search for a common element in all religions and the resulting reductionism or secularization of the religious phenomenon has had the effect that scholars take less and less interest in the mystery of divine life as such. That is to say, religion occupies center stage, spirituality (in the strict sense) fades into the background. Interest is expressed primordially in the human being as a religious being, not in the God to whom he worships.<sup>19</sup> Religion becomes a part of anthropology. Humans attempt to enclose religion within their own subjectivity. This makes Karl Barth's insistence on the non-religious nature of Christianity all the more understandable.

As we shall see presently, the parable traced by the loss over the modern period of the sense of the Absolute seems to have been substantially inverted in recent decades, with the explosion of new religious phenomena, often decidedly ambivalent, giving rise in turn to a plethora of new spiritualities. Let us examine some moments of this history.<sup>20</sup>

**Religion and Reason** Firstly we may consider the rationalistic reduction of religion, which goes back further than other kinds of reduction. In a sense the challenge of religious rationality is to be found at the very beginning of Christianity itself, being a religion of meaning and intellection, a religion of the Logos. During the late Middle Ages, however, the demand for rationality become more radical on account of the predominance of a variety of anti-intellectual strains, voluntarism, nominalism, spiritu-

alism. As a result, man, essentially a religious being, becomes the center of attention. During the Renaissance period it is generally accepted that any religion pretending superiority to others needs to overcome mythical moulds, traditional beliefs and practices. Rational religions, that gradually eliminate the need to believe, will necessarily be the most perfect ones. This tendency is to be found for example in Marsilius Ficinus († 1499), who attempted to establish a substantial equivalence between religion and philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Likewise Giordano Bruno († 1600) tried to promote a religion for philosophers, superior to the gross religion of the common people, made up of superstition and motivated by fear.<sup>22</sup> This tendency was consolidated notably by the wars of religion, between Protestants and Catholics, that we have already referred to.

Auguste Comte († 1857), the founder of sociology, explains the evolution and demise of religion in a tripartite way.<sup>23</sup> The first stage of man's quest for ultimate meaning is theological. Religion dominates his view of the world; myths and superstitions abound. Hidden personalities are seen to control the different phenomena we experience. The inadequacy of this position leads on to a second, metaphysical, stage in which divine personalities are replaced by impersonal abstractions. This however, is but a bridge to the third stage, that of adult intelligence, positive science, that derives from the observation of facts and leads to definitive knowledge. Divinities and metaphysical concepts disappear, and the way is opened to pure science.

G.W.F. Hegel († 1831) represents the culmination of the rationalizing process. Philosophy, he says, involves a definitive surpassing (*Aufhebung*) of religion. The latter indeed grasps the religious phenomenon on the imperfect plane of representation, of myth.<sup>24</sup> But philosophy expresses the religious spirit on the perfect and insuperable plane of reason, of the "idea". With the advent of philosophy, he says, the God of religion dies (he speaks about a 'speculative Good Friday') and rises up as the Absolute Spirit.<sup>25</sup> The same position may be found nowadays to some degree among those who openly oppose religion and science.<sup>26</sup>

**Religion and Ethics** Religious reductionism likewise refers to the ethical side of human life. Again, traditional religious life, also that of Christians, would be considered simply as an imperfect form of ethical endeavor, whereas true religion is entirely centered on upright ethical behavior. Liturgy and piety become irrelevant. The best known author in this sense is Emmanuel Kant († 1804), who defines religion simply as "the knowledge of all our duties as divine commands".<sup>27</sup> Religious truths (sin, redemption, prayer, Church) are allegories that express the different sides of moral life. Besides, according to Kant, the moral imperative alone opens the way to our knowledge of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, etc.<sup>28</sup> In the same direction the philosopher John Dewey († 1952) states that "religiosity is but morality touched by emotion".<sup>29</sup> It may also be noted that the most popular expressions of "compared religion" nowadays are of a moralistic kind: one religion is considered superior to another when the life of its members is more irreprehensible.

**Religion and Man** The central role played by humans in the religious phenomenon has brought several authors to consider religion fundamentally as a projection upwards of the human being's desire for infinitude. This may be considered as the final stage of religious reductionism: from God to man, from religion to anthropology. It is just a step away from atheism. Among the Greeks the phenomenon was not unknown.<sup>30</sup> In modern times, the philosopher David Hume († 1776) suggested that religious life is simply the product of fear of the unknown.<sup>31</sup> Another expression of this may be found in the writings of Edward B. Tylor († 1917), especially in his work *Primitive Culture* (1856). For Tylor every religion has its origin in an idea of the soul, whose activity, though human, surpasses that of the body.<sup>32</sup> That is, all religions are forms of animism. The principal defender of this tendency in modern times is Ludwig Feuerbach († 1872) for whom the object and subject of religion simply coincide with one another. That is to say, what we call "God" is no more than man himself, going beyond his limits and projecting himself upwards. Religion is the result of psychological representation. For this reason, Feuerbach concludes openly, 'theology is anthropology', and 'anthropology

is theology'.<sup>33</sup> Christianity has confirmed this basic intuition, he would add, when it proclaims the Incarnation of God in the man Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup>

**Religion and society** Other authors consider religion in the context of the socialization of man. In many ways this understanding is not far from Feuerbach's, only that it is referred to human collectivity. According to Émile Durkheim († 1917), religion is simply the personification of the social grouping of humans. It is 'a united system of beliefs and practices, related to sacred things, things that are separated and interdicted, and these unite all those who belong to the group, called a "church", in a single moral community'.<sup>35</sup> Likewise Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in his work *Primitive Mentality*, considers religion as a product of a prelogical mentality resulting from the immersion of individual consciousness in that of the group.<sup>36</sup> Religion will be overcome all primitivity when humans develop their proper individuality. Likewise, Marxism considers religion as a kind of alienating and mystifying superstructure that justifies socio-economic structures reflecting in turn the abuse of the poor classes by the rich. Hence religion is destined to disappear with the advent of the classless society,<sup>37</sup> and the original state of the human race, in which religion was absent, will finally prevail.<sup>38</sup>

**Religion and sentiment** One of the best-known figures in the study of religious phenomenology is Friedrich Schleiermacher († 1834). He was keenly aware of the danger involved in reducing religious life to a particular part of anthropology—in particular he opposed Feuerbach—and attempted to find in humans a "regional ontology", as it were, of the universal phenomenon of religious life. Inspired by his Lutheran pietism, and employing the phenomenological method, he concluded that religion is neither rational knowledge or morality, but rather 'a sentiment and taste for the Infinite',<sup>39</sup> 'a sentiment of infinite dependence' of man in relation to what goes infinitely beyond him.<sup>40</sup>

Schleiermacher attempted indeed to overcome the reduction of religion to mere anthropology. However he practiced a kind of reductionism himself within anthropology, by centering religion on one aspect

of the life of humans, that is the sentiment of creaturely dependence before the Absolute. Besides, the marginalization of rationality and morality within religion could not but have deleterious effects. For Schleiermacher religion refers to God, to the God of Christians revealed in Jesus Christ, but it refers only to one aspect of human life, however important this may be. The fact is that his thought tended inevitably towards subjectivism.<sup>41</sup> Besides, his explanation took absolute value away from Christ, the Man in whom the sentiment of dependency obtained maximum intensity, and from Whom the self-same sentiment is meant to be communicated to humanity.<sup>42</sup>

**Recuperating a sense of the sacred** A special place in the 20th century philosophy of religion must be attributed to Rudolf Otto († 1937). The principal work he authored, *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), has become a classic in the scientific study of religion.<sup>43</sup> Editor of the works of Schleiermacher and in many ways a disciple of his, as of Kierkegaard, Otto focuses his phenomenological analysis on "the divine" in man, what he calls the "Numinous". The Numinous is Infinite Power, the totally Other, which breaks into the life of the creature.<sup>44</sup> Faced with the nearness and transcendence of the divine, man experiences his own nothingness (Otto calls this the *Kreaturgefühl*, the "creaturely sentiment"). Before man, says Otto inspired by St Augustine,<sup>45</sup> the divine is experienced as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the 'fearful, fascinating mystery'. Thus religious experience is different from all other experiences, insofar as the latter do not produce the sacred, which in turn actually modifies and transforms them. Otto explains that human experience of the absolute power of the divine, which is both spectacular and awe-inspiring, does not derive either from a rational or from an ethical understanding of the world. Rather it is original in humans, and Otto characterizes it as "irrational". Obviously by "irrationality" he does not mean what is contrary to reason, but rather what is previous to it. The fact is, he says, that every religion, while starting from our experience of the divine, inevitably gives rise to a process of rationalization and moralization. Yet we must remember that 'a conceptually understandable God is not God'.<sup>46</sup>

The approach of Otto is taken up and developed

extensively throughout the XX century by scholars such as Gerhard van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade, Max Scheler and Romano Guardini.<sup>47</sup> According to these authors religion refers above all the power of the divine that marks every aspect of human life. Generally they consider Christianity as superior to other religions, in that it manages to reconcile better than others the transcendence of God with his paternal closeness to humans.

**The recuperation of “myth”** Of particular importance in the modern history of religion is the recuperation of the category of myth. On the basis of the writings of the Romantics,<sup>48</sup> many authors came to hold that myth ‘occupies a fundamental place in the history of religions’.<sup>49</sup> This may be seen for example in the writings of Georges Dumézil,<sup>50</sup> Paul Ricoeur,<sup>51</sup> Lucien Lévy-Bruhl<sup>52</sup> and Mircea Eliade.<sup>53</sup> Let us examine the latter author.

Faced with the different forms of modern reduction of religion, of a rational or ethical kind, Eliade († 1986) insists on the incomparable value of “myth”. He does not consider the myth as a fable or allegory, but rather as a “sacred word”, received by humans. The modern rationalization of religion has managed in part to eliminate the content of myth –this was the case particularly in Hegel who attempted to go beyond representation in religion–, but not the undeniable fact that man is a “mythical animal”. Humans need myths. It should come as no surprise that the modern process of demythologization of Christian revelation, promoted by Bultmann and others in the name of scientific rigor,<sup>54</sup> occasioned the discovery and imposition of new “myths”: consumerism, mass media, careerism, etc. ‘Modern man still holds on to certain residues of “mythical behavior”’, Eliade writes. ‘The roots of this behavior are revealed in the desire to rediscover the intensity with which something was lived or known for the first time, to recuperate the far-off past, the beneficent time of the “beginnings”’.<sup>55</sup> At heart, man is always searching for immortality: ‘it is always the same battle against Time, the same hope of being freed from the weight of “Dead Time”’.<sup>56</sup> Man, indeed, is a myth-searching animal.

Taking up the research of the psychologists Káro-

ly Kerényi<sup>57</sup> and Carl G. Jung,<sup>58</sup> Mircea presents the myth as a “true story”, an “exemplary archetype”.<sup>59</sup> And he states that man, if he refuses to listen to the myth, never comes to know his own identity, does not comprehend himself, remains closed in upon himself, as occurs in Hegel and Kant. When man is closed off to myth, rationality becomes rationalism, morality becomes voluntarism, piety, sentimentalism, and cult, ritualism. ‘Myths... are more ample images of man’, Kerényi writes, ‘prototypes that show different aspects of his character in their connection with human existence and in the consequences they have on it... Myths reflect not only the human being but also “the world of humans”’.<sup>60</sup> In the words of Julien Ries, for Eliade myth is ‘a sacred and true story which explains the origin of things. In knowing the myth one knows the origin, and this is what allows us to live; it is an experience of the sacred, not of the everyday... The myth is not a scientific explanation but an experience of life that brings us to live anew the mystery of the beginning’.<sup>61</sup>

**Recuperating a sense of the Absolute** It is not easy to sum up in a few words the already brief overview just made of the modern understanding of the religious phenomenon. However, even running the risk of over-simplification, the following may be safely said. The movement that goes from the anthropocentric reduction of religion to the recuperation of the sense of the Sacred, in its otherness, absoluteness and universality, has occasioned the re-discovery of the category of myth, and the affirmation that man is a “mythical animal”. The human being is constituted, indeed, as one who stands in need of a word, a sacred word, that will reveal his origin, identity and in that way, in a sense, save his life. At the same time this rediscovery is contrary neither to rationality, nor to ethical behavior, nor to man himself in the full range of his aspirations.

What has just been said constitutes an important step ahead in understanding the general dynamic of religious life. Hegel had eliminated myth in searching for a religion that was purer, more perfect, more rational, less open to manipulation. Eliade situates myth anew at the very heart of the religious phenomenon in order to avoid the premature death of religion by pure starvation.

The fact is that if religious life is not nourished by representation, by “myth”, by an exterior, objective source that serves as a vehicle to the eternal and invisible Logos, it will end up referring only to itself. It will become rationalism, sentimentalism, narcissistic self-sufficiency. To some degree this is what has happened throughout the modern process of secularization. It is clear that religion needs unconditional openness to the divine.

It is interesting to note that sociologists of religion generally accept that the much mooted, once-considered irreversible, process of secularization is presently in a state of bankruptcy. Over recent decades, religious and spiritual life are in a state of gradual explosion. Peter Berger and others have realized that whereas in the 1960’s religion seemed to be fading from the world scene, the new millennium has brought about a period of “desecularization”, a new and irrepressible rebirth of religion<sup>62</sup> in many parts of the world.<sup>63</sup> This need not be considered a positive phenomenon in every case. The fact is that religions and ‘spiritualities’ have frequently become a lucrative form of business,<sup>64</sup> instruments of abuse and subversion, perfectly capable of spawning or supporting new forms of irrationality and violence.<sup>65</sup> For this reason the need for a religious philosophy based on rationality and on a rationally developed ethical system, is more necessary than ever. The fact is that Christianity from the very beginning has been presented as a religion of the word, of reason. Both in its dogmatic and ethical content Christian theology has developed in continuity with the rational discourse of philosophers rather than the mythical thought of pagan religions.<sup>66</sup> Yet it is not only a religion of reason, but also of faith, of openness to a divine word.

### 3. Religion: the binomial myth–faith

Summing up what we have seen so far, the following may be said: every living religious phenomenon moves within a polarity between the transmission of something (a message, a saving power, a tradition) on the one hand, and its acceptance by humans, on the other. Let us call the first “myth”, the second “faith”. Obviously we are using the terms in question in an approximative sense. The fact is that Christianity has

never considered itself as a “mythical” religion. The Fathers of the Church openly opposed the old myths of paganism.<sup>67</sup> However, as we shall see presently, the term occupies a precise place in the Christian lexicon. Likewise, it is clear that, theologically speaking, the term “faith” has a meaning all of its own, because it comes to life and is entirely determined by Christian revelation.<sup>68</sup> However, man is a being who is made to believe. He is structured by openness, and is meant to make his own what he receives.<sup>69</sup> For this reason it is legitimate to understand “faith” as the acceptance of “myth”, in the ample sense of these terms.

When Leibniz said that ‘pagans had no article of faith’, he was only partly right. Every religious dynamic involves the living binomial faith–reason: faith by which man opens himself confidently to revelation, to the power of God, to myth, and reason, with which he makes them his own, interiorizing them. It is precisely within this process of transmission and acceptance that certain forms of “violence” can come into play, either because the “myth” is false content-wise, totally or in part, or because “faith” does not accept what is offered in the appropriate way. To further explain this process of transmission and acceptance we can consider two understandings of the religious phenomenon, the Platonic and the Christian.

**“Faith” and reason in Plato** According to the early philosophers, the religious identity of the Greek people was determined principally by a patrimony of sacred myths handed on from the time of Homer, Hesiod and the great epic poets.<sup>70</sup> It was the sacred duty of the State to ensure that this patrimony was guarded and handed on from one generation to the next. The transmission took place, Plato says in the *Phaedo*, *ex akoes*, “from hearing”,<sup>71</sup> that is by the citizens’ acceptance of a sacred oral tradition.<sup>72</sup>

Plato as a philosopher, along with his master Socrates, opposed the efforts of some statesmen to modify and select the sacred traditions and the State divinities, corrupting the young in view of short-term political goals.<sup>73</sup> According to a widely accepted reading of Plato’s texts, they attempted, through a rich, penetrating and realistic analysis, to receive and situate, understand and criticize, with freedom and

respect, the rich mythical tradition they received. 'Plato attempts to purify the mythology handed on by Homer and Hesiod', Ries says, 'getting rid of whatever contrasts with his philosophical principles'.<sup>74</sup> Plato realized that religious truth needed assimilation and evaluation by human reason, in order to ensure its consistency, unity and ethical rectitude, and on this basis, its truthfulness, its conformity with the "world of ideas" human souls contemplated at the inception of their existence. This task was carried out by Socrates so tenaciously and rigorously, Plato tells us in the *Phaedo*, that he ended up paying for it with his life. He died, in a sense, a "martyr to truth", in that he attempted to defend, purify and transmit the content of sacred tradition with the help of a healthy critical reason.<sup>75</sup>

In sum, Platonic thought demonstrated a real interactive relationship between faith and reason. Besides, his reflection reveals how a subtle and interested manipulation of the *traditio sacra* eventually led to the violent death of Socrates.

### **The binomial faith-reason in**

**Christianity** It is interesting to note that the Platonic way of explaining the dynamics of religious communication and acceptance comes quite close to expressions used in the New Testament to describe the Christian Gospel and the act of faith it gives rise to. Where Plato used the expression *ex akoes*, St Paul spoke of the *fides ex auditu*, 'faith which comes from what is heard' (Rom 10:17; Eph 4:21).<sup>76</sup>

In many ways, Christian religious life is not unlike its Greek counterpart,<sup>77</sup> even though the content and modality are clearly diverse. In the place of myth, which the State was obliged to guard and citizens to assimilate, is situated salvation history, the history of the People of God of the Old Testament, and especially of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The living reality of salvation history is received by man through faith in the power of the Spirit, and transmitted from one generation to the next by the Church, the body of Christ.

Doubtless, from the point of view of content, the Fathers of the Church firmly rejected the old myths: they showed that the pagans gods who are the prime protagonists of the myths simply do not exist;<sup>78</sup> they distinguished between the creation of the world and

man's fall into sin (in this way overcoming all fatalism);<sup>79</sup> and they placed history, which is irreversible, in the place of the myth of eternal return.<sup>80</sup>

However, some Fathers of the Church did offer an allegorical exegesis of the ancient myths, finding in them seeds of truth.<sup>81</sup> But above all it was considered that the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ disqualified the myths because it took their place, becoming the *vera religio*, the "true religion",<sup>82</sup> the "true myth", which reveals the falsity of the myth at the same time as it takes its place and confirms its relevance. 'The myth gave way to Christ', Julien Ries says.<sup>83</sup> Many Christian authors, such as Odo Casel and Louis Bouyer, in their writings on the Paschal mystery, encounter important analogies between Christian mystery and pagan mysteries. In effect, the latter providentially prepared the way for the revelation of the 'mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things' (Eph 3:9).<sup>84</sup>

According to Eliade, 'the mythical behavior of ancient man is marked by an imitation of an archetypal model, by the repetition of an exemplary scenario, by a break from the profane time-frame'.<sup>85</sup> Something of a kind takes place in Christianity, he says, with the life of Christ, expressed and lived through the sacred Liturgy, in which God breaks into time. 'In order to obtain salvation it is necessary to ritually reiterate the life of Jesus, it is necessary to imitate the model, and accept the message. Also on the level of behavior. In this sense Christian and mythical ways of living present numerous similarities... Mythical behavior in fact finds its place principally on the level of liturgical celebration. The liturgical year is organized around the historical mysteries. Liturgical time rediscovers the cyclical period, the *illud tempus*, and organizes the liturgical repetition of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus'.<sup>86</sup>

Hence it is fair to say that Christian salvation history has come to take the place of the mythical patrimony of Greek religion. Something of a kind may be said of almost all religious expressions. From the point of view of Christian faith, of course, myths are false, being vain projections of the religious spirit present in every human being.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the very scale of their existence and influence in different times and places firmly suggests that man possesses an insuppressible "mythical register". He is indeed a

“mythical animal”, hungry for myth to fill out his need for narrative identity and living memory. According to the Pauline expression, the Christian indeed has received a new living reality, through faith, that is: ‘it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20).

#### 4. Christian witness, the ‘gentle violence’ of saving grace

As we have already seen, within this process of transmitting divine life that is personally assimilated by faith, different forms of violence may arise. Even in the Gospel there is an insinuation to this effect: ‘From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force’ (Mt 11:12). Disconcertingly, Jesus announces to his followers: ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword’ (Mt 10:34). The coming of the Holy Spirit is presented as ‘the rush of a mighty wind’ (Act 2:2). Indeed the effusion of the Spirit in the Church brings about conversion that is often painful, because it involves overcoming the reluctance of the sinful human heart.

Yet this “violence”, though painful, is not contrary to human nature, but belongs to its growth and salvation. St Irenaeus observes that God convinces us ‘not by force, but by persuasion’.<sup>88</sup> In the Letter to Diognetus we read that God ‘sent his own Son in the best possible way: as Savior, as one who persuades, not as one who constrains. Because in God there is no violence’.<sup>89</sup> And Origen had the same thing to say: ‘Christ does not prevail over anyone against their will, but acts rather by persuasion, for he is the Word of God’.<sup>90</sup> The idea is central in Augustine, for whom the grace of God is invincible, *invicta gratia*,<sup>91</sup> yet not violent, for it seduces the soul of the sinner with the *suavitas amoris*, the gentleness of love,<sup>92</sup> through the *concupiscentia bona*, the desire for the good.<sup>93</sup>

It should be observed however that the communication of the saving power of Christ to humans is not a purely interior process brought about by the Holy Spirit. According to the earliest writings of the New Testament, Christ sends the Apostles to preach the Gospel. The Church is “obliged”, as it were, by the Spirit of Christ to preach the word of God ev-

erywhere, to everyone, to all races and cultures, until his return in glory, or more exactly, in order for this return to take place.<sup>94</sup> In the Church each Christian, in turn, is “obliged” to evangelize. ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16), says St Paul. That is to say, not only God but also believers are meant to take part in the *compelle intrare* (Lk 14:23) of evangelization. Yet this involves no violence on other people, but rather an attractive abundance of light, of doctrine, of virtue.<sup>95</sup> Neither does the *compelle intrare* refer to the State exercising coercive authority over citizens as the “temporal arm of the Church”.<sup>96</sup>

Perhaps the Biblical category that best describes the gentle and efficacious persuasion that is Christian apostolate is that of witness, the third and last key word we intend to consider in this study.

“Witnessing” is an important Biblical category. As in the Old Testament, says Jean-Louis Leuba, ‘witnessing constitutes the basic structure of Christian revelation, more even than revelation itself... because it is what makes revelation possible’.<sup>97</sup> The “gentle violence” exercised by the witness, inspired and tempered by charity, by which the power of Christian grace is transmitted, may be described in three stages.<sup>98</sup>

**1. Self-giving as a source of conviction** In the first place, the witness, in giving himself through word and action, shows he is prepared to lose himself, whole or in part, as long as he gets across the message he intends to communicate. The witness is prepared to renounce his reputation, or his time, perhaps his very life. He is firmly convinced of the truthfulness of what he teaches, and by every means at his disposal attempts to transmit his conviction to others. Pascal declared that he was ‘prepared to believe only those who are prepared to have their throats cut’.<sup>99</sup> This self-giving takes place in an exceptional and paradigmatic way in Jesus Christ, ‘the faithful Witness’ (Rev 1:5), when he preaches, works miracles, and dies on the Cross. Likewise it occurs in the life of those who belong to Him, when they live fully Christian lives, or die as martyrs. Besides, the Christian witness excludes violence on the other, accepting it only for himself. Indeed, whereas the witness in person assumes the weight and pain of truth, his intention is to inflict it on others. When Jesus was being arrested, he said to the soldiers: ‘I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go’ (Jn 18:8).

However, there is always the possibility that the witness, though fully convinced, may be mistaken in his convictions, even in good faith, because he confuses universal truth with the position of a particular social group to which he belongs. Perhaps this was the situation Socrates was in when he accepted death to defend the integrity and rationality of the sacred traditions of the Greek people. Several philosophers, among them Nietzsche, Heidegger and Vattimo, have made an important critique of the epistemological reliability of witnessing in this direction.<sup>100</sup> In effect, it is always possible that the message communicated by a witness simply reflects the position of a group of which the witness has become the spokesperson. So, is there no other aspect to witnessing that can add truthfulness to mere conviction? Two further aspects of the witnessing process, referred to above, must be considered. symbiosis

**2. Symbiosis between the witness and the message** To ensure that his message will be accepted as trustworthy, the witness tends instinctively to look for somebody else who is prepared to repeat and proclaim what he said, and then another, and so on. In this way the reliability of the witnessing process is reinforced, doubtless, but in a merely numerical way. If, however, between the person of the witness and the message being communicated there is a clear cohesion, a deep identification, the process will be reinforced in a qualitative way. That is, witnessing will not remain exterior to the one who witnesses, but will reveal his interiority and the consistency of the message being communicated. In Christ this bond between person and message is clearly present. The disciples ‘were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes’ (Mk 1:22; cf. Mt 7:28f). The scribes in fact based their arguments exclusively on what other, more ancient, authors had taught them.<sup>101</sup> Jesus however speaks to them from the depths of his being: ‘Truly, truly, I say to you...’, or ‘You have heard that it was said to the men of old... But I say to you...’ (Mt 5).<sup>102</sup> Besides, the firmness with which Jesus rejects hypocrisy of all kinds goes to demonstrate the coherency of his message and renders his communication effective.<sup>103</sup> In effect, the words and life of Christ carried with them all the power of authentic-

ity. And Christian believers are urged by grace to act in the same way.

**3. Vindication of truth** The process of witnessing to truth is still not complete, for as yet it does not go beyond the level of personal conviction and of the possible “sectorial truth” of a particular social group. This brings us to consider the third aspect of the dynamics of witnessing. Witnessing involves not only to the person of the witness or to the truth witnessed to, but also to the public vindication of the truth in question. The witness, aware that conviction alone, even to the point of self-sacrifice, may not carry the day, throws himself back on a superior instance, a source of truth and right, establishing with it a kind of trust-bond. *Unus testis, nullus testis*, says the classical aphorism. The source or foundation of truth is called upon, albeit implicitly, to eventually proclaim the truthfulness of what the witness has declared, to vindicate the veracity of his message. Paul Ricoeur observes that ‘witnessing does not belong to the witness. It proceeds from an absolute initiative, in both its origin and content’.<sup>104</sup>

The phenomenon of vindication may be observed especially in the life of Jesus Christ, not only in that he gives witness continuously to his Father (Jn 1:18; 5:43; 12:44ff; 17:8), but more specifically because the Father vindicates him by raising him from the dead. In this way the Father proclaims to the world the truth proclaimed by the Son (Act 2:24.32; 13:33f; 17,31; Phil 2:9-11). Since Christ was put to death precisely on account of the doctrine he preached, the Resurrection constitutes the proclamation by the Father, in a language any mortal can understand, not just of Jesus’ trustworthiness in general, but of the truthfulness of the very doctrine he taught. The Resurrection of Christ becomes, in effect, ‘the definitively valid manifestation of the Truth of God’.<sup>105</sup> And in the resurrection at the end of time, definitive manifestation of the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit will vindicate Jesus once and for all, because the Spirit ‘who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you’ (Rom 8:11; cf. Eph 4:30; 1 Cor 3:16f, 6:19f), in this way doing all justice.<sup>106</sup>

Likewise, Christian believers, who have been incorporated into Christ by Baptism, become carriers

of the power of the Risen One through the Spirit. With the ‘good perfume of Christ’ (2 Cor 2:15) that emanates from their lives, they present the power and truth of the Gospel to the world. In this way the life of Christians –Christ working in and through them– also exercises a kind of “gentle violence” over the rest of humanity. This compelle intrare takes place not only on account of their virtues, good example or lucid explanations. The baptized become alter Christus, ipse Christus, “another Christ, Christ himself”, to use an expression of St Josemaría Escrivá.<sup>107</sup> In this way, Christ lives and acts in the Christian, in spite of his limits and defects. In Christ indeed the Christian becomes salt of the earth, light of the world, leaven in the mass (Mt 5:13f; Lk 13:21).<sup>108</sup>

To sum up, the “gentle violence” of Christian witnessing serves as an instrument to communicate to humanity the word and grace of God, to be received by faith. This “violence” of course is far removed from any kind of imposition, of intolerance, of inhuman imposition. Rather it derives from the painful process of conversion involved in the sinner becoming a saint.

**Christian witness and its reception** It may be disconcerting to observe, however, that the reception of the gentle and insistent missionary “violence” of the Church often provokes an even greater violence culminating in the violent destruction of human life, in the first place that of Christ on the Cross, and then that of martyrs. There is a mysterious lack of proportion between the diffusive power of faith and the reaction it can provoke in an impenitent heart. The Letter to Diognetus observed that ‘those who hate [Christians] do not really know the cause of their hate’.<sup>109</sup> The Psalmist speaks of those who ‘hate without reason’ (69:4), a text Jesus applies to himself and to his followers (Jn 15:25). In the life of the martyr we may plumb the depths of the religious process: the gentle and divine violence of truth and love colliding with non-acceptance, refusal to believe, the sin of humankind.<sup>110</sup> As we have already said, if violence may be associated in any way with Christianity, this is not on account of the humanizing and saving power of Christian faith, of its communication of the divine, but rather of human sin that attempts to impose a distorted and rebellious dominion over man and the world.

## 5. Religion and the human person

The most decisive anthropological argument in favor of the truthfulness of Christian faith, in all probability, lies in the “good news” of the dignity and incalculable value of each human being, the person.<sup>111</sup> Pascal said that man was a reed, fragile both morally and ontologically, but he was a “thinking reed”.<sup>112</sup> His greatness lies in that. Person goes beyond nature. And so there is nothing contradictory in holding that a single human being, a witness, can become the depository of the whole truth, as XX century personalist philosophers have generally recognized.<sup>113</sup> For this reason also, Christianity excludes all kinds of violence against the human person, against the individual, because it does not consider man as a means but always as an end, to use Kant’s famous expression.<sup>114</sup> And the Church, as it perseveringly preaches the word of God, is fully aware that this may produce not only the pain of conversion, but also reactions of incomprehension and at times of violent rejection.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction to religious phenomenology, cf. for example H. Bürkle, *Der Mensch auf der Suche nach Gott. Die Frage der Religionen* (Paderborn: Bonifatius 1996); G. Filoramo, *Che cos’è la religione. Temi, metodi, problemi* (Torino: Einaudi 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, *Decr. Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), nn. 6–7. On this document, cf. the interesting reflections of M. Rhonheimer, *Il rapporto tra verità e politica nella società cristiana. Riflessioni storico-teologiche per la valutazione dell’amore della libertà nella predicazione di Josemaría Escrivá*, in F. de Andrés (ed.), *Figli di Dio nella Chiesa. Riflessioni sul messaggio di san Josemaría Escrivá. Aspetti culturali ed ecclesiaci*, vol. 5/2 (Rome: EDUSC 2004), pp. 153–178.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. especially Barth’s commentary on the Letter to the Romans (1919, 2nd ed., 1922). On the question of “religion” in Barth, cf. E. Busch, *The Great Passion. An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology* (Grand Rapids (MI): Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans 2004), especially pp. 128–151.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Guardini, *Religion und Offenbarung* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh 1958). Cf. note 47 below.

<sup>5</sup> The religious dynamic is situated in man himself, according to H. De Lubac, specifically in his desire to see God.

<sup>6</sup> On the meaning of tolerance, cf. F. Ocariz, ‘Delimitación del concepto de tolerancia y su relación con el principio de la libertad’, in *Scripta Theologica* 39 (1995), pp. 865–884; as well as different studies of J. Ratzinger, in *Glaube, Wahrheit, Toleranz: das Christentum und die Weltreligionen* (Freiburg im B.; Basel: Herder 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (München; Wien 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Dawkin’s work *The Selfish Gene*, is well known. Cf. M. Artigas, ‘El capellán del diablo. Ciencia y religión en Richard Dawkin’, in *Scripta Theologica* 39 (2006), pp. 13–34. Artigas’ study considers the most recent work of Dawkin, entitled ‘The Chaplain of the Devil’.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the texts of John Paul II during the World Day of Prayer for Peace, in Assisi, 27th October 1986, in *Insegnamenti Giovanni Paolo II 9* (1986/2), pp. 1249–73.

- <sup>10</sup> Cf. the paper of P. Sequeri in the Convegno di Studio organized by the School of Theology of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, *La natura della religione in contesto teologico*, entitled 'La specificità della fede cristiana: soggettività e universalità del suo evento fondatore'.
- <sup>11</sup> Christian faith, says Sequeri, "rinvià all'insuperabilità di Gesù Cristo come soggetto-attore della rivelazione costituente, e non solo oggetto-storico disponibile all'interpretazione della fede istituita: sia in ordine alla certificazione di quel senso del divino (altrimenti inimmaginabile), sia in riferimento all'accessibilità riconoscibile del suo accadimento (altrimenti inevidente), sia infine a sostegno della sua attestazione di verità (altrimenti inosservabile)", *ibid.*, p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, 'Message for the World Day of Peace: "Peace is to be found in Truth"' (8.12.2005), for 1.1.2006.
- <sup>13</sup> The writings of René Girard are of particular interest in respect of the role of violence within religious life. Cf. his works *Le bouc émissaire* (1987); *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris: Grasset 2003). On his thought, cf. A. Llano, *Deseo, violencia, sacrificio: el secreto del mito según René Girard* (Pamplona: EUNSA 2004).
- <sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus caritas est* (2005) states that the Church should be present in social life and politics 'through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper' n. 28, a. 'The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run' *ibid.*, n. 29.
- <sup>15</sup> In this manner W. Pannenberg understands the consolidation of the truthfulness of Christianity; cf. vol. 1 of his *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark 1991), chapter 3.
- <sup>16</sup> This may be found in many of the early Fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical writers, for example St Justin, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. As J. Ratzinger points out, the dialogue Christians established with pagans was not on the level of religion but of philosophy: see note 66 below.
- <sup>17</sup> G. Morra, 'Religione (fenomenologia della)', in *Dizionario Teologico Interdisciplinare*, vol. 3 (Torino: Marietti 1977), pp. 43-55, here p. 45.
- <sup>18</sup> On the phenomenon of secularization, cf. for example F. Gogarten, *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit. Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem* (München & Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch 1966). For a critical account, see J.L. Illanes, *Cristianismo, historia, mundo* (Pamplona: EUNSA 1973).
- <sup>19</sup> See the paper of P. Sequeri, quoted above.
- <sup>20</sup> We have closely followed the study of G. Morra, 'Religione', *cit.*
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. Marsilius Ficinus, *Docta religio et pia philosophia, Epitome in Plotinum, Proemium*, in *Opera*, vol. 1 (Basilea: 1961), p. 1537.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. Giordano Bruno, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*, dial. 1, in *Dialoghi italiani* (Firenze: 1958), pp. 386f; Tommaso Campanella, *Metaphysicorum lib. 16, c. 3, a. 1*, vol. 3 (Bologna: 1967), p. 216.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. especially A. Comte, *Système de politiques positives instituant la religion de l'Humanité*, 4 vol. (1851-54).
- <sup>24</sup> According to Hegel, the myth in Plato serves only as a representation of potential thought, "but shows up the powerlessness of thought, which cannot yet stand on its own feet, and as a result is not yet free thought". Myth belongs by right, he says, to the learning stage of humanity, in that it moves and attracts towards the content of thought. But it must be surpassed and left behind. 'Since thought is contaminated in myth by sensible forms, it is not in a position to express thought. When the concept has reached maturity, it no longer has any need of myth' G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1965), vol. 18, pp. 188 ff.
- <sup>25</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (1832), postume.
- <sup>26</sup> On R. Dawkin, cf. note 8.
- <sup>27</sup> I. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793).
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*.
- <sup>29</sup> J. Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: 1934).
- <sup>30</sup> Senofanes said that religion was an 'anthropomorphic projection', Critius, 'a political imposition', Evemerus, 'a divinization of the heroes', Lucretius, the result of 'fear of natural phenomena'. Cf. G. Morra, 'Religione', *cit.*, p. 44.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. D. Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1799).
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols (London: 1903).
- <sup>33</sup> L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, ed. W. Schuffenhauer, 2 vols (Berlin: 1956). Orig., 1841. On this work, cf. the critical presentation of C. Fabro, *Ludwig Feuerbach. L'essenza del cristianesimo* (L'Aquila: 1977).
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, *cit.*; *Das Wesen der Religion* (1845).
- <sup>35</sup> Cf. É. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), p. 50.
- <sup>36</sup> Cf. L. Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive* (Paris: F. Alcan 1922). Against this, Rudolph Otto shows that religion is not as such "prelogical" (or non-rational), but rather metaphysical. On this, cf. L. Bouyer, *Rite and Man, Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1963), p. 28.
- <sup>37</sup> Cf. for example the works of K. Marx-F Engels and V. Lenin on religion.
- <sup>38</sup> H. Bergson shows the weakness of the Marxist critique of religion, by showing that religion is capable of breaking down social barriers and closed compartments in which humanity is settled. Cf. his work *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (London: 1935). Bergson shows how Marx misses the point of true religion, in that he criticizes, at times justly, the instrumentalization of religion.
- <sup>39</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *Reden über die Religion an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799).
- <sup>40</sup> *Idem.*, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche in Zusammenhänge dargestellt* (1821-2); ed. Förster, Halle, § 4, vol. 1, p. 13.
- <sup>41</sup> As has been shown by K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: 1947).
- <sup>42</sup> For Schleiermacher, A.E. McGrath says, 'the essential difference between the Redeemer and the redeemed consists in the prototypical dominance of the God-consciousness in the Redeemer, into whose fellowship the believer may be admitted by a process substantially analogous to the formation of a human society around a charismatic leader, who unites them by his vision of their future state' *The Making of Modern German Christology* (Oxford: Blackwell 1986), p. 23.
- <sup>43</sup> R. Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1917) (München: 301958). English translation: *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational in an Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (London: 1936).
- <sup>44</sup> Before Otto, the work of Wilhelm Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (Münster: 1912) should be kept in mind. Schmidt maintains that man is naturally and originally monotheistic, and attempts to demonstrate the falsity of the theories that tribal polytheism is prior to monotheism.
- <sup>45</sup> Cf. St Augustine, *Confessions* 11,9.
- <sup>46</sup> R. Otto, citando Tersteegen, in G. Morra, 'Religione', *cit.*, p. 46.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. G. Van der Leeuw, *De primitieve mensch en de religie* (Groningen: 1937); *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen 1956; M. Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris: 1949); *Aspects du mythe* (Paris: Gallimard 1963), and other works, cited below; of M. Scheler, cf. especially *Das Ewige im Menschen* (1921); of R. Guardini, cf. *Religion und Offenbarung*, *cit.* On these authors, cf. G. Morra, 'Religione', *cit.*, pp. 47-53.
- <sup>48</sup> On the role of myth in the romantic period, from Herder onwards, cf. J. Ries, *Le mythe et sa signification*. We will follow the Italian translation of Ries' book, *Il mito e il suo significato* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2005), pp. 112-120. According to Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie* (definitive edition, 1857), myth contains the truth and always has a religious meaning, for it

represents the whole: 'truth is to be found in the whole' J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 118. At the same time, myth is ambivalent, in such a way that 'in the exegesis of myth, it is necessary to perceive the meaning beyond the sign' *ibid.*, p. 118; according to Herder it is also profetic: 'the mythical expression is an ironic expression' *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 235.

<sup>50</sup> Dumézil's work *Le festin d'immortalité: étude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne* (Paris: P. Geuthner 1924), has been particularly influential.

<sup>51</sup> *Inter alia*, cf. P. Ricoeur, 'Mito e storia', in *Enciclopedia delle religioni*, vol. 1 (Milano: Jaca Book 1993), pp. 372-381; 'Mythe. L'interprétation philosophique', in *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (Paris: 1990), vol. 15, pp. 1041-8.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. especially L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: F. Alcan 21912); *La mentalité primitive*, cit.; *La mythologie primitive: le monde mythique des Australiens et des Papous* (Paris: F. Alcan 21935).

<sup>53</sup> On the thought of Eliade, cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., pp. 185-250; among his works, cf. especially *Traité d'histoire des religions*, cit.; *Aspects du mythe*, cit.; *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (Paris: 1949); *Mythes, rêves et mystères* (Paris: 1957); *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Hamburg: 1957).

<sup>54</sup> On R. Bultmann's demythologization program, cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., pp. 133-148. According to Bultmann, mythical representation is described as follows 'what is not belonging to the world, that is the divine, appears as if it did belong, as if it were human' *ibid.*, p. 140. Thus mythical thought is opposed to scientific thought, because it represents things as mysterious, hidden, enigmatic.

<sup>55</sup> M. Eliade, *Aspects du Mythe*, cit.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> According to Kerényi, myth refers to 'a collection of primitive elements transmitted by tradition, contained within known stories that deal with gods and divine beings, with combats between heroes and descents into the underworld. It contains a message that goes back to the beginning but does not speak so much of causes, but of effects. It is a message which must be allowed to speak for itself' J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 168. Myth refers to events that form the basis of the world. It is the expression of the capacity man has of immersing himself within himself, in his own origins. Cf. K. Kerényi, *Die antike Religion: eine Grundlegung* (Amsterdam: Pantheon akademische Verlagsanstalt 1942); *Die Mythologie der Griechen: die Götter- und Menschheitsgeschichten* (Zürich: Rhein Verlag 21951); *Miti e misteri* (Torino: 1950).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 166. In the depths of the human soul, Jung encounters three levels: the first is the person, the social personage; the second is the shadow, made up of the dark side of man; the third is that of the archetypes, that is of the collective unconsciousness. The archetypes, he says, are formational and dynamic virtualities which contain emotional charges of the numinous. By means of them Jung undertakes the exploration, interpretation and translation of the myth. His main work on the question, written with Kerényi, is entitled *Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie* (Zürich: 1941).

<sup>59</sup> According to Eliade, 'the history of religions... is made up of an accumulation of hierophanies, that is, manifestations of sacred realities. From the most elementary hierophany, for example the manifestation of the sacred in whatever object, a stone or a tree, to the supreme hierophany which for a Christian is the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, there is no real break. It is always the same mysterious act: the manifestation of something "totally other", which in reality does not belong to our world, in the objects that belong fully to our "natural", "profane" world' *Das Heilige*, cit., p. 15. 'The myth tells a sacred story. It presents a happening that took place in primordial times, the fabled time of the beginnings' *Aspects du mythe*, cit., p. 15. The sacred breaks into the world, in that way becoming a model and exemplar for all human activity, "because the first born did that for the first time". In principio, nunc et semper. Also modern man considers himself a product of history, observes Eliade. But primitive man goes beyond that: he repeats history, he actualizes it anew (J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 239). Modern man, conversely, considers historical events as irreversible. Such events have, perhaps, formed man, but now they represent the past. Primitive man, however, reactualizes what is past, he remakes it, through myths and rites (*ibid.*, p. 240).

The myth is known through the ceremony of initiation, and the repetition of sacred texts.

<sup>60</sup> K. Kerényi, *Miti e misteri*, cit., p. 303.

<sup>61</sup> J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 241.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Berger spoke of the beginnings of this phenomenon in the 1960's. Cf. his work *A Rumor of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Doubleday 1969). He explains it more clearly in P. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington D.C.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Ethics and Public Policy Center; W.B. Eerdmans 1999). Cf. also P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: University Press 2002). For recent discussions on the phenomenon of secularization, in the context of sociology and theology, cf. L. Oviedo, 'Balances sobre la secularización: respuestas teológicas', in *Antoniano* 81 (2006), pp. 381-97, who considers the works of G. D'Costa, D. Pollack, D. Martin, G. Ward and M. Percy.

<sup>63</sup> D. Pollack in his careful study *Säkularisierung - ein moderner Mythos?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003) is of the opinion that this phenomenon is not generally to be found in Europe, particularly in Germany.

<sup>64</sup> For example, cf. the study of J. Carrette - R. King, *Selling Spirituality. The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge 2004), which analyzes this phenomenon.

<sup>65</sup> On different modern forms of violence, cf. J. Ballesteros, *Repensar la paz* (Madrid: EIUNSA, 2006), pp. 17-60.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (London: Burns & Oates 1969), pp. 94-99. Pope Benedict XVI mentions this idea in the encyclical *Deus caritas est*, nn. 10, 28f.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. notes 78ff below.

<sup>68</sup> On the way revelation determines the fact and profile of faith, cf. G. Colombo, 'La teologia prima e dopo il Concilio Vaticano II', in *Seminarium* 43 (1991), pp. 227-44.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. the interesting reflection of J. Duque, 'Homo credens - para una teología de la fe', in *Antropología y fe cristiana* (IV Jornadas de Teología. Instituto Teológico Compostelano) (Santiago de Compostela: 2003), pp. 223-35.

<sup>70</sup> On the mythology of Homer, Hesiod and others, cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., pp. 37-40; E. Feil, *Religio*, vol. 1: *Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1986), pp. 32ff.

<sup>71</sup> Platone, *Phaedo* 61d. Using the term *pistis*, faith, the dramatist Euripides, in his work *Iphigenia Taurica* 14, 75f, explains the same dynamic when he affirms: 'whoever hears the word of a god and does not obey it, is a madman'.

<sup>72</sup> On the role of myth in Plato's religious thought, and its relationship with "faith", *pistis*, cf. the XIX century study of F.C. Baur, *Das Christliche des Platonismus oder Sokrates und Plato* (Tübingen: 1837), and W. Windelband, *Platon* (Stuttgart: F. Frommann 41905). During the XX century, cf. J. Pieper, *Über die platonischen Mythen* (München: 1965), especially chapter 5; G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, vol. 2 (Milano: 81988), in particular the section entitled "Mito e logos", pp. 47-52. Cf. also my study 'Evangelizzazione e Luoghi della Fede. Una riflessione in base all'enciclica Fides et ratio', in *Comunicazione e luoghi della fede* (Pontificia Università della Santa Croce. Facoltà di comunicazione sociale istituzionale), ed. N. González Gaitano (Città del Vaticano: Vaticana 2001), pp. 109-46. The myths of Plato 'would be a synthesis of religion and philosophy', says J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 42. According to J. Pépin, Plato had recourse to myth, to which he attributes value insofar as it offers an image of the truth and not a gratuitous fiction. Hence, for Plato, the message carried by myth is particularly important: *Mythe et allégorie. Les origines et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne 1958), pp. 112-121. Even though the role of myth in the thought of Plato may be explained in other ways, Giovanni Reale is of the opinion that the explanation just given is acceptable if we take into account the role of "oral traditions" in Plato's thought: cf. my study 'Evangelizzazione e Luoghi della Fede', cit., p. 124, note 49.

<sup>73</sup> On the political doctrine of Plato, cf. G. Reale, *Storia... cit.*, pp. 285-331; on the question of philosophy as the motor for good government and for

overcoming political corruption, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 318–327. Plato's political philosophy is to be found especially in the Republic. On the formation of the youth and the role of myths, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 377–398.

<sup>74</sup> J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. the text of R. Guardini, *Der Tod des Sokrates: eine Interpretation der platonischen Schriften Euthyphron, Apologie, Kriton und Phaidon* (Mainz; Paderborn: Matthias-Grünewald; Schönigh 51987).

<sup>76</sup> The 'obedience of faith' of which Paul writes in the letter to the Romans (1:5) is rendered as *upakoien* in Greek, and as *ob-audire* in Latin.

<sup>77</sup> G. Filoramo asks whether Christianity has understood religious dynamics differently from paganism. He replies in the negative. 'Christian polemicists, from Arnobius to Lactantius, from Eusebius to Augustine, used the same ideological armament used in the philosophical critique of mythical-religious traditions in relation to the pagan gods' *Che cos'è la religione*, cit., p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> The apologists rejected calumnies and myths, and affirmed the superiority of Christianity over paganism (cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 72–83). With Justin, the rejection is absolute (cf. *Apol.* 1:54,2–4). According to Tatian, the gods who were protagonists of the myths were in fact demons. 'If the myth is symbol and language', Ries concludes, 'the pagan myth is a symbol of non-existent gods, a language of a false religion' *Il mito*, cit., p. 75. Tertullian also rejects pagan gods for this reason (*Apol.* 10:2), as do Arnobius of Sicca, *Adversus nationes*, Lactantius, in his *Divinae institutiones*, and especially St Augustine in *De Civitate Dei*. The pagan gods, says Augustine, are simply 'men who were divinized in the course of history' *ibid.*, 2:5. Besides, they are evil gods, because they are unfaithful (*ibid.*, 4:7). The multiplication of gods is a sign of their impotence (*ibid.*, 4:8). Likewise Augustine rejects the specialization of gods, typical of the Romans (*ibid.*, 4:22), and the theology of Varro, in that it includes mythical figures (*ibid.*, 7:6).

<sup>79</sup> On different cosmogenic myths, cf. M. Eliade, *La nostalgie des origines* (Paris: 1971), pp. 150–177; J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., pp. 241–247.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. especially M. Eliade's classic work, *Cosmos and History: the Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row 1959).

<sup>81</sup> Teachers of the Alexandrian school, particularly Clement, tried to convince their listeners of the foolishness of pagan beliefs. For this reason Clement in his *Stromata* had recourse to allegorical interpretations of myth. But he adds: 'may the one who began this falsehood for humankind be destroyed' *Protrepticus* 2:13,3. Likewise Origen offers an allegorical interpretation of pagan myths: cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., pp. 76f. J. Pépin speaks of 'a pacific utilization of pagan allegory by Christian allegorists' *Mythe et allégorie*, cit., p. 265.

<sup>82</sup> Tertullian addresses the pagans as follows: 'what we adore is the unique God, who drew this great mass out of nothing... If therefore your gods do not exist, it means that your religion does not exist; and if there is no religion (since there are no gods), how can we be considered guilty of *laesa religio*? Quite the contrary, that very accusation will fall on you, because you adore falsehood, not only neglecting the true religion of the true God, but even more, by opposing it, in that way falling into the crime of authentic irreligiosity' *Apol.* 17:1; 24:1–2.

<sup>83</sup> J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 83.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. O. Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium* (Regensburg: F. Pustet 1923); L. Bouyer, 'Le salut dans les religions à mystères et le christianisme', in *Revue des sciences religieuses* 31 (1952); *idem.*, *Rite and Man*, cit. On Bouyer, cf. A. Catapano, *La sofologia di Louis Bouyer: prolegomeni per un'antropologia teologica* (Roma: Pontificia Università della Santa Croce 2001), pp. 55–153. The similarity between Christianity and pagan mystery religions was already noted by R. Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistische Mysterienreligionen* (Leipzig: 1910), W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Göttingen: 1921), and popularized in France by A. Loisy, *Les mystères païens et le mystère chrétien* (Paris: 21930). These authors hold that Christianity and pagan religions belong to a common mold of agrarian cults. Mystery religion is a sacred action representing the death and return to life of savior god. According to Casel, other religions prepared the ground, serving as a providential preparation for Christianity. Bouyer explains the distinction between them: 'In opposition to cosmic cults, never freed from the cyclic setting of an eternal return, the worship of the Christians is directed toward a savior god who, though He transcends the world, once and for all descends into human history to transform it, and

at the same time, in an irreversible manner, the whole course of the cosmos' *Rite and Man*, cit., p. 35. Whatever material similarities there may be between pagan mystery religions and Christianity, the framework is clearly different. Cf. also B. Metzger, 'Considerations of Method in the Study of Mystery Religions', in *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1955), pp. 1ff. The principle idea is that the higher should not be reduced to or explained by the lower (as James Frazer did in *The Golden Bough*), for this would mean that the higher has been invented.

<sup>85</sup> J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 248. According to Eliade, Christian faith is unique in that it looks on history as God's direct and irreversible manifestation in the world (cf. *ibid.*, p. 247). Christianity is radically different from mythology, he says, because Christ is a historical personage. As in Judaism, it has a beginning and an end. There is historical development, and so it is not a myth. The *illud tempus* is not mythical time, but historical time. Hence Christianity is far from myth (cf. *Das Heilige*, cit., pp. 94–98). Nonetheless, the process of Christian evangelization has not neglected the mythical content of cultures it encounters. 'Popular Christianity has clearly prolonged certain aspects of mythical thought to our very days' *Aspects du mythe*, cit., p. 211.

<sup>86</sup> J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., p. 250.

<sup>87</sup> The issue was considered by L. Lévy-Bruhl (cf. J. Ries, *Il mito*, cit., pp. 150–157). According to him, myths are born of the projection of what exists presently into the realm of the supernatural and primordial time: whether institutions, or relationships between human groups or plants or animals, or salient parts of the landscape. Yet it must be situated in the framework of primitive society: celebrations, ceremonies, prayers, images. The personages and events involved in myths are considered as real, as a transcendent and enduring reality. Some are in contact with this world; they hold the mythical secrets, and carry out quasi-priestly functions. Besides this is a universal phenomenon, present in all primitive peoples. P. Commelin commented to the effect that 'mythology is evidently a sequence of falsehoods. But these falsehoods have been, for many centuries, the object of belief. Among Greeks and Latins they were considered as dogmas and reality' *Nouvelle mythologie greque et romaine* (Paris: Garnier 1926), p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> 'Non enim cum vi, sed secundum suadela[m]', Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* 5,11.

<sup>89</sup> Anon., *Letter to Diognetus* 7,4 (SC 33,68).

<sup>90</sup> 'Neminem enim invitum vicit Christus, sed suasionem (peithon), cum sit Verbum Dei', Origen, *Sel. in Ps.* (PG 12,1133b).

<sup>91</sup> On the notion of *gratia invicta* in Augustine, cf. *De corr. et grat.* 12,38.

<sup>92</sup> On grace that acts in the soul as *suavitas amoris*, cf. *Enn. in Ps.*, 13.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *De Spiritu et lettera*, 4,6.

<sup>94</sup> On this issue, cf. my study *The Christological Assimilation of the Apocalypse* (Dublin: Four Courts 2004), pp. 149f.

<sup>95</sup> In the words of St Josemaría Escrivá, the *compelle intrare* does not involve 'a kind of material push, but the abundance of light, of doctrine, the spiritual stimulus of your prayer and your work, which is an authentic witness of doctrine; the sum total of the sacrifices which you know how to offer; the smile coming to your lips because you are sons of God; filiation which fills you with a serene happiness—even though adversities will also be there—which others see and envy. Add to all this your human grace and qualities, and we have the content of the "compelle intrare"' *Letter*, 24–X–1942, n. 9, cit. in my study 'The Inseparability of Holiness and Apostolate. The Christian "alter Christus, ipse Christus" in the Writings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá', in *Figli di Dio nella Chiesa. Riflessioni sul messaggio di san Josemaría Escrivá. Aspetti culturali ed ecclesiastici*, vol. 5/1 (Rome: EDUSC 2004), pp. 229–254, here p. 252.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. M. Rhonheimer, *Il rapporto tra verità e politica*, cit. in note 2.

<sup>97</sup> J.-L. Leuba, 'La notion chrétienne de témoignage', in E. Castelli (ed.), *La testimonianza* (Roma: Istituto di studi filosofici 1972), pp. 309–316, here, p. 311.

<sup>98</sup> For a more complete description of the witnessing process, cf. my study 'El testimonio de Cristo y de los cristianos. Una reflexión sobre el método teológico', in *Scripta Theologica* 38 (2006), pp. 501–568; and a briefer presentation in 'La verità di Cristo nella storia: testimonianza e dialogo', in *PATH* 5 (2006).

<sup>99</sup> B. Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Brunschwig, n. 593.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. the summary of these positions in G. Vattimo, 'Tramonto del soggetto e problema della testimonianza', in E. Castelli (ed.), *La testimonianza*, cit., pp. 125-139.

<sup>101</sup> St Jerome, commenting on this texts, says that Jesus 'did not speak as a teacher but as Lord' Hom. in Ev. Marc., 2. Elsewhere he says that the scribes 'taught the people the things written by Moses and the prophets. Jesus on the other hand, being God and Lord of Moses himself, either added to the Law according to his own free will things that seemed less important, or rather, modifying the Law, preached to the people as we are told: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old... But I say to you"' Comm. in Ev. Matth. 1:7,29.

<sup>102</sup> John Chrysostom says that the crowd follows 'because Jesus Christ knew how to infuse so much love for his words in them! They admire his power and his authority. Jesus in fact does not speak referring to another, or in the name of someone else, as Moses and the prophets did, but on every occasion he shows he has the power to command. Often, in fact, as he establishes new laws, Christ openly says "But I say to you"; and referring to the terrible day of judgment, clearly shows that on that day he will be the one to judge, punishing the wicked and rewarding the just' Comm. in Ev. Matth. 25,1.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. especially Mt 23; and also *The Christological Assimilation*, cit., pp. 219f.

<sup>104</sup> 'Le témoignage n'appartient pas au témoin. Il procède d'une initiative absolue, quant à son origine et quant à son contenu', in 'L'herméneutique du témoignage', in E. Castelli (ed.), *La testimonianza*, cit., pp. 35-61, here p. 44. R. Guardini makes the following observation: 'Tutte le cose attestano se stesse come reali ed essenziali: ma allo stesso tempo lasciano intuire che non sono l'elemento definitivo, sono piuttosto punti di passaggio, attraverso i quali si manifesta l'elemento veramente definitivo e autentico: forme espressive che lo manifestano', *Religione e rivelazione* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero 2001), p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> P. Martinelli, *La testimonianza. Verità di Dio e libertà dell'uomo* (Milano: Paoline 2002), p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> On the relationship between final resurrection and justice, cf. my study *La muerte y la esperanza* (Madrid: Palabra 2004), pp. 97-109. Sequeri, when he speaks of the need to purify religious life, explains this double justification of Christ, just mentioned, by the Father and the Spirit. First he observes that 'la purificazione della religione —non dalla religione— è il compito storicamente più alto e difficile affidato ai discepoli del Signore. Impossibile e necessario'. Then he says: 'Il Figlio stesso neutralizzò definitivamente l'autoreferenzialità del circolo di un'apologetica viziata, restituendo al Padre

la giustificazione radicale della sua verità. E allo Spirito che risuscita i morti il compimento perfetto della sua giustizia' P. Sequeri, *La specificità della fede cristiana*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> On the expression *alter Christus, ipse Christus*, cf. my study, 'The Inseparability of Holiness and Apostolate', cit.

<sup>108</sup> As Benedict XVI says in his recent encyclical: 'Nor has the Lord been absent from subsequent Church history: he encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist' *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 17. Every Christian knows, the Pope continues, that 'those who practice charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love' *ibid.*, n. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Anon., *Letter to Diognetus*, 5:17.

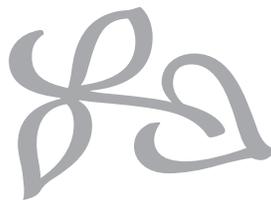
<sup>110</sup> According to St John, sin in the fullest sense of the word is incredulity (Jn 3:18).

<sup>111</sup> It is well known that the notion of "person", that is the human individual who is at once irreplaceable and open to the world, is rooted in that of Trinitarian person. Thomas Aquinas, in confrontation with the Arabic commentators of Aristotle, insists on the metaphysical incommunicability of the human individual, that is its unsubstitutable character. It is interesting to make note of recent studies on the medieval period speaking of the emergence of human individuality in religious and popular writings of the XII century. Cf. for example C. Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual. 1050-1200*, SPCK (London: 1972); C.W. Bynum, *Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?*, in *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley (CA)/ Los Angeles (CA): University of California Press 1984), pp. 82-109; A.J. Gurevic, *La nascita dell'individuo nell'Europa medievale* (Roma/Bari: Laterza 1994) (this is an Italian translation of the original Russian text). This awareness did not arise during the Renaissance period (XIV-XV centuries), as J. Burckhardt claimed towards the end of the XIX century. For a more complete development of the theme, cf. my study 'L'Europa e la speranza: tra promessa e ricordo. Riflessione intorno all'Ecclesia in Europa', in *PATH 4* (2005), pp. 241-70.

<sup>112</sup> B. Pascal, *Pensées*, cit., n. 347.

<sup>113</sup> Among the existentialist and personalist authors who attribute special importance to the notion of witnessing, cf. Paul Ricoeur, Søren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Lévinas and, more recently, Jean-Luc Marion. The reason for their position lies in the priority they give to person over collectivity.

<sup>114</sup> I. Kant, *Foundation for a Metaphysics of Customs*.



# Academic Freedom and the Catholic University

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**A**cademic freedom is a great good, which should be cherished and honored by every university community. This precious heritage of freedom originated in the Christian West and rose initially in the great universities of Europe, which themselves sprang from the cathedral schools of the early Middle Ages. Great universities such as Padua, Bologna, Louvain, Paris, Prague and Oxford, all sprang, as the late Pope John Paul II observed, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, “out of the heart of the Church.” A Catholic university has a special and unique role to play within the university community in its promotion of and defense of academic freedom. As Pope John Paul II wrote: “It is specifically a Catholic university’s privileged task to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as if they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the font of Truth.”

The *magna traditio* of Catholic higher education builds upon the two orders by which we come to know things—faith and reason. These two distinct orders of knowledge, each possess their own autonomous method, but ultimately converge in their examination of reality. Since for the Catholic the two have a common source in God, who is the author of faith and the author of reason, Catholics have always held firmly that there is nothing to fear from sound reason in scientific inquiry. Faith and reason, each within their proper sphere, are in service to the truth and therefore complement each other in ways that are mutually reinforcing. As Pope John Paul II taught us in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, it is the “honor and the responsibility of a Catholic university to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth.” It is precisely the faith dimension present within the Catholic university that makes this consecration possible. Faith, in addition to offering guidance to sound reason, also gives illumination and its own impetus to the discovery of truth and the safeguarding of

authentic academic freedom. Reason for its part can be of great service in penetrating and explicating the supernatural mysteries proposed by faith. Both faith and reason, the Pope observes, are in service to the dignity of man and the good of the Church.

Within the Catholic university, there should never be found a truncated view of reality. Rather, there should be an openness to the fullness of truth, wherever it may be found, whether that truth bears on God, man or the created order. The free pursuit of truth has always been viewed as a most noble undertaking. Freedom, however, is not an absolute right that lives in isolation; rather, it is related intimately to the true and the good. As a matter of fact, it is only in freedom’s relation to the true and the good that authentic freedom can be guaranteed and nurtured. This Catholic vision with its deep philosophic and theological foundations is not simply a “perspective” or a “view” that is to be made present as one among many different perspectives. Rather, it is a fundamental grounding vision that gives meaning, direction and purpose to all that we do. “Because there can be no freedom apart from or in opposition to the truth, the Catholic defense—unyielding and uncompromising—of the absolutely essential demands of man’s personal dignity must be considered the way and condition for the very existence of freedom” (*Veritatis Splendor*, 96). Here we can see manifested the inseparable connection between truth and freedom, which is not only the foundation for the authentic freedom of the human person, but for all freedoms including academic freedom.

In order to maintain a true sense of academic freedom, it must be nurtured within the confines of what is good and what is true. Great thinkers and great ideas, which sometimes might be hostile to the Christian tradition—such as Nietzsche or Jean Paul Sartre—remain important thinkers whom students must encounter and reflect upon critically. Nevertheless, academic freedom must be lived within the university in such a way that the dignity of man and the human person is always defended especially from violence and distortion. Some have claimed certain theatrical or film productions of dubious artistic

merit and demeaning language as being essential for academic freedom, particularly in serving the need, for example, to defend the dignity of women and oppose violence against women. The latter certainly are noble goals. One cannot help but observe, however, that there are many ways within the university's commitment to academic freedom in which the dignity of women and opposition to violence against women can be defended and promoted without resorting to offensive language and imagery. For a Catholic university and a secular university as well, a close examination of John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* or a careful reading of his *Apostolic Letter on the Dignity of Women* could be pursued in which many of the great issues touching upon the rights and dignity of women could be discussed.

It is important to remember that especially for the Catholic university, having an open mind is not a goal or an end in itself. An open mind is not in and of itself a perfection; rather, it is a mind which is still searching—for Truth, which is the object of the intellect. It is not the purpose of the Catholic university to form students who are open-minded. Rather a Catholic university seeks to educate free individuals with discerning minds. We want our students to have a keen intellect, which is critical, and reflective, that makes use of the lights of faith and sound reason, recognizing their common source. As Cardinal John Henry Newman once described, the education of the young should provide them with a “habit of mind which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom.” A discerning mind using principles of sound reason will not be “open” nor claim that everything is good and everything is worthwhile. The university exists for one specific purpose—to help form and shape the minds of its students in their search for the acquisition of truth. In this noble effort the cultivation of an appreciation of the good and the beautiful is also crucial, for as John Paul II stated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Catholic university's goal is “to help students think rigorously, to act rightly and to serve the cause of humanity better.” A Catholic university's specific task is consecrated to this goal of using the light of faith and sound reason in the service of truth. In uniting these two orders, which characterize so much of what is best in the Catholic

tradition, epitomized in the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas and many other Fathers and Doctors of the Church, there is an openness to the fullness of reality, which sadly oftentimes is lacking in the secular model of the university. Sound philosophy and theology, faithful to the roots of their disciplines, have a crucial role to play within the structure of the university community and particularly in the pursuit and preservation of academic freedom.

Perhaps an example might go a long way to help illustrate this point. A hospital exists for one purpose—the restoration of health. A Catholic hospital certainly would do this as well, in union with the teaching of the Church inspired by the spirit of the Gospel and Christian charity. Sadly, today there are hospitals that provide abortions and sterilizations of patients and are willing to euthanize the terminally ill in some states. Such a facility may be considered a hospital by some, but such a hospital, however, could never be considered a Catholic hospital even if it should have a beautiful chapel, a priest present and be filled with beautiful religious art.

A Catholic university in our pluralistic society has a specific role to play and a unique contribution to bring to the great problems that are confronting our society and our culture. There are four essential elements that were listed by John Paul II in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* that are essential characteristics for the Catholic university as Catholic:

- 1) It must have a Christian inspiration, not only on the part of individuals within the university but the university community precisely as a community must have this inspiration.
- 2) It must be a place where there is a continuing reflection in light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge to which it seeks to contribute by its own research.
- 3) There must be fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church.
- 4) It must have an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and the entire human family on their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal that gives the meaning of life.

Far from limiting academic freedom, such a position provides the fundamental structure in which authentic freedom can be lived. This is why the late Holy Father states that in a Catholic university

“Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles penetrate and inform university activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities.”

Pope John Paul II was in many ways a philosopher Pope, who remained intimately involved with the academic life of the university. In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* he defines academic freedom as follows:

Academic freedom is the guarantee given to those involved in teaching and research that, within their specific, specialized branch of knowledge, and according to the methods proper to that specific area, they may search for the truth wherever evidence and analysis leads them, and may teach and publish the results of this search, keeping in mind the cited criteria, that is, safeguarding the rights of the individual and of society within the confines of the truth and the common good.

The Catholic university because of its commitment to academic freedom sometimes will have to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please modern public opinion, but, nevertheless, are necessary in order to safeguard the authentic good of society (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 32). Such an institution, however, will always promote a culture based upon a true Christian anthropology recognizing the fundamental dignity of the human person.

Just as we had remarked earlier concerning the nature of a Catholic hospital, similarly, we would say that a university that is not truly guided by these four essential characteristics set forth by the Church, may be considered a university in a secular sense, but certainly should not claim to be a Catholic university.

## A Christian Reading of the God of Abraham

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“We risk wallowing in longing for God instead of grappling with God—as Jacob and Socrates, each in his radically different way, teaches us to do.”

—Thomas Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*.<sup>1</sup>

“Of his own free will Jesus ran to meet those sufferings that were foretold in the Scripture concerning him. He had forewarned his disciples several times. . . . He had made it clear that it was by means of his suffering that the world’s salvation was to be accomplished.”

—Theodoret of Cyr, Bishop, (d. 466 A.D.),

“On the Incarnation of the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

“From all this Strauss drew, in the name of classical rationalism, this momentous lesson: a human being cannot escape or compensate for his mortal limits by looking for solace to the collective efforts of mankind. A human being can only come to terms with his mortal limits, and he can do this only by trying to progress in understanding those limits and their necessity or permanence.”

—Thomas Pangle, 1989.<sup>3</sup>

### I.

Ever since, in the 1950’s, Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss caught American academic attention, the serious study of political philosophy -- something radically different from theologians treating “liberation theology” -- would have implications, including theological implications, far beyond its own apparently limited field of competence. Catholic thinkers brought up knowing Maritain, Gilson, Pieper, McCoy, Fortin, de Lubac, and others were familiar with the terms and scope of the argument. The relation between classical, medieval, and modern political thought was itself considered, but not so acutely as that which resulted from Strauss and Voegelin studies. Most often the Catholic question during that period was an attempt to “reconcile” its own intellectual traditions with “modern” thought, often without, as Tracey Rowland has shown, sufficient insight into just what this “modern” aspect of thought might entail. Certainly this “reconciling” effort appeared to many to be the purpose of Vatican II and the surrounding struggles over its “spirit.”

Maritain’s *Peasant of the Garonne* was perhaps

the first straw in the wind for most Catholics that something intellectually may have gone seriously wrong. But Strauss' *Natural Right and History* and Voegelin's *New Science of Politics* from the early 1950's had already indicated that trouble was afoot. Even Maritain's *Man and the State* and Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, written about the same time and in the same series at the University of Chicago, were still more concerned with reconciling than with warning, however good both latter books were.

Strauss and Voegelin attended to the root problem of what came to be, as I like to call it, the "scourge of natural rights." For it was through the "natural rights" doctrine from Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and perhaps, as McCoy maintained, even from the Stoics and Epicureans, that the foundations of a state based on reason and natural law were undermined. The radical voluntarism that characterizes modern liberal thought found that no objective order exists to which any will is subject. We only have an arbitrary "order" projected on society by the autonomous human will, defining itself independently of any stable nature, free from either a first or secondary cause.

Both Susan Orr's and Kim Sorenson's books on Strauss' view of reason and revelation alerted us to the seriousness of this issue as itself related to political philosophy. Thomas Pangle's *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, my interest here, is a very welcome study in the exacting Strauss tradition of what the Hebrew Bible might say or imply about political philosophy. The book wants to know whether and at what points political reason and the revelation, found in the Hebrew Bible, might be related. I do not intend to write a "review" of Pangle's fine book here. Suffice it to say that it is an extraordinarily lucid and erudite treatise. It is one of those books that teach something profound on every page, that see relationships and connections that might otherwise be missed without Pangle's wide reading and sensible judgments.

Though this book is clearly about the intelligibility of the content and meaning of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Abraham, Pangle ranges, in his illuminating explanations, not only through classical and modern Jewish sources, but also through Christian and Muslim authors. Augustine and Aquinas are very

prominent, as are Luther, Calvin, Pascal, Barth, and Kierkegaard. Interestingly, Pangle does not aver to intellectual issues that might, as such, separate Catholics and Protestants, if we are still allowed to talk about such. Pangle is comfortable with the issues brought up by Christian writers, though they are cited almost exclusively in connection with what we Christians would call Old Testament issues. It has been apparent that Jewish thinkers writing after the beginning of the Christian era, as we would expect, deal with Hebrew revelation in a manner different from those of Christian writers dealing with the same material. A Jew does not claim as is own the New Testament but a Christian does claim as also his own the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament, Christianity is meaningless. Without the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible remains what it has always been.

As the passage from Theodoret of Cyr, cited in the beginning of this essay, intimates, the Christian writer sees the Old Testament as everywhere leading to the New Testament. The Jewish writer, in turn, systematically does not see any way that this connection is evident, or possible, or even necessary to mention. Hence Christian authors will be valuable as explanations or insights into philosophic or Old Testament themes, but their own revelational insights will not be a factor for a Jewish scholar understanding his own tradition. When Harry Jaffa gave his short and memorable eulogy at the death of Leo Strauss, he praised Aquinas and Strauss' considerable attention to him, but only insofar as Aquinas was a commentator on Aristotle. In *Natural Right and History*, when, in a famous passage, Strauss himself deals with natural law, as such, that is as "law" with a lawgiver, he argues that this law can only be seen by those with Christian faith, which he (Strauss) does not have. He implies that Aquinas' interpretation is not intelligible to him (that is, to reason) since he (Strauss) does not have Christian faith, which, of course, is true.

Interestingly enough, I obtained my copy of Pangle's book from the *Review of Metaphysics*. These days—may I conclude?—the metaphysicians and philosophers are finally beginning to be concerned with political philosophy and revelation. This three-fold relationship of philosophy, revelation, and political philosophy is a theme Robert Sokolowski often

touches on and, indeed, illuminates. I have dealt with it myself in a number of ways, notably in *Reason, Revelation and the Foundations of Political Philosophy*, *At the Limits of Political Philosophy*, and *Roman Catholic Political Philosophy*, the initial interest in which is something I inherit, I think, from Charles N. R. McCoy, Clifford Kossel, and Heinrich Rommen.

In any case, Pangle's book is clearly also concerned with philosophy, political philosophy, and Hebrew revelation. Slowly but surely, particularly Jewish writers are realizing the importance of dealing with political philosophy in the light of the revelational side of their own tradition and, in turn, its relation, if any, to reason. Leon Kass' *The Beginning of Wisdom* and several other Jewish studies on Genesis and Creation, especially those of Strauss, come to mind. In all of these latter books, there is a certain silence. The Hebrew tradition is rather enigmatically related to philosophy. Both traditions, of philosophy and of the Hebrew Bible, have discussions of "wisdom." But, at first sight, the philosopher and the rabbi live in different worlds. Strauss seemed content to provide a place for both without the need to reconcile them to each other. The life in obedience to the law and the life of the quest of wisdom by our own powers seem, no doubt, to be unrelated to each other, yet the same word "wisdom" is used by both. What is valuable about the Pangle book is its frank recognition that the two traditions must, if possible, not only be juxtaposed but related.

## II.

When I put Pangle's book down—I say this without irony, but with some amusement and some astonishment, with complete truthfulness and delight—I said to myself, "I have never read a better 'introduction' to Christianity!" Now the book never mentions Christ or Christianity one way or another except incidentally in citations or in titles -- i.e., Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. The only direct citation of the New Testament in the text is, interestingly, is from "Mary's Magnificat." Pangle is dealing with the notion of how Yahweh's power to grant "infinite good" can be related to his power to

inflict "infinite suffering." The passage cited is Luke, 1:50, "And his compassion, from generation to generation, is for those who fear him."<sup>4</sup> A Christian reader, in passing, cannot but be struck by the relation of Mary to both "infinite good" and "infinite suffering."

This book is not at all like, say, Josef Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* in which he talks about Christianity on its own terms. Nor is it like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pangle does not talk about Christianity's conception of itself, for that is not his purpose. One would hardly know Christianity existed from reading the book. Rather, Pangle carefully discusses the Hebrew Bible, its meaning, its unity, its implications, problems that might arise in understanding what it intends or signifies. His question is "what, on its own terms, does the world look like if Hebrew revelation is true?" He does not posit any historical "mutual influence" between Jewish and Greek traditions in Israel's central books. Pangle does not here directly treat of the history of Israel and the prophets after its founding in Abraham.

But Pangle is also, in his own right, a political philosopher. He does not belong to that rationalist school of thought that would systematically exclude, as unintelligible, any consideration having to do with the mission of Israel in the world. If the genuine philosopher is to be open to the "whole," he must, in some honest sense, include what is said to be revealed if only as a phenomenon of curiosity. Nor, conversely, does Pangle think the Hebrew believer can simply ignore, even on revelational grounds, what is found in the philosophers. Too many obvious philosophical questions arise in Hebrew history and scripture that must be commented on.

The most obvious of these passages with philosophic overtones in the Hebrew Bible, as Strauss is fond of citing, is from Deuteronomy 4:5-6, "Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'" Obviously, this is an appeal of reason to the nations based on the content of the laws

observed in Israel.

A further place political philosophy touches the teaching in the Hebrew Bible concerns kingship over against some more democratic form among the political philosophers. How are these two emphases compatible? Did Israel's wars violate the principles of a just war? What about the understanding of law as will or reason? Of the chosen people? Of piety? Does not "wisdom" mean one thing for the philosophers, knowing the order of things, and another for the pious Jew, following the commands of Yahweh wherever they lead? Pangle is not the first to deal with these issues, of course, but he does deal with them frankly and with great insight. How can the particularism of the Bible be reconciled with the universalism of the philosophic tradition? And does this particularism point to an individual or to a nation or perhaps, as we Christians would say, to both? What about the accounts of evil in the Bible and among the philosophers?

The question I ask initially is this: "should a Christian be surprised that a philosophic Jew should seek insight simultaneously from both philosophy and Hebrew revelation? And in following what is proposed, should not the Christian thinker further ponder the terms of his own understanding of revelation in both Testaments and those of reason? Of course, we Christians do this all the time. We habitually include in our thinking the philosophers, the Hebrew tradition, and Christian revelation. Pangle himself is aware that he must deal with Locke, Kant, and Hegel. We Christians think, at bottom, that reason and revelation belong together in a coherent whole, an enterprise, the working out of which is itself part of the history of our thought.

We read Paul and John as already to be themselves involved in this seemingly necessary philosophic occupation. We do not think the human mind can be itself without including these traditions—and any other one for that matter. Indeed, we have been doing it all along and with much less difficulty. When Christians read the Old Testament, we read it, rightly or wrongly, as if it points to something else, which something else, when reflected on, yields knowledge both of what philosophy is about and what the Hebrew revelation is about., as well as what Christianity is about.

Take, for example, Augustine's reading of Psalm 42. "Truly blessed Church!" he writes.

You have both heard and seen. You have heard the promises, and you see their fulfillment; you have heard the prophecy, and you see in the Gospel. Yes, all that has now been brought to completion was prophesied in times past. Raise your eyes, then, and cast your gaze around the world. See God's people, your heritage, spread to the ends of the earth. See the Scripture now fulfilled....<sup>5</sup>

Such passages can be multiplied ten-thousand fold in other Christian writers in all ages as well as in Augustine himself. The very structure of the Divine Office is to point constantly to this "fulfillment" understanding that Christians have in their own reading of the Hebrew Bible, a Bible to which they also lay claim.

My point here is not polemical. Believing Jews must read the Hebrew Bible as what they are and what they see. They have to read Augustine as having somehow mis-understood the meaning of the Hebrew Bible when he says that it is "now fulfilled." A Christian would encourage this philosophic effort of the Jew who denies that his Scripture points to and is fulfilled in the Son of Man we call Christ. The Jewish mind has to explain what Scripture means in another way. Christ cannot be what Christians claim him to be. We Christians too can read what the Jewish mind comes up with as an alternative explanation. These alternative explanations are really the basis of my own reaction that Pangle's book is a remarkable "introduction" to Christianity. This alternate reading is why Pangle's book is so fascinating to a Christian reader. The more accurately, the more insightfully the believing Jew is, the more likely it is that what he discovers or is forced to wonder about is something that will make sense to Christians in Christian terms.

The Christian thinker reads the New Testament as pointing back to, being grounded in the Old Testament. But he reads both Testaments as pointing to and being grounded in philosophy. This relation to philosophy is why readings on Creation, common to both traditions are so significant. It is said that the single most undermining cause of disbelief in the modern world, probably for Jew and Christian alike, is the notion that the book of Genesis and its account of Creation are incompatible with science. We

can only be impressed with the efforts, knowing this background, that the Straussian tradition, including Pangle in this book, take to show that the account of the days of creation in fact reveals an intelligible order, as does the account of the Fall, one that is not irrational or unscientific.

Pangle reads political philosophy not as if its foundations are to be discovered in the Bible in either Testament but as something in its own right that is to be examined and reflected on in its own right. Aquinas, of course, had already followed this effort in his reading of Aristotle. Thomas' reading of Maimonides itself connects Jewish thought with both philosophy and the Hebrew Bible. Strauss doubted whether someone could be, at the same time, both a philosopher and a rabbi. He did not mean to denigrate either the way of life of the philosopher or the way of life of the Rabbi. He probably meant that if one is going to do either of these things, he must devote his whole life to it, and it would be a worthwhile life.

The Christian, as Strauss himself intimated, systematically educated the clergy both in philosophy and theology. Christian experience from an early period recognized that certain groundings in realism, in *what is*, had to be philosophically established if its revelation were to be understood because he did not think one would be completely intelligible without the other. Faith was not reason, but depended on it in the sense that, ultimately, someone had to see. Revelation ultimately was mind speaking to mind. The authority of faith was likewise a confidence in reason. Faith did not depend on witnesses *ad infinitum*, but on someone ultimately really seeing the truth. Faith pointed to reason and reason to faith. *Fides et Ratio*, not *Fides aut Ratio*, not *sola fides*, not *sola ratio*.

### III.

**B**ut why, one might ask, is a book about the Hebrew Bible and its intellectual tradition such an improbable “introduction” to Christianity? Briefly, because each of the issues that Pangle so well delineates as wonderments in the Hebrew Bible that require some input from reason to prevent God and His plan from appearing as merely arbitrary

to our minds, still granting that “His ways are not our ways,” immediately also points to an alternative Christian solution. I have long argued that the newness of faith or revelation will only be understood in its uniqueness and novelty under one condition. The believer, at least the believer who conceives himself to be worried about intellect—not everyone, not even most, need be likewise philosophers, however valuable philosophy might prove to be—must first see how much reason or philosophy by itself can tell us. It is at the limits of philosophy, as it were, after having exhausted the philosopher's mind on ultimate questions that revelation appears to the philosopher as a coherent, non-contradictory possibility, but only possibility, not fact. It can, I acknowledge, appear as nothing else but possibility, even dim possibility. Otherwise, we would have reason “proving” by its own methods revelation. In that case, reason would put forth for itself a divine claim, something not entirely unknown among the philosophers.

The classical position, of course, was that reason could not “disprove” revelation. The reason for this was that both reason and revelation originated from the same source and hence had an overall unified purpose, however difficult it might be to sort out. This meant, on further reflection, that some more penetrating understanding of philosophy as such would appear in the effort to reconcile the two. Revelation thus made philosophy to be not revelation but better philosophy. This is a hard saying for many philosophers, particularly those who understand philosophy, in principle, to exclude any possible influence, or even consideration of revelation. Aristotle's philosophy, I think, following Pieper, did not imply this radical and dogmatic rationalism. And of course, in Plato and his tradition, we are almost constantly prodded by a sense of the divine, of which Augustine's “restless hearts” are only the most famous manifestations, after Plato himself.

Pangle's wrestling, in his last chapter, with Kierkegaard's “*credo quia absurdum*,” in dealing with the command to sacrifice Isaac, makes fascinating reading in this regard. A Christian would read this whole story in the light of Christ and obedience to His Father. As Pangle rightly notes, the account also relates to the tradition of Greek tragedy, if not to the Trial of Socrates himself, at the origins of philosophy.

And this Trial, in turn, relates, as I have often tried to indicate elsewhere, to the Trial of Christ, both trials being also issues of political philosophy. Pangle, rightly, I think, resists the temptation to agree with Kierkegaard about the absurdity. Indeed, he is not even sure Kierkegaard agrees with himself. But in making his argument, a good argument, Pangle closes off an avenue for the understanding this account that a Christian would normally take in dealing with Abraham, Isaac, and the foundations of the Call of Israel by Yahweh.

Actually, the nature of Islamic philosophy also comes into these reflections, particularly the extreme voluntarism that is often found in the understanding of the will of Allah. Stanley Jaki's discussions of the relation of Islam to science are, I think, pertinent here. Both the Jew and the Muslim, moreover, read Scripture as if neither the Trinity nor the Incarnation either happened or were possible. Both doctrines, Trinity and Incarnation, are famously called "blasphemous," meaning that they apparently lessen the holiness of God. Aristotle is read this way also. Christian theology basically is concerned to demonstrate that no such contradiction exists.

For the Muslim or the Jew, any understanding of the Divinity that would include otherness within the Godhead or the fact of the incarnate God as a single person, albeit divine, are excluded for one or another reason, but all going back to an understanding of the absolute otherness of the Godhead that excluded the Trinitarian internal life of God as its essence and meaning. The Christian, of course, understands these doctrines as neither contradictory nor as indifferent to reason's pondering of their possibility. He thinks, moreover, that a philosophic foundation exists for admitting their feasibility. Still, he does not think philosophy itself can do more than this. In any case, I suspect that the wars of our time have more to do with these unresolved understandings of the Godhead in the light of political philosophy than we are perhaps willing to consider. Our ecumenism sometimes interferes with our realism; hence we do not discuss what should be discussed in more direct terms.

But Creation, its ultimate intention to associate other free beings within the inner life of the Godhead, the place of man within this divine live and

within the cosmos, the Fall, and the subsequent history of revelation, particularly the ultimate destiny of each individual person, the Trinity and Incarnation of the Word to dwell amongst us—all these become the background or foreground in which these historical events recorded in both Testaments take on meaning. The must first be seen in the light of a God that has no complete inner life, whether Creation exists or not, as it need not.

What particularly struck me about Pangle's moving book, and it is something that arises in political philosophy as such, is what I might call the relation of evil to friendship. In salvation history, those who do evil are redeemed and friendship is guaranteed. Both of these acts, redemption and friendship, in their highest sense, flow from Trinity and Incarnation. The Jew deals with suffering through the history of his people, culminating for many in the Holocaust in modern times. The Christian dimension is rather the Crucifixion understood as the death of an innocent Man, who was God, at the hands of men, in a public trial in Jerusalem. All are implicated; redemption has a personal, individual dimension for each person. The death and resurrection of Christ, though they took place at a particular time and place, locates the drama of history in our own souls, whatever be our polity. We are not wrong to see Plato here.

Evil is not defined away; indeed its classical Platonic definition as the lack of a good in what ought to be there is taken almost literally. Recently, I was reading Julian of Norwich. In one of what she called her "showings," she wrote:

I understood the Passion of Christ to represent the greatest pain and even more than that. And all this pain was shown in one stroke and quickly passed over into comfort (for our good Lord does not wish that the soul be made fearful by this ugly sight). But I saw not sin; for I believe it has no manner of essence, nor any portion of being, nor can it be known except by the pain that is caused by it. And this pain, it is something for a time, as I see it, because it purges and forces us to know ourselves and ask for mercy. But the Passion of our Lord is comfort for us against all this, and so is His blessed will.<sup>6</sup>

The mystery of evil is very deep, going back, as Pangle recounts, to the understanding of Lucifer himself and the decisions of the first parents about

the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But its solution, in the Christian mind, not only points to the philosophic recognition that evil has no “being,” but to the drama of Abraham and Isaac, that it still has consequences in the sufferings of others..

Almost the only time that the phrase “New Testament” is used in Pangle’s treatise is in a footnote when he is dealing with the perplexing question of whether the “chosen people” are chosen against the rest of the human race, thereby violating what the philosophers look to as a common good of all men. “There is nothing in the covenant,” Pangle writes, “to suggest that the elevation of the chosen people justifies their turning their backs on the rest of the human race. All to the contrary, the Bible highlights and clarifies Abraham’s special sense of responsibility for his fellow man by the incidents it narrates immediately after the report of the circumcision covenant that sets him and his household apart from the rest of humanity” (153). The next thing that happens in the text is the famous instance of the Lord appearing to Abraham in the form of “three human travellers.”

In the footnote to this passage, Pangle cites von Rad, the Greek tradition, Homer, Plato, and Josephus about differing ways to understand these “three human figures” in the Yahweh’s appearance to Abraham. Pangle concludes: “The issue of course becomes moot on the basis of the New Testament.” He cites as evidence Acts 10:41. Acts 10:40–41 reads (Peter is speaking): “But God raised Him up on the third day, and made Him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses; who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.” Just what becomes “moot” is not entirely clear to me. Do the chosen “witnesses” reverse or complete the earlier chosenness? Does it imply that the New Testament is not concerned with its mission to all men whereas the Old Testament is? But this can hardly be the case since the whole New Testament is directed to “go forth and teach all nations” and the universal redemption of Christ. Or it could become “moot” because, in the New Testament, the three figures are given a Trinitarian interpretation, which would be the normal Christian view. Would that make the whole concept of God as understood in the Hebrew Bible beside the point? And then there is this “raising from the dead.”

The final comment I would like to make on this book concerns its understanding of friendship in the Old Testament. Pangle’s wife has in fact written a note-worthy book on this famous topic. It is, moreover, the central question that arises in Aristotle about human life and its ultimate context, something with personal, political, and transcendent overtones. Aristotle is commonly understood as not allowing any friendship between God and man, on the grounds that the First Mover is much too exalted and separate from human life. The First Mover has no personal providence or interest in individual human persons.

But the mere fact that Aristotle worries about the problem is read by a Christian reader with great attention. The reason for this attention is twofold, because first the doctrine of the Trinity, its complete inner life, in principle obviates the concern that God is lonely and therefore “needs” man to be Himself complete. Secondly, the Incarnation, and its consequences, namely, the resurrection of precisely the body, obviates the concern both about our friends and about own permanence, as well as with our friendship with God, if it is offered. The most profound passage in the New Testament, in this regard, is Christ’s saying to his Apostles at the Last Supper—itself something that reminds Christians of Leon Kass’ *Eating and the Perfection of Our Nature*—that He no longer calls them servants but friends. This was precisely the concern of Aristotle. Philosophy is illuminated by revelation.

Pangle remarks, in his conclusion, in a profound insight, that the “longing for God” can be a substitute for actually dealing with God in the manner that God has revealed Himself to us. Pangle further warned us of the danger of seeing God in some “collective efforts of mankind.” Voegelin also thought this was a real danger particularly for Christians whose faith is weak. Such concern would suggest to readers of Augustine, of course, that the location of these collective efforts, which seem to have legitimacy, are to take seriously the “limits of politics.” Speaking of political philosophy, and particularly Plato, Pangle wrote,

But in the best city’s divine worship, this yearning is always intertwined with another yearning, with the longing to devote or to sacrifice oneself to something

more aloof, more splendid, and more lasting than individual or familial existence. The philosophic civil religion thereby compels the guardian to confront, and may prompt him to wonder about, start thinking critically through, this latter longing (62).

A Christian reading of this passage would presume that all of these things can be maintained together in a proper order. That we have here no lasting city does not mean that we have no City of God. That we seek to save our own souls does not mean that this is to be done as if friendship with others and God is not also granted to us. That there is a common good in this world in which we play out the drama of both our souls and our city precisely in our longing for eternal life is also taken for granted. And when it comes to the question of the city's "divine worship," we cannot help but recall Catherine Pickstock's notion about the "liturgical consummation of philosophy."

Thus, if I maintain, as I do, that Pangle's *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham* is the best "introduction" to Christianity that I have read, I intend to respect Pangle's own tradition that sees none of these connections. I likewise think that the revelation in the Hebrew Bible, though pointing, as we see it, to final revelation in the New Testament, still, with much laborious intellectual work, will yield philosophic insight that is, as it seems, itself valid and still more fully explained with the assistance of New Testament revelation. This preparatory purpose was,

of course, what Aquinas said the earlier revelation was about. In its own way, again read by a Christian, this preparation is what Pangle's book is about. In brief, the relation between philosophy, the revelation found in the Old and New Testaments, and political philosophy cannot, at their core, be in contradiction with one another. It is only when they are so considered that explanations of *what is* lead us philosophically down paths that we best not follow.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), last lines of book, 184.

<sup>2</sup> Theodoret of Cyr, "Treatise on the Incarnation of the Lord," c. 26, Second Reading, Office, Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> Week.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, "Editor's Introduction," *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, Selected and Introduced by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xxxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, *ibid.*, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, "Discourse on the Psalms," in Readings, 19<sup>th</sup> Week, Wednesday.

<sup>6</sup> *A Lesson of Love: The Revelations of Julian of Norwich*, edited by John-Julian, O.J.N. (New York: Walker and Company, 1988), C. 27, 62



# Sociobiology and Social Justice

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## 1) SOCIOBIOLOGY—THE NEW SYNTHESIS

**A**lthough evolutionary biology and issues of social concern were first brought together in a noticeable way by Herbert Spencer under the banner of Social Darwinism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this inflammatory mixture of interests has only relatively recently been rekindled to the point of public prominence as the result of the publication of Edward Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* in 1975. What is purportedly new in the branch of science known as sociobiology is the way in which various scientific disciplines, such as ethology, ecology, and population genetics are bound together in a powerful interpretive synthesis so as to enable a genetically enhanced Darwinism to encompass both human behavior and culture within its scope. According to sociobiological dogma there is a biological basis to the social behavior of both humans and animals. Wilson began to implement this decree for the case of human behavior systematically for the first time in *On Human Nature* (1978), although he did briefly address the topic at the end of *Sociobiology*. Prior to that his focus had been primarily upon the behavior of animals, his main area of expertise being insect life.

## 2) THE CATHOLIC CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

**I**ssues of social justice began to be carefully considered by recent popes with the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. The theory of Catholic social justice over the last century or so represents the ongoing attempt by the magisterium of the Church to apply its ethical teaching to pressing political and economic issues which impact the rights and duties of all people. It continues: to provide a

proper philosophical framework for the Church in its relation to the modern state, to commend the inviolable dignity of each human being as made in the image and likeness of God, and to promote the fundamental principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. Subsidiarity seeks to foster freedom and individual initiative while maintaining a proper respect and role for legitimate authority, while solidarity dictates that the golden rule guide all transactions between factions of varying competence.<sup>1</sup> My aim in this essay is to shed some light upon some of the serious deficiencies in sociobiological theory as a would-be replacement for the Catholic conception of social justice. Wilson, a former Baptist turned atheist, welcomes a social agenda which has been weaned of any affiliation whatsoever with organized religion. If he subscribes to any creed then it is the sociobiological dogma which proclaims that the genes “hold culture on a leash.”<sup>2</sup>

## 3) ALTRUISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

**T**he sights of sociobiology have been fastened most intently upon the theological virtue of charity, which in the literature is customarily referred to by the term altruism. There are two main reasons for this in my view: 1) To undermine the essence of charity would help to pull the rug out from under the Christian religion; and 2) Since evolutionary theory from day one has been built around aggressive behavior and competition, the very existence of charity is at least an anomaly, perhaps even a mutation, and most certainly a potential falsifier of the main self-serving thrust of the dominance-based theory of evolution. According to Wilson, who views evolutionary biology as the Rosetta Stone by which the hieroglyphics of religion can be translated into the vernacular of science, “fallen heroes do not have children.”<sup>3</sup> What this statement is meant to convey is that self-sacrificial behavior, which Christ acknowledges as the greatest expression of love, or altruism, is bound not to be reproductively successful according

to the basic evolutionary calculus of Natural Selection. While the blood of martyrs may be the seed of the Church, its spilling does not contribute to the biological survival of a bloodline.

According to the Darwinian paradigm, if extreme altruistic behavior were to persist then it would lead to the extinction of that very trait within a population, although Simpson's paradox does offer a way around this unfortunate loss. Statistically it is possible for a trait to be disadvantageous for each group within a larger population, but still beneficial to the population as a whole. The reverse, beginning with a trait which is advantageous for each group within a population but disadvantageous for the population as a whole, is equally possible. Wilson refers to a mutant gene called the Good Samaritan gene in *Sociobiology*. It is said to have made its first appearance in the genome by the happenstance of mutation, but will, he thinks, eventually be, although not entirely, cruelly rooted out by the merciless selective pressures of adaptive evolution. As another modern Leo, the baseball great Leo Durocher, once put it: nice guys finish last!

Within the hierarchy of Christian virtues justice is a human disposition toward the good that is subordinated to the theological virtue of charity (2 Peter 1:4), which as St. Paul informs us stands superior to its theologically kindred virtues of faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13). Wilson credits that the cultural infrastructure of human justice as a whole ultimately derives from the individual motivating factors of human behavior, which Christianity would also aver. But Wilson further argues that the compelling force underlying the motivation of charity or altruism is natural, not supernatural. Altruism for him then qualifies as a biological, not a theological, virtue. Human relations, according to Wilson, are primarily driven by the biological mechanism of Reciprocal Selection, which operates in accordance with game-theoretic probabilities and utilitarian goals, where each rational agent gives to another in order to get something more beneficial back for himself or herself in return. Wilson treats this selection mechanism as commensurate with rationality. This genetic view is espoused to an even more rabid degree by Richard Dawkins who maintains that the gene be defined

as the basic unit of selfishness.<sup>4</sup> Wilson has many people in his camp, although it is true that the biological community as a whole has rejected his singular sociobiological slant on things, but not for the same reasons as religiously minded people.

Wilson acknowledges that a minority of human actions seems to be truly selfless. Such actions are associated with the selection mechanism known as Kin Selection, which was first entertained by Darwin but eventually worked out in detail by W.D. Hamilton.<sup>5</sup> According to Kin Selection, altruistic decisions are determined by a sliding quantitative scale in which closer relatives, as defined by the number of our genes which they share, are assigned a higher coefficient of relationship than more distant kin. According to the genetic calculus of Kin Selection two siblings or eight first cousins are worth one self. This led the famous British biologist J. B. S. Haldane to remark, I hope only jokingly, that he would definitely not trade his life to save that of his brother, as there would be no evolutionary advantage to doing so. But he would unhesitatingly lay down his life for three brothers or nine first cousins.<sup>6</sup>

Wilson himself has mathematically analyzed the kinship-based heroics of insect societies at some depth in various books and articles, arguing in essence that the sacrifice of a life in such cases can still nevertheless be explained in terms of an increased survival probability for the close blood relatives of those who perish for so noble a cause. The genes of the deceased are thereby perpetuated in increasing proportions within succeeding insect generations as the result of their sacrifice. Wilson admits however that he hasn't been able to empirically account for the genetic advantages to be derived from such kinship tendencies in humans. Playing the game of *ad hominem* rhetoric to the hilt, Wilson refers to the major or Reciprocal altruistic tendency within human nature, symbolic of sophisticated although largely self-serving prudential judgment, as soft core, while the minority Kinship tendency meant to exemplify emotionally charged Christian love he classifies as hard core. In *On Human Nature* Wilson makes the claim that hard core altruism is the enemy of civilization.

"The distinction is important because pure, hard-

core altruism based on kin selection is the enemy of civilization. If human beings are to a large extent guided by programmed learning rules and canalized emotional development to favor their own relatives and tribe, only a limited amount of global harmony is possible. International cooperation will approach an upper limit, from which it will be knocked down by the perturbations of war and economic struggle, canceling each upward surge based on pure reason. The imperatives of blood and territory will be the passions to which reason is slave. One can imagine genius continuing to serve biological ends even after it has disclosed and fully explained the evolutionary roots of unreason.

My own estimate of the relative proportions of hard-core and soft-core altruism in human behavior is optimistic. Human beings appear to be sufficiently selfish and calculating to be capable of indefinitely greater harmony and social homeostasis. This statement is not self-contradictory. True selfishness, if obedient to the constraints of mammalian biology, is the key to a more nearly perfect social contract.”<sup>7</sup>

#### 4) AN UNFIT THEORY

In works such as *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998) and *The Future of Life* (2002) Wilson illustrates quite clearly that his concern for global harmony, which he thinks would be undermined by hard core altruism, is directly related to the need to avert ecological catastrophe on the planetary level. The possible extinction of the planet as a haven for life is obviously correlated to our own survival as a species. In these works Wilson asserts a need for mutual ethical concern and cooperation on a global level. Global problems, he thinks, cannot be dealt with in the traditional adversarial manner, pitting the interests of nations against each other. Sociobiologically speaking, the earth needs peace not just to stop the killing, but in order for us to be able to bring together all possible resources and intelligence in order to stave off the perils of a planet that we are responsible for making less hospitable to life. Wilson calls the need to ensure a “culture of permanence,” for ourselves and the biosphere which we inhabit, the most im-

portant question of the new century in which we now live.<sup>8</sup> In any case the role assigned to biological knowledge in the rescue effort to salvage human life will be pivotal in the years to come. Perhaps it is only poetic justice that knowledge about life be put at the service of preserving it. Physicist Freeman Dyson espouses the view that in the next century solutions to significant problems of social justice like poverty will stem more from the green technology that is rooted in our increasing knowledge of the life sciences than from the heretofore more successful grey technology derived from the physical sciences.<sup>9</sup>

In *Darwinism, Dominance and Democracy: The Biological Bases of Authoritarianism* Albert Somit and Steven Peterson argue that the rarity of democracy in history can be explained by the evolutionary predisposition of humankind for hierarchical structure in social and political systems.<sup>10</sup> Wilson however believes that the democratic exercise of rational autonomy is crucial to overcoming the energy, population, and environmental problems which threaten to interfere with our survival on this planet. Taken together for what they are worth, the positions of Somit/Peterson and Wilson paint a picture of evolutionary theory that is anything but easily reconciled. In the most economically affluent age in history Wilson thus informs us that we must respond to diverse economic, environmental and sociological pressures by acting out of character with what Somit/Peterson maintain is our evolutionary predisposition in order to survive as a race. In the context of this sociobiological clash it is interesting to note that the literature on the Catholic principle of subsidiarity often points out that its relatively late and only recent historical emergence had a lot to do with the increase in the hierarchical differentiation within political and social institutions that is such a major feature of the modern world. This core principle of Catholic social justice has since its inception served as a balancing point between too much and too little freedom, between freedom’s limitation in socialist and communist forms of life and its excess when libertarian thinking might endanger and suppress individual rights and duties. It does not however in any way represent a reversal in traditional Catholic thinking as to the way in which ethics is to be translated or extrapolated into the

political sphere.

Sociobiology is often, perhaps unfairly, maligned by its opponents who claim that it supports racist, genocidal, and sexist views. This is mainly due to the pairing of sociobiology with previous movements such as eugenics and Social Darwinism. Many would maintain that sociobiology is stuck in a Tennysonian mode of thinking, in terms of a “nature red, in tooth and claw.” Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century there has existed a discernible bias which employs genetic determinism to validate the existing order, especially the ruling class. Wilson himself however is no hate monger but a scientist with the worthy ambition of putting knowledge at the service of the world. Politically he is in the center although most of his leftist opposition view him as far to the right. In *Defenders of the Truth: The Sociobiology Debate* Ullica Segerstrale frames the sociobiological debate as primarily between the activism of the New Left, most notably the Sociobiology Study Group – Science for the People, on the one hand; and traditional liberal democrats like Wilson upon the other.<sup>11</sup> Wilson however is partly to blame for his own mislabeling since in his sociobiological analyses of animal behavior he will sometimes resort to such connotatively unfortunate terms as “slaves” and “caste.” For all his efforts Wilson was once rudely baptized with a bucket of water while on stage during a conference conducted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science held in Washington D.C. in 1978 by an irate ideologue who did not wish to turn back the clock in regard to issues of emancipation.

As we have seen, Wilson holds that hard core altruism based upon Kin Selection is an enemy of both the people and the planet. How does such a view impact the family unit? While the family, which is linked to the bottom-up societal principle of subsidiarity in paragraph 2209 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, may be the birthplace where human love is first nurtured, it is not meant, at least not from a Christian perspective, to be its final resting place. Christian morality implores us to love both neighbor and enemy in the selfless way so feared by Wilson. This fear is based upon Wilson’s assumption that there is an inverse relationship between hard-core emotion and soft-core reason. While a high level of

reason is undoubtedly a necessary condition for solving global problems, it does not logically follow that such reasoning be unaccompanied by strong emotional attachments and preferences. Plato was closer to the truth in the *Republic* in his effort to express how the passions can be governed, but not extirpated, by the intellect in an effort to achieve justice both in the individual and in society. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Ivan (Part II, Book v, chapter 4) asserts that he is not “able to understand how it was possible to love one’s neighbors, because I can conceive of the possibility of loving those who are far away.” I invite all readers, especially Wilson, to reflect upon both the psychological and theological import of such a sentiment. Christian teaching, properly construed, represents an attempt to act in accordance with family preferences, but expands the moral concept of family to include all persons. At the same time Christian moral and social doctrine is set up so that the traditional biological family -- the domestic church, can flourish and not perish. Wilson assumes that a planet of sufficiently self-interested people working together as separate individuals seeking mutually beneficial agreements in a Reciprocal manner is superior to a human culture which faithfully follows the gospel mandate to be magnanimous toward others. Wilson says he remains optimistic that hard core behavior will remain below the critical threshold which endangers civilization. To swear allegiance to sociobiology is to be an enemy of the family.

The logic of what Wilson is touting is completely incoherent, despite his protestations to the contrary. He need not jettison the family in order to envision the implementation of his sociobiological goals. Let us concede, just for the sake of argument, that the members of a family comprise a unit of solidarity, and that each family can, so to speak, act, as a corporate individual, or “person,” promoting its own self interest in the reciprocal manner so pleasing to Wilson. Thus the family unit can be selfless or hard core in its interior relations and still be selfish or soft core enough to satisfy Wilson in its intercourse with the outside world. Assuming a degree of goal oriented unanimity within each kindred group (e.g. nuclear family, extended family, tribe, clan, etc.), in each of which hard core sentiments prevail, the only

deviation from Wilson's panacea of a world led by the leash of reciprocity would be that the total number of "persons" would be reduced in proportion to the average family size. Three centuries ago it was Bishop Butler who pointed out that there is no logical inconsistency between real self-love and benevolence. If I "profit" as the result of your improved well-being, and you "profit" on account of mine, then by acting on behalf of others everyone wins. The implementation of Christian charity is therefore not a zero sum game, at least not spiritually. But as Chesterton once noted, with his customary collusion between exaggeration and truth, the problem with Christianity is not that it doesn't work, but that nobody is willing to try it.

Wilson's analysis between reason based reciprocity and emotionally laden kinship as the basis for behavior forges a biological dichotomy between reason and will that does not exist in the Christian conception of the human person. By person, I do not mean the corporate person as envisaged by Rawls, but the person according to Aquinas, a person in which mind and body, cognition and volition, coexist in a collaborative substantial union that promotes life in its full abundance. What God has joined together, let no entomologist put asunder. In the Christian hierarchy of the virtues the human virtues of justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance are governed by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In the Gospel according to Wilson the evolutionarily stable mechanism of Natural Selection, together with its other selective offspring (Kin, Reciprocal, etc.), tempers the degree to which humans are prone to behave justly, prudently, and courageously in faith, hope, and charity. Each of these virtues are explicable, for Wilson, in biological terms. Just as the golden mean for Aristotle meant an axiological balancing point of virtue poised between excessive and deficient extremes of vice, Darwinian evolution for Wilson and his colleagues expresses a balancing point between genetic extremes that allows for the successful adaptation and survival of the glorious accident called life. Both sociobiology and Christian ethics in their pursuit of social justice would agree that the implication of "ought" from "is" does not involve a naturalistic fallacy. Sociobiologists in principle support the

premise that social statues reflect genetic reality, while Christians believe that it would be nice if human behavior and culture, as well as our legal and political institutions, bear some resemblance to the principle of *imago dei*. Both sociobiologists and Christians also concur that only the fittest will survive. Where they disagree is in their fundamentally opposed conceptions of what constitutes human nature, and in their understanding of the relation between fitness and what it means in the long run to survive. A Christian does not agree with John Maynard Keynes that in the long run we are all dead.

While Wilson admits, perhaps inconsistently with his underlying materialism, that social evolution can be far more cultural than genetic, thus following in the footsteps of and embracing what Richard Dawkins refers to as memes, the cultural analogues of genes; he nevertheless still sees himself as on the opposite side of the cultural fence from Theodosius Dobzhansky who used to argue that culture was completely superorganic. Culture, it would seem to me, is strongly shaped and molded by moral convictions. This may not be so on an immediate causal level, for example, should the morality of a weaker group be dominated and modified by the morality based culture of a stronger group; or if the emergence of a completely amoral primitive culture were possible, which is then afterwards constrained by the superimposition of a moral code. If morality does shape culture, and Wilson is attributing culture a majority share in the evolutionary development of human patterns of behavior, then he must, at least implicitly, think that morality also plays a significant role in social evolution. But if he holds that morality is ultimately dependent upon the genes, which seems most of the time to be the case, then he contradicts his own admission about the causal role of culture within social development.

Despite various discrepancies and occasional lapses of language I would argue that Wilson, in the main thrust of what he has written, is an apostle of the genomania which is feverishly spreading through the culture and the academy. We know that genes code for proteins, but not the extent to which they contribute to external features of the body. When a trait is deemed to be hereditary then it is automati-

cally assumed that a gene or genes for it must exist. While we assume, for example, that skin color is hereditary, we still do not understand the genetic details that generate pigmentation. A molecular biologist named Leonard Guarante from M.I.T. has recently announced the discovery of a gene which is thought to possibly regulate the various mechanisms of aging to be found in animals and humans. He claims that caloric restriction is the salient factor in increasing longevity. Another less technical word for caloric restriction is “fasting.”<sup>12</sup> How interesting!

The recently deceased Stephen Jay Gould, a noted paleobiologist and fervent critic of sociobiology in general, and Wilson in particular, referred to some of the more fanciful genetic reconstructions of evolutionary-minded thinkers as “just so” stories. As Tom Bethell remarks in his excellent article entitled “Against Sociobiology,” which appeared in *First Things* in January of 2001, which is itself noteworthy as to what the editorial board of a well known Catholic journal deemed relevant for the first issue of the new millennium, the postulation that genes are behind everything that is done or said marks them as the “astrology of the modern academy.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of assuming the existence of planetary spheres and epicycles in the heavens in order to make sense of astronomy, the sociobiologist is accused of assuming a comprehensive genetic materialism in order to make sense of human nature. While it would be unfair to place the status of genetics as on a par with the empirically deprived string theory of physics, it is certainly the case that a number of significant biologists, such as Richard Lewontin, have severely criticized the overselling of the success of the human genome project in both the popular and the scientific press.

No less an evolutionist than Darwin’s own bulldog Thomas Henry Huxley was of the opinion that human nature could subvert what he called the cosmic process, thereby substituting the “state of art” for the “state of nature.” One of many problems plaguing Wilson’s sociobiological view of human nature has to do with the rapidity of cultural change in relation to the relative stability of genetic identity as dictated by the Hardy-Weinberg law, the so-called First

Law of Population Genetics. In other words, how can genetic factors cause or contribute to cultural change if the effects are effected prior to any changes in the genetic material? Wilson slickly sidesteps this problem by relying upon a concept drawn from economics called the Multiplier Effect. What this purports to do is allow small deviations in the genetic profile of a population to be amplified enormously within a limited time span. One sees such moves made with ever increasing frequency these days in scientific explanation with the maturation of theories dealing with chaos, complexity, and fractals. The self-organizing tendencies of dynamic systems, in which massive changes can be generated and explained by infinitesimal fluctuations in initial conditions, represents a quite promising area of research. But all that Wilson has been able to do so far is to invoke some dubious Multiplier Effect, for which he possesses not one shred of evidence. Everything must be just so in order for his sociobiological program to succeed.

An ironic if not embarrassing point for sociobiology is the love which many humans harbor toward animals. I say ironic because Wilson’s writings are peppered with analogies between animal and human behavior, and he himself was the Curator of Entomology at Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology. In one passage from *On Human Nature* Wilson compares the limited hard-core tendency for extreme sacrifice in human culture with that of suicidal insects whose sacrificial acts promote the survival of the more fertile members of their insect colony. “Sharing the capacity for extreme sacrifice does not mean that the human mind and the “mind” of an insect (if such exists) work alike. But it does mean that the impulse need not be ruled divine or otherwise transcendental, and we are justified in seeking a more biological explanation.”<sup>14</sup> It would seem that, according to Wilson, since the insects have no hope of ever rising to our cognitive level, then we must sink down to theirs. Human altruism toward other species cannot be easily explained in terms of any of the selection mechanisms which have been devised to preserve and protect the reputation of Natural Selection.

## 5) CONCLUDING REMARKS

Lapses in faith are a commonplace for all those still under the yoke of the human condition. It is encouraging to note that scientific materialists are prone to the very same flaw. In an autobiographical reference to his former religious attitudes Wilson says the following. “Still, I had no desire to purge religious feelings. They were bred in me; they suffused the wellsprings of my creative life.”<sup>15</sup> As a paradigm for social justice the science of sociobiology is beset with many problems of a logical, methodological, theological, and even empirical nature. Let us hope that the mandarins of materialism somehow allow the unseen wellsprings of their nature to stir them toward the contemplation of a scientific knowledge which does not withdraw from God but that can move them closer and closer to a true understanding of the created order. This is something devoutly to be wished.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> I borrow this synopsis of the ongoing engagement of Catholic Social Thinking with the modern world from notes compiled by Father Joseph W. Koterski, S.J..
- <sup>2</sup> Edward Wilson, *On Human Nature (OHN)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 167.
- <sup>3</sup> Wilson, *OHN*, pp. 152–153.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- <sup>5</sup> W.D. Hamilton, “The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior,” in *The Sociobiology Debate: Readings on Ethical and Scientific Issues*, ed. By Arthur Caplan (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 191–212.
- <sup>6</sup> David Barash, “Evolution as a Paradigm for Behavior,” in *Sociobiology and Human Nature*, ed. By Michael Gregory, Anita Silvers, Diane Sutch (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), p. 17.
- <sup>7</sup> Wilson, *OHN*, p. 157.
- <sup>8</sup> Edward Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Knopf, 2002).
- <sup>9</sup> Freeman Dyson, “Technology and Social Justice,” Unpublished Paper, 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> Albert Somit and Steven Peterson, *Darwin, Dominance and Democracy: The Biological Bases of Authoritarianism (Human Evolution, Behavior, and Intelligence)* (Westfield, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997).
- <sup>11</sup> Ullica Segerstrale, *Defenders of the Truth: The Sociobiology Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- <sup>12</sup> Leonard Guarante is the founder of a company called Elixir, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose purpose is to promote the production of anti-aging research and drugs.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas Bethell, “Against Sociobiology,” *First Things*, January 2001, pp. 18–24.
- <sup>14</sup> Wilson, *OHN*, pp. 152–153.
- <sup>15</sup> Edward Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1998), p. 6.

*Aristotle and the Science of Nature: Unity without Uniformity*, Andrea Falcon, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2005). xvii+139 pp. Cloth, \$75.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty, Dean Emeritus, The Catholic University of America

This remarkable little book provides a clear introduction to Aristotle’s philosophy of science and is one that could be used in the classroom at both the graduate and undergraduate level. As Falcon explains, the natural world for Aristotle consists of two domains, the sublunary world of terrestrial experience and the celestial world. The natural world possesses sufficient unity to be the object of a single general science, yet there are features of the celestial world that outrun the explanatory resources developed in the study of the sublunary world. Aristotle reasons that the celestial realm is in part composed of principles unique to its order. It may be intelligible in itself, but what is intrinsically intelligible may not be fully known by us.

The key chapter of this book is chapter three, in which Falcon examines Aristotle’s doctrine of motion and change. In an attempt to explain circular motion within the context of his study of natural motion, Aristotle is obliged to account for the unusual motion, by terrestrial standards, of the celestial bodies. He is committed to the view that the characteristic behavior of the celestial bodies—their complex but regular motion around the earth—requires the recognition of a specific type of causal principle. He credits celestial bodies, not with mere life but with intelligent life because of their special features: they are not subject to generation and corruption, and are engaged in a type of motion that cannot be explained except by invoking the notion that somehow their motion is willful. Terrestrial motion can be explained in the light of the four causes, but no causal impetus can be identified as the source of celestial motion. Celestial motion has to be taken as a case of voluntary motion, bodies acting of their own volition. This may be a shocking conclusion to the modern reader, but the reasoning process by which Aristotle is drawn to that conclusion is worthy of consideration. For Aristotle, science is not mere description or the ability to predict on the basis of previous experience; the aim of science is causal explanation in the interest of understanding. A scientific explanation consists in rendering intelligible something that is not intelligible in terms of its self.

Although Falcon seems primarily interested in the Meteorologica, he nevertheless devotes some attention to the de Anima in the interest of situating the study of living things within the general science of nature. The study of plants and animals presupposes certain conceptual resources developed in the course of Aristotle’s study of the principles of change

and the four causes. Since animals and plants are perishable things, one has, from Aristotle's perspective, to be clear about the nature of perishing. Perishing is a case of going out of existence rather than a case of becoming something else. Living and nonliving sublunary things are configurations that come into existence, endure for a while, and finally go out of existence. All properties of living things are to be explained by appealing to the nature of which they are manifestations. A living thing is a composite of matter and form. The form of a living thing, a soul, is the internal principle of regulation and unity. Aristotle calls it the first actuality of a body that is not only natural but organic. The study of the soul falls within natural philosophy, yet Aristotle is convinced that there is not just one science, but sciences. Following Aristotle's lead, Falcon does not make a detailed study of the *de Anima* in the present work.

Falcon clearly establishes that for Aristotle there is a region in the province of the science of nature where we are confronted with difficulties exceeding our capacity to provide a solution. Approximately two thousand years separate Aristotle and Newton. What Aristotle took as intelligible in itself through the centuries has gradually become intelligible to us. The *Meteorologica* may have been superseded long ago as a text for the study of celestial phenomena, but Falcon makes clear that it can still be studied for its attempt to account scientifically for data that resisted explanation by what was then available from a study of the sublunary world.

*If you would like to receive a complimentary copy of one of the books below in order to review it for a future issue, please email your request to Alice Osberger at [osberger.1@nd.edu](mailto:osberger.1@nd.edu)*

*If there are books you know of that should be reviewed, let Brian Benestad know at [benestadj1@scranton.edu](mailto:benestadj1@scranton.edu)*

*Ten Dates Every Catholic Should Know: The Divine Surprises and Chastisements that Shaped the Church and Changed the World*, Diane Moczar, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2006) Paper, 178 pp.

## LETTER

### Historical Perspective on the Issue of Racism and Evolutionism: The Problem of Secularism

by Fr. Joseph M. de Torre, Ph. D.  
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*Fr. de Torre writes "The improved version I sent you was not taken into account in Vol 29, No 3 (Fall 2006). Particularly important was the very first page" (below):*

#### I. Introduction

One of the most notorious degenerations we have witnessed in our time, with well-known devastating effects for humanity, is the ideology of *racism*, or the belief in the biological, genetic and cultural superiority of one race (*ethnos* in Greek) over the others. But it is a matter of scientific, logical and historical accuracy to see the essential links of this ideology with its twin ideology of *evolutionism*, as a degeneration of a debatable concept of biological evolution. The latter is *scientific*, though far from demonstrable, question, whereas evolutionism is a *philosophical* matter. The website for Evolution cites many works on the subject, for and against. But I would like to mention the remarkable book of Larry Azar, *Evolution and Other*

*The Fulfillment of all Desire: A Guidebook for the Journey to God Based on the Wisdom of the Saints*, Ralph Martin, Emmaus Road Publishing: Steubenville, OH, (2006), Paper, 472pp.

*A Student's Guide to Liberal Learning*, James V. Schall, S.J., Intercollegiate Studies Institute: (ISI): Wilmington, DE, (2006), 52pp.

*After Asceticism: Sex, Prayer and Deviant Priests*, The Linacre Institute: Bloomington, IN, (2006), Paper. 260pp.

*Fairy Tales*, (Bloomington, IN, Author House: 2005), recently reviewed in the FCS Quarterly.

The website on Racism devotes 35 pages to the topic, reporting that "since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have been few in developed nations who describe themselves as *racist*, which has become a pejorative term, so that identification of a group or person as *racist* is nearly always controversial. Racism is regarded by all but racists as an unacceptable affront to basic human dignity and a violation of human rights. A number of international treaties have sought to end racism. The United Nations uses a definition of *racist discrimination* laid out in the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* and adopted in 1966:

*...any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."*

However, the report compiles a list of no less than 27 countries affected by racism! Let us now examine the link between racism and evolutionism in historical perspective.

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## THOUGHTS ON A RAINY DAY

The first and third of the Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin answer, oddly enough, to the fourth and fifth Joyful mysteries of the Rosary. The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple was the occasion for the somber prophesy of Simeon, and the sorrowful loss of Jesus led to the joyful finding of him. Perhaps every event that causes joy conceals as well the *lacrimae rerum*. In this Vale of Tears there are no unalloyed goods.

A similar ambiguity is captured in the title of the famous article, "The Vice of Gambling and the Virtue of Insurance." And now we have from Cambridge University Press Tom Cavanaugh's magisterial book on the principle of double effect, *Double Effect Reasoning*. I have always been suspicious of the invocation of double effect, but Cavanaugh makes it more than palatable. And, while I am touting books by

young scholars, I will mention as well Charles Natoli's paradoxically titled *Fire in the Dark*, a series of essays on Pascal that anyone will be better for having read. Natoli's publisher is the University of Rochester Press. And, finally, there is Daniel McInerney's *Difficult Good* from Fordham Press.

These three books might suggest a variation on the article mentioned: The Vice of Research and the Virtue of Scholarship. They are both scholarly books, the fruit of a long pondering. Research, on the other hand, seems to be a device to reduce one's teaching load, to substitute anonymous addressees elsewhere for the students one can confront face to face.

Well, these are thoughts on a rainy day in Indiana. Of course, above the clouds the sun still shines. ✠

*Ralph McInerney*

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