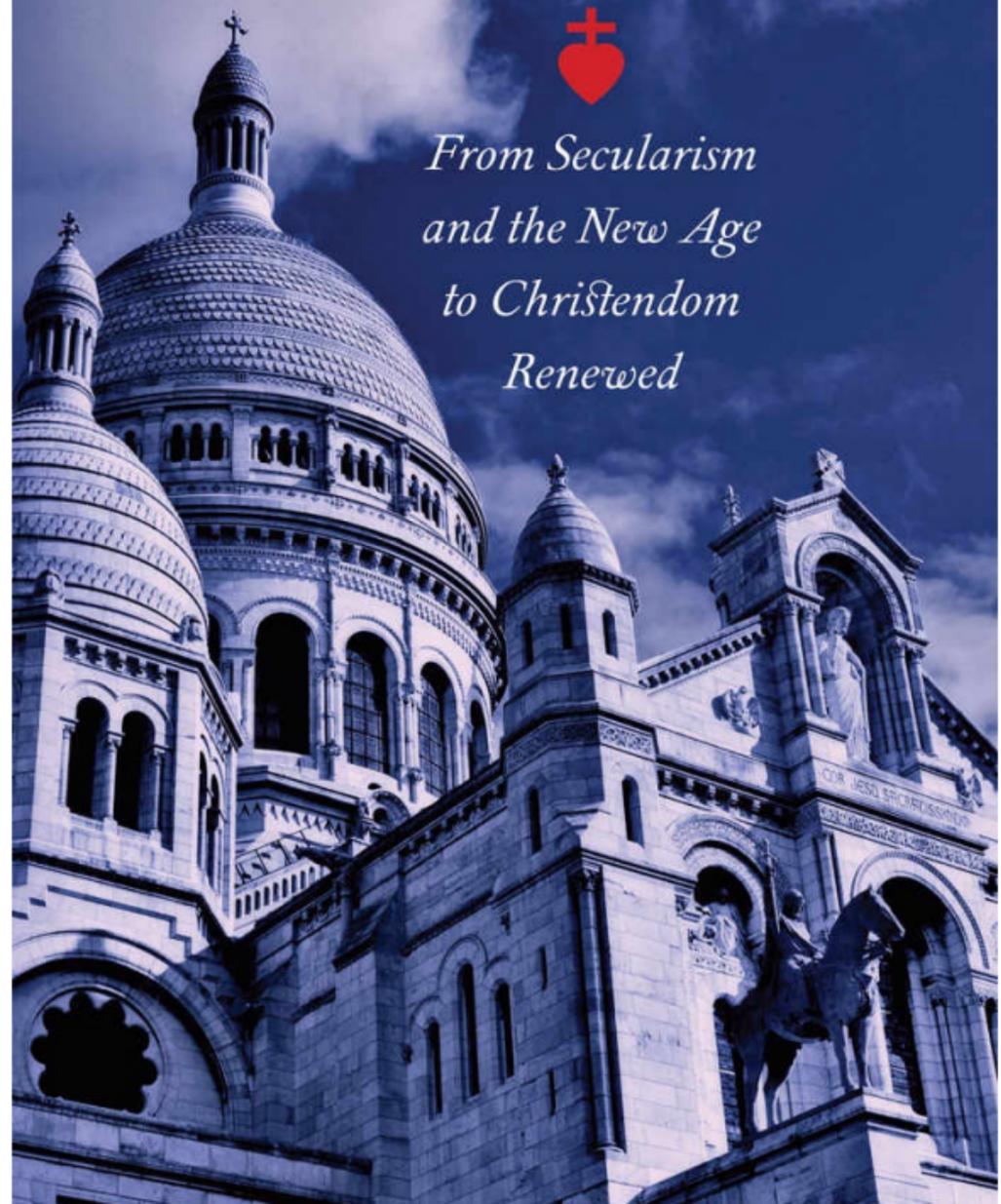


ROGER BUCK  
COR JESU SACRATISSIMUM



*From Secularism  
and the New Age  
to Christendom  
Renewed*



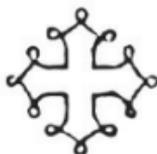
Cor Jesu Sacratissimum  
*From Secularism and the New Age  
to Christendom Renewed*



COR JESU  
SACRATISSIMUM

*From Secularism & the New Age  
to Christendom Renewed*

*by*  
Roger Buck



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## DEDICATION

To the Soul of France, Catholic France, which was subjected to utter mutilation in the past, and to the Soul of Catholic Ireland, which is being mutilated in similar fashion today, this book is dedicated.

To the Souls of these great Catholic cultures, I owe more than I can possibly tell you, dear Lector.

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# Acknowledgments

IN THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS of a book like this, it is customary to acknowledge people. We will get to those in a moment.

I begin, however, not with individuals, but rather cultures—indeed the *souls* of nations. In particular, there are two of these that you, dear Lector, may have already spied in this volume's dedication: France and Ireland.

As I elaborate in these pages, I am basically an Englishman from Los Angeles, who rather wishes he were Irish! The potential for schizophrenia here has only been abetted by the fact that I have lived in nine different nations, but the experience of comparing and contrasting these has generated innumerable reflections that have given rise to this book. <sup>1</sup>

Here, then, are the reflections of an Anglo-American Catholic convert, who, though originally steeped in his native culture's residual Protestant legacy, was perturbed to discover the very different Catholic universe of the Irish and the French.

Ireland hit me first, after I first moved here in 2004 (and where, after going to France and Spain, I returned in 2013 ). Words cannot describe how deeply moved I have felt living in rural Catholic Ireland. Out of all the nine nations mentioned above, the Irish warmth, piety and charity have impressed me like no other. This, I dare to suggest in these pages, has much to do with the fact that—until very, very recently—the Irish were plunged in the Sacraments, unlike any other country in Europe, (save, perhaps Poland). Yes, even forty years ago, the Irish went to Mass and Confession in extraordinary numbers, with, in my view, astonishing effect on a culture that, alas, is now in grave danger of becoming simply another province of the Anglo-American culture with its post-Christian New Age spirituality.

Thus, I acknowledge all the Irish who have ever helped to illumine the deeply prayerful, wholesome, and human integral Catholic culture they once inhabited and whose rich after-glow has still not disappeared.

With France, the story is very different. The rich, sacramental culture that once existed there began to be systematically destroyed over two hundred years ago. Living in France, I witnessed the devastation of Catholic culture with horror. Not only has that personal horror shaped this book, but I visited, many times, the great Apparition sites where Our Lord and Our Lady appeared on French soil: Paray-le-Monial, Lourdes, La Salette, Pontmain, and the Rue du Bac in Paris. There, I could not only feel all that France formerly was, but all she has since lost. This book, then, owes an incalculable debt to what was once called *La Vraie France*.

Saying this, however, I cannot omit Spain. I spent less time amidst her warm, passionate people and this book is less concerned with her. Nonetheless, she, too, provided a rich Catholic contrast to the sterility of my many years in a New Age cul-de-sac. For, as you will see, Lector, this book has everything to do with this contrast between the barren Anglo-American secular culture with its New Age offshoot and what I discovered in Catholic Ireland, France, and Spain. Hence, this overture.

But let us turn now to beloved individuals. Above all, I thank my wife Kim, a “human angel” whose endless love and wisdom irradiate the whole of my life. This book would have been utterly impossible, but for her never-failing faith in it and me over many years. Besides Kim, I also thank my beautiful daughter Mary, whose rare insight, integrity, and courage also yield a very special light.

In addition, Georg Nicolaus has done more for me and my books than I can say. He not only helped to save me from New Age-ism, he has loved me in a profound way for almost my entire adult life.

I am also more indebted to Romany Buck than words can

possibly express. In countless ways, she made my time in France and Spain possible, which so potently yielded this book's counter revolutionary thesis—a thesis she cannot support! Her faith in me proves only more real as a result.

The same is just as true for Mark Anderson who trusts and supports me, despite his commitment to numerous causes criticized in these pages. His endless kindness and generosity over nearly thirty years included creating and sustaining my website—<http://corjesusacratissimum.org>—which made the book you now hold in your hands possible.

I say this because it was only by Mark's gift of this website that John Riess and James Wetmore of Angelico Press discovered my writing. I thank them, too, for their great faith in me—and also great patience! Editor Anna Maria Mendell is also owed much gratitude for smoothing out my syntax and for truly helpful suggestions. I am unsure whether any company renders me deeper hope for the world than Angelico. For I see these people's self-sacrificing efforts to produce great and needed books on very limited means. I pray for their success and encourage my readers to do the same.

Special thanks are likewise owed to my friend Tracy Tucciarone, who has also sacrificed much for an unusual effort to preserve and restore Catholic Tradition—the website and forum at <http://fisheaters.com>. Not only has her large Italian heart been ever kind to me and my writing, but I admire how that same generosity of spirit supports so many others, who suffer, like I do, the ecclesiastical tragedy of our time.

Luis María Santamaria Lancho, Maria Cifuentes, Antonio Romero, Luis Flamenco, and Charo Santamaria Lancho also need to be gratefully acknowledged. They supported me in a truly extraordinary fashion during a difficult time in Spain, where much of this book was originally drafted. I thank, too, Sue and Tony Mathews who then supported my continued work on the manuscript, when I

returned to Britain for a spell, amidst my time in Catholic Europe.

Another encomium is owed to the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest. Their sacred Latin liturgy never ceased to elevate my soul, whilst I crossed through four different nations: France, Spain, England, and now, once again, Ireland.

And, in alphabetical order, I extend my warm gratitude to Manuela Andolina, Nathan Banks, Billy Bishop, Kelly Calegar, Fr Robert Copsey, Charles A. Coulombe, David Carter, Leon Crisp, Michael and Eva Frensch, John Halloran, Fr. Dan Horgan, Sue and Tony Mathews, Michael Martin, Marc Potiez, Siri Restrict, Lauren Rose whilst I thank many other old friends within the silent recesses of my heart.

Having saluted the living, I close by honoring the dead. The support of my gentle father, John Buck, was incalculable over the course of my life. And there remain two deceased authors, Valentin Tomberg and Hilaire Belloc to whom this book is, above all, indebted. (Indeed, my greeting the reader, throughout these pages, as “Lector” is done with an affectionate nod to Belloc, whom many will recall addressing them this way in *The Path to Rome*.) Both Belloc’s and Tomberg’s writings guide and inspire me like no other. This is so much the case that, although I never met them in this world, I can scarcely think to omit them from this list of my dearest friends, family, and supporters.

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<sup>1</sup> Here I treat the Welsh, English, and Scottish as three separate nations, as they deserve. The other six nations are my native America as well as Germany, Switzerland, Ireland, Spain, and France.

## Prologue: One of Us

*One of us drives a 1937 Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, plated in chromium that gleams.*

*One of us picks bananas for a living.*

*One of us longs to play at Wimbledon.*

*One of us longs to go to Outer Space.*

*One of us longs for the next edition of Better Homes and Gardens.*

*One of us designs cigarette packets and studies how to target customers.*

*One of us is dying from cancer of the lung.*

*One of us aches in fear. (He bungled the job and left his prints at the scene of the crime. )*

*One of us shakes in fear—of inadequate care in her old age. (And so she hoards: stocks and shares, property and policies—not to mention Krugerands. )*

*One of us sees inadequate care everywhere she looks and pours her lifeblood into social causes.*

*One of us is very kind and simple. (Her door is open to all who come, and she feeds them. )*

*One of us cannot stop his pedophile fantasies and loathes himself.*

*One of us is a pedophile and does not loathe himself at*

*all.*

*One of us prays fervently to Allah for the conversion of Europe.*

*One of us worships at the “church” of Elvis.*

*One of us dreams of owning every issue of The Amazing Spiderman in near mint condition.*

*One of us ensures her seven poodles never fail to receive the most immaculate of grooming.*

*One of us is so starved that her breasts produce no milk for her baby.*

*One of us is fighting to get her food in a brutal third world country.*

*One of us longs to help the animals. (She wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up. )*

*One of us would “heal” the world—by eliminating “all God-talk and metaphysical nonsense.”*

*One of us regrets bitterly the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.*

*One of us had thirty years of psychotherapy—and wonders why.*

*One of us murdered someone.*

*One of us was just aborted.*

*One of us stares at television from morning to eve—and is two years old.*

*One of us aims to give every human being the respect,*

*mirroring, and interest that each one craves.*

*One of us photographs Playboy “Bunnies” for a living.*

*One of us is infuriated by “intolerant fascists” and regularly explodes when they refuse to conform to her own codes of conduct.*

*One of us is a groupie.*

*One of us believes in a “New Age of Aquarius” and that all this “Old Age” stuff will shortly vanish from the world.*

*One of us volunteers long hours in an African hospital that is breaking down.*

*One of us studies melting polar ice—with growing horror.*

*One of us is freezing.*

*One of us prays 159 Hail Marys a day, imploring help for humanity.*

*One of us works seven days a week, 16 hours a day in a sweatshop—making clothes for us to wear.*

*One of us longs for the perfect clothes, the perfect house, the perfect lawn, and the perfect pool.*

*One of us has never stepped beyond the confines of the English-speaking world.*

*And ...*

*One of us looks on at all this, with a Sacred Heart of Infinite Burning Charity and feeling every individual gesture, tear, and tragedy. He calls each of us to come be*

*warmed at His Blazing Hearth of Love and join Him in His Work.*

# Introduction: Windows onto the World

*And one of us is you, who read these words.*

*And one of us is Roger Buck, who writes these words to you, dear Lector.*

**D**EAR LECTOR —such is the way I would like to address any one of you who renders me the gift of careful, sympathetic attention. I greet you warmly in this long book, written in four different European countries over eight years from 2008 – 2016.

In this chapter, originally drafted in eastern France, I talk a little of this one of us who is Roger Buck. This book is not autobiography *per se*. Nonetheless, elements of my life story appear throughout. These fragments from memory are not offered from a hunger to share my tale with you, Lector. Rather, they have another end. For each life-story renders unique points of vantage—or different windows onto the world. What I would extend to you is a chance to gaze at the world, through windows different from your own. St. Paul said we see through a glass darkly, and, of course, the glass in these windows is clouded. I want to have no pretensions to certainty and comprehension I do not possess. I simply offer you these vantage points, inadequate as they are, in case you find them useful to grapple with the world.

By the *world*, I principally have in mind the life of humanity as this Third Millennium dawns. Clearly, this world is possessed of unimaginable diversity. Yet, however, inconceivable this diversity is, we urgently need to try to imagine it. With this aspiration, I wrote my prologue imagining all the different “ones of us” featured in our world. And, plainly, it is a world of real tragedy and real love. Yet beyond the

good and evil, which have ever marked our fallen state, it is also a world that appears set for centuries on a course of continuously deepening materialism.

### Regarding Materialism

MATERIALISM. It is a word many associate solely with the commercial ethos that saturates our modern existence. Here are thoughts initially drafted from “the Christmas season” in a large French city. And I imagine, dear Lector, you will feel the heartbreak of such materialism, as I do. Christmas is the time to celebrate the moment His Sacred Heart began beating in this world. This Heart came to liberate us from the purely materialistic. Yet this Christmas in France, the very opposite surrounds me: the endless incitation to buy, buy, buy, the shopfronts, which entice desire of material luxury, technological gratification, and more. There are many forms of such materialism. For on the way to the Holy Mass today, I passed a sex shop, where the human body is marketed as object. And there are graphic images outside, which would have been unthinkable two or three generations ago.

Now, in speaking of materialism, I have the tragedy of such commerce in mind—but I mean other things by that word as well. I invoke not simply consumerism, but *a centuries-long process of scientific or philosophical materialism*, where thinkers considered the world in increasingly material terms, gradually eliminating everything else. The men and women of the Middle Ages never questioned a spiritual reality. Not only did they never question the reality of God, they also did not query the presence of angels and demons or even ghosts. They did not doubt the Communion of Saints, who interceded in this vale of tears. And they did not doubt the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. The greatest minds of the Middle Ages took all this as granted and would certainly see our modern doubt as

an extraordinary and pathological condition.

*Doubt.* This single word expresses so much of what was set in motion by the modern age, as philosophers—Descartes, Hume, Kant, and all the rest—called everything of Faith into question. And Science? Science, from Copernicus to Darwin and beyond has frequently fostered the same agenda. The result? This book will be a meditation on the results, which many of us see. Suffice it to say, a trajectory, which began as doubt, has culminated in denial. For today, it is not just “one of us,” but many souls, who seek “to eliminate all God talk and metaphysical nonsense.”

Yes, increasing numbers now seek to reduce the universe to matter alone. And they believe humanity will benefit from their reductionistic projects! Such souls often include the most intelligent, able, and influential minds of our age. They create highly effective forms of education, media, and propaganda, telling us that all that matters—is matter. They seek sincerely to liberate us from what they confidently declare to be illusion!

Clearly, this philosophical and scientific materialism is not unrelated to commercial materialism: the pursuit of happiness in things—without regard to God, His Blessed Mother, or the Holy Church. And neither can these variegated forms of materialism be disentangled from the secular, liberal, and capitalist ambitions of modern times.

*Secular, liberal, capitalist.* These words describe *intertwined historical processes* in recent centuries, which have nurtured ever more worldly values. And so in this book, dear Lector, you will often find the terms conjoined. For example, I frequently speak of *Secular Materialism* to describe the ideology that dominates the West today.

In many ways, this Secular Materialism emerged from the Protestant cultures of recent centuries. For in these cultures, many elements of the Mystery Catholics had guarded for 1,500 years were thrown to the wind. We speak, falteringly, of a vast, multifaceted

Mystery entailing the Holy Sacraments, Mary, Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, the Holy See, an Ordained Hierarchy, and the Revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I am writing as a *Catholic of Faith*. Here is a term I use to distinguish from lapsed or nominal Catholics—as well as many still-practicing liberal Catholics, who have lamentably set aside many, if not all, aspects of the traditional Faith. Writing as a Catholic of Faith means I do not believe the Catholic Mystery is there for nothing! Thus, I do not believe that rejecting that Mystery—as happened in the Reformation—can be without grave consequence for humanity.

Here I have no wish to offend Protestant Christians, who so often valiantly uphold faith in Jesus Christ in our troubled times. Nonetheless, as this book unfolds, it should become evident to you, Lector, why I think Luther and Calvin's Reformation, which stripped Catholicism from much of the West, has contributed significantly to global materialism. For I hope it will be apparent why I believe the repression, often brutal, of the Catholic Mystery has fostered a materialistic mindset—one which grows all the more cold and individualistic for being denied the warming Sacraments of the Church.

I will also elaborate what would seem obvious indeed: that commercial materialism and economic liberalism are *ruining life on earth*. Not only environmental degradation sets in, leading to slow catastrophe, as ice begins to melt and a planet starts to burn, but the human soul becomes fettered, stunted, and mechanical.

### **The New Age and the Catholic Mystery**

HERE are grim things I see through my windows onto this world. Yet I also wish to offer windows onto worlds of hope—worlds which can remedy the crisis of materialism. These worlds are non-material; they are worlds of spirituality and mystery, for lack of better terms.

But which spirituality and which mystery? For long years, I was committed to the New Age movement. That movement stands (and falls!) on the thesis that every religion expresses but a single, timeless, universal spirituality. This universal spirituality, it is said, *transcends* “limited and narrow” religions like Christianity. Likewise, such religions suffer from a sectarian Babel of largely linguistic differences that lead to the illusion of *significant* religious divisions. Beneath the surface, there is really only *oneness* (an important word, as we shall see, for New Agers). Here is a New Age dogma in a movement claiming to be free from dogmas. But is the dogma really true? Or could it be that a Christian Mystery exists, which actually *differs* from New Age spirituality? Could it be a false dogma that every spiritual approach essentially amounts to the same thing? If so, could this dogma render New Agers blind to the Church, because they are all too self-assured that whatever the Church offers is already subsumed beneath their “perennial and universal” New Age umbrella?

This book offers a meditation on such questions after more than three decades of personal experience with New Age spirituality. The first two decades involved profound sympathy with the New Age movement, during which I worked actively to promote it. But for over a decade now, I have grown ever more disturbed by the New Age, even whilst I continued to engage old friends and family bound up with the movement.

After thirty-five years of reflecting on New Age matters, I believe much is being done to conceal from New Age folk—most often good, decent folk!—the Mystery guarded by the Catholic Church. The New Age dogma of “no genuine religious differences” is one of many forms of obscurantism, which is all the more insidious because of its subtlety.

Thus, in this book, I hope to offer windows into the Catholic Mystery. Does this mean I think New Age mysteries are simply wrong? False mysteries—simply and purely to be discarded in favor of

the Mystery, beating at the Heart of the Church? “Simply and purely.” Lector, to such a profound question as this, there can be no facile answer! But my entire book turns around this question. And it certainly entails the story of why I left New Age mysteries behind to pursue the Mystery of His Sacred Heart, and also why I pray others will find the same liberation through the Holy Church that I found.

When I speak of the Church, I invoke the Hierarchical and Sacramental Church, as it existed in both West and East for fifteen centuries before Luther, and as it has been maintained since the Reformation—in spite of countless assaults (e.g., the wholesale extirpation of the monastic houses in Britain and Ireland by Henry VIII). To what extent can one legitimately use the word “Church” for the manifold Protestant communities? This, I confess, I do not know. This may sound scandalous. But I mean no disrespect by my confession of “not knowing.” As a Catholic, I note how recent Vatican documents speak of the Eastern Orthodox Churches as “Churches.” But these same documents refer to the Protestant denominations as “Ecclesial Communities,” rather than “Churches.”<sup>1</sup> In issuing these, I do not think the recent Popes, like Benedict XVI, intended disrespect either.

Such Protestant communities undoubtedly serve humanity profoundly. But is it strictly accurate to call them “Churches”? It all depends on one’s definition. If one defines the Church according to the understanding *established for fifteen centuries* before the Reformation, one speaks necessarily of an apostolic succession and a hierarchy, oriented to the Seven Sacraments, above all to the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. By such a definition, many a Christian congregation cannot be called a Church, even if, it too, points the way to Christ.

No, I do not think Benedict XVI meant disrespect. His pontificate was plainly filled with burning compassion for humanity. In that compassion, he tried to orient us toward the original meaning of that so-misunderstood word: *Church*. He saw how greatly humanity

suffers, deprived of this crucial understanding.

This book is also concerned with such suffering. For we survey the tragedy of global materialism. We explore a society famished for meaning and mystery: the New Age movement, psychotherapy, holistic healing, and countless other phenomena—all these bear ample testimony to deprivation. Such hunger! Such terrible hunger! Thus, I try to throw open windows to the Mystery at the Heart of the Church. For Our Lord Jesus Christ is *One of us* and His Heart is still beating still for us all. One may meet the God-Man through His Church, if one practices Her traditions and receives Her Sacraments. One can meet the Mystery of Divine Humanness and draw strength in this dehumanizing world.

## On Vatican II

ALAS, however, a problem exists here. For the Catholic Church is in grave danger of losing many of her traditional practices, since the time of the Second Vatican Council ( 1962 – 1965 ). The Council Fathers, of course, sought to help the Church, not harm Her. However, they tried to open the Church to the world or even accommodate Her to the world—at the expense of tradition. Thus (to cite a single instance of what I mean) Fr. Karl Rahner campaigned energetically to ensure the Council refused the traditional image of Our Lady, for fear, perhaps, of upsetting both Protestants and modern liberal theologians alike. <sup>2</sup>

At any rate, after the Council, dramatic changes were undertaken to diminish Catholic distinctiveness—what separated the Church from the world. Perhaps the most obvious change occurred in the Mass, which had been celebrated exclusively in Latin for centuries. Now, it was replaced by a popularized vernacular version. But the new Mass was only symptomatic of a wider change whereby a new spirit of acquiescence and accommodation could be observed: the so-called “spirit of Vatican II.” “So-called,” I say, because much—very much—

that was done in the name of the Council was not at all willed by the Council Fathers. Yet, whatever the true sources of this so-called “spirit of Vatican II,” the Catholic Mystery has been devastated.

Perhaps this is nowhere more tragically evident than with the Sacraments. In the so-called developed world, at least, the numbers speak for themselves: Precipitous drops in priestly ordinations, baptism, confirmation, confession, and Mass attendance—everywhere a general weakening of the Catholic Mystery. In a materialistic world, famished of meaning, is it surprising how many folk have deserted the Church since Vatican II (in many cases for New Age pastures)? A central idea in this book is this: In the failure to guard sacred tradition, the modernizing elements within the Catholic Church have not only failed to meet the true needs of our time—but betrayed them.

The Sacred Heart beating at the center of the Church has not abandoned Her and never will. But how often that Sacred Heart is obscured! Many a modern Mass is replete with banal—or even bizarrely inappropriate—liturgy, yet His Sacred Heart remains beating there. It is as though this Heart is wrapped in banks of fog. Such irreverent celebrations of the Holy Mass are not sufficient to destroy Christ’s presence; they only blind people to it.

The results are as manifold as they are grievous. But perhaps few are as saddening as this: Catholics, even when they continue to practice, are lost. They are no longer really sure of their Faith or why it matters. The Church is torn apart by warfare between liberals and conservatives. And a house divided against itself cannot stand. Individually and collectively, Catholics are unable to stand effectively, as the once-Christian West falls beneath the double-barreled assault of Secular Materialism and New Age neo-paganism. And so this book issues a cry—a cry for the Church to surrender the spirit of compromise and accommodation which has both robbed Catholics of their Faith and their capacity to stand erect in a world going under.

## A Touch of Autobiography

HERE is what I witness through my windows onto the world. Now, these windows, of course, are framed by my biography. And to orient my book, dear Lector, I would share with you a brief outline of my life. I was born fifty-two years ago of English parents on the West coast of America. I grew up in both Britain and the United States. One might observe, then, that I am *quintessentially Anglo-American*. I am forever marked by two great Protestant nations of modern times. That marking had an effect: it rendered the Catholic Mystery *invisible* to me for decades. Here lies another theme to this book: that peculiarly Anglosphere blackout of the Holy Church. A *cultural blanketing* exists in the English-speaking world, which frequently buries the Catholic Church so deeply as to make Her not simply invisible, but also incomprehensible—even when or if She is at last discovered.

But let me return to my childhood, which, after my earliest years in California, was mainly spent in a very “White Anglo-Saxon Protestant” part of Oregon. My upbringing was not especially religious; I was not baptized as a child. Still, my father possessed real faith in God, a gift beyond price to his son. When I was young, he read the Bible. Later, he turned to the Koran—but not before teaching me the *Pater Noster*. And so, as a child, I prayed to Our Father nightly—though I saw scarcely anything at all that pointed to Jesus Christ. Yet, all my early years, I believed in God—but a God seen purely as transcendent. I would not know the God Incarnate, the Word made Flesh, until many years later. Nothing in my childhood provided a clue as to the God who became *particular and personal*. Nothing showed me that since nearly two millennia, God now had a human heart.

Thus, it was the idea of God as transcendent spirit, spirit alone, that I carried into my initial explorations of New Age culture, thirty-five years ago. For around 1979, age 15, I began reading about the

New Age community at Findhorn in the far north of Scotland. The following year, I made my first journey there. Findhorn—much more will be said of it anon. For now, suffice it to say that many regard it as the leading New Age community in the world.

In 1986, I went to live at Findhorn for the best part of three years. I spent long hours in Eastern forms of meditation and studying esoteric books, those of Alice A. Bailey in particular. In fact, it was the Bailey writings which first brought the term “New Age” to popular usage. And should you wish to look there, Lector, you can find the doctrine (articulated in depth) that traditional Christianity is now being superseded by a dawning Age of Aquarius. Christianity, so it is said, will shortly be replaced by modern forms of spirituality more appropriate for a New Age.

After leaving Findhorn, I aspired to bring my so-called “modern spirituality” to the wider world—which I considered free of dogmas, doctrines, and sectarian bias. (Whether such is truly the case is a question we leave for later on.) I had met a woman at the community, and we left together for the express purpose of bringing spirituality “Findhorn style” to Cambridge, England. We established, in this medieval town with its ancient seat of learning, an educational charity to promote our “non-religious spirituality.” Our city-center premises contained a library of books and a room for meditation. We also hosted lectures and workshops by well-known figures in the New Age movement, including Peter Russell, Rupert Sheldrake, Caroline Myss, and Sir George Trevelyan.

Here in Cambridge, I also began to study the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. Steiner had once been a Theosophist and is therefore often confused with the New Age. The truth is somewhat different: Steiner broke from Theosophy, precisely because he rejected the anti-Christian thrust present within it. This is not to justify his Anthroposophy, which remained severely critical of the Church! However, Anthroposophy remains a very different entity from the New

Age movement. Here we only touch on complex matters which also form part of my past, although I hardly enter into them in this book.

No, in the present volume, I am far more concerned with making reparation for my New Age past. For in Cambridge, I worked, hard, to evangelize the spirit of the New Age. I genuinely assumed this spirit was countercultural. In some sense it was. Plainly, it rejected certain aspects of mainstream materialism. But it would take me years to see how, in so many ways, my beloved New Age movement was hardly countercultural at all! It jived to the beat of the secular, liberal, capitalist culture. Thus, it could never truly defy that culture (as the Church has done repeatedly and courageously).

All this escaped me at the time. The Nineties went on; with the Cambridge project, weariness set in. I felt loss of life and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm: I knew that word derived from the Greek *en theos*, but still my lassitude did not trouble me. I never doubted this New Age spirituality was crucial for the world. And so I labored on.

But in 1997, as this book shall tell, everything changed. In a few short weeks that autumn, I stumbled on the road to Aquarius. I received a blessing from a Catholic Priest, discovered Catholic theology and a miracle befell me: Perhaps I even touched the Hem of His Garment. By now, I was working for my New Age dream with another woman—Kim. Yet by events of formidable Providence, we were soon baptized as Anglicans and married as Christians.

In all this, I was assisted by an unusual Catholic author: Valentin Tomberg, who wrote a masterpiece entitled *Meditations on the Tarot*. This book is concerned with the *images*—rather than cards—of the Tarot, steeped as these images are in medieval Christendom. Whilst it contains not even a single sentence about telling fortunes, its unusual nature may trouble some readers. For myself, I know the GRIP of the New Age. Without Tomberg, I do not know if I would ever have been liberated from it. And I believe his book can liberate others like myself, pointing the way to Jesus Christ and His Church. Much more,

then, will be said about Tomberg in terms of freeing people from New Age bondage.

The ensuing years saw many changes. We left Cambridge for a trail of new cultures, beginning with Germany, Switzerland, and Wales. On Easter night 2000, Kim and I were confirmed Catholic. A mysterious, wholly unexpected joy descended that night and, to this day, my Confirmation remains one of the greatest joys of my life. Despite this startling plenitude, I still remained somewhat aloof from the Church at first. New Age beliefs die hard. My attachment to many secular dogmas was also tenacious indeed. I was a thoroughly liberal Catholic. Indeed, it seems to me as though I was something like a liberal New Age Protestant—who just happened to have been confirmed in the Church of Rome. I did not engage deeply with the Tradition, at first. It was years before I would pray the Rosary. Sometimes I missed Mass, ignoring the Sunday obligation. But the Sanctifying Grace of my Confirmation continued to work in the depths of my soul. Slowly, I entered more fully into the Mystery of the Church.

### **The Sacred Heart and Integral Catholic Culture**

My entry into the Catholic Mystery was facilitated as our semi-nomadic life continued and we left Protestant countries behind to inhabit a series of Catholic cultures: Spain, France—but first of all *Ireland*.

It was in the west of Ireland that I first really encountered a culture that had been utterly steeped in Catholicism. Here I discovered very different attitudes from the liberal and secular certainties, which characterized my own Protestant Anglosphere. For, in Ireland, I experienced the afterglow, at least, of an *integrally Catholic culture*. This is to say, a culture where the Faith had formed, until very recently, a *sine qua non* —i.e., it was integral. The Irish society I

encountered in 2004 had known, within living memory, an immersion in prayers, Sacraments, and traditions, inconceivable in America and England.

Ireland—how different you were to anything I knew in my youth! For the Catholic Mystery was *not* well-nigh invisible on your blessed island! And your people possessed a spirit of piety, warmth, and community—unlike anything I had witnessed *anywhere* before.

Ireland, this book is dedicated to your Christian soul, because your profoundly Catholic culture guided me to what lies at the heart of this volume. Not only did you lead me deeply into the Mystery of the Church, you also showed me the only hope I have for Western civilization.

Yet this book is also dedicated to France, where my soul has been transformed, particularly in a little town called Paray-le-Monial. In Paray in 1673, the Master of Love revealed His Sacred Heart to humanity. And from Paray, the Cult of the Sacred Heart was born, whence it spread rapidly, across France, Ireland, Spain, Latin America—indeed the entire Catholic world of that time. This, of course, is the world which remained Catholic after the Reformation divided Christendom, leaving northern Europe and her colonies firmly Protestant.

Here we evoke a distinction, then, between societies whose religious development was never interrupted by the Reformation—and those that suffered rupture from tradition. For English and other northern European cultures did not participate in Catholic tradition as she continued to evolve after the Sixteenth Century. Thus, when devotion to his Sacred Heart spread across the Catholic world, it did not reach England and her colonies. Or at the very least, this devotion did not reach her easily. It was outright repressed at first, along with Catholicism itself. Later on, when Catholicism was legally permitted, other means were found to marginalize or suppress devotion to His Sacred Heart. For example, it was ridiculed as nothing more than mere

sentimentalism or Jesuit fanaticism.

The truth is very different. The Sacred Heart had appeared as a burning furnace of charity for a great purpose. Tridentine Catholicism—the era following the Council of Trent ( 1549 – 1563 ) until Vatican II—would soon be thoroughly permeated and transformed by the wildfire development of the Sacred Heart devotion. And in this book we suggest that Tridentine Catholic culture was thereby *warmed* by this furnace of His Love. It was protected by it. By contrast, we argue that the countries deprived of this devotion were more prone to the icy rationalism which has led to present-day Secular Materialism.

And yet was not France a leading force amongst the nations that pioneered modern secular culture? Is not France—in many people’s minds, at least—that great revolutionary nation which threw off its Catholic “shackles” to become the country of “superb” rationalism, urbane sophistication, and secularism it is today? At first blush, France would certainly appear little different to the Protestant nations in terms of secularization.

At first blush, we repeat. For the truth is different—because before it was destroyed by aggressive de-Christianization, there was once *another* France, a France that struggled to remain faithful in the face of religious persecution. Like Ireland, Nineteenth-Century France had also been home to an astonishing, vital, integral Catholic culture. Yet, as we shall see, French Catholicism was repeatedly attacked for over a century by revolutionary forces which worked ruthlessly and systematically: to destroy the monasteries, to expel religious from French soil, to close Catholic schools, to forcibly appropriate the property of the Church—not to mention a thousand other means more subtle and insidious.

Yes, France was once very different to the Anglo-American sphere. Countries like England and America did not need to brutally repress opposition to secularism, because *opposition to secularism scarcely existed in those countries!* By contrast, France was once home to a far-

reaching culture of Catholic Counter-Revolution, which resisted secularization to the teeth! We explore this Counter-Revolution later in this book.

Let it suffice, for now, that Protestant countries generally secularized far more rapidly and easily than those traditional Catholic societies, warmed and animated by the Heart of the Church. Instead, an *alternative world-vision to Secular Materialism* once powerfully manifested itself in Catholic cultures—in sharp contrast to Anglo-American culture.

Perhaps few things bear witness to this Catholic contrast than a national flag, once seriously proposed in such countries. Catholic France, Catholic Ireland—both were countries for whom His Sacred Heart has been particularly important. And it is a well-known fact that, for decades, vast numbers of Catholic French sought to place His Sacred Heart upon the middle band of the French tricolor: Blue, White, and Red. It is much less known that at the birth of the Irish Free State in 1922, there was a similar campaign to place His Sacred Heart upon the Irish tricolor: Green, White, and Orange.<sup>3</sup> Such notions may sound bizarre indeed to British and Americans. One cannot easily imagine initiatives like this on the Union Jack or the Stars and Stripes!

### **On Christendom**

BY invoking such potentially startling images, I hope to illumine the very different cultural attitudes Catholic countries possessed, even relatively recently, compared to Protestant ones. Clearly, the image of the Sacred Heart on the flag reveals a rejection of secularism. It points to a yearning to see the nation devoted to Christian values rather than materialistic ones. This is to say, the yearning for Christendom renewed.

Is this book then a call to Christendom renewed? Yes. However,

you will not find any grandiose political project outlined in these pages, nor will you see, I hope, a simplistic nostalgia for an impossible return to the past. What you will find is my conviction that Secular Materialism is killing us, body and soul, and that Catholics have a duty to resist this. We have a duty to work toward a civilization animated by Christ and His Church.

Such a civilization will inevitably look different to that envisaged by the Counter-Revolutionaries of yesteryear. However, I lovingly evoke the memory of those original Counter-Revolutionaries. I am personally indebted to these people. They *forged* the Catholic Ireland and Catholic France which opened my eyes and transformed my soul.

Likewise, I am indebted to another set of people—today's *Catholic traditionalists* who also lovingly remember these cultures. These are the people concerned that the post-conciliar Church sacrificed far too much of its tradition. Generally speaking, they are usually identified by their love for the old Latin Mass. The truth is more complex. For these Catholics also believe the post-conciliar church has been far too conciliatory toward secularism and, like the Counter-Revolutionaries of old, remember Christendom.

In this regard, it is striking that Catholic traditionalism has emerged from one country above all—*France*. It is also notable that the French have a name for these Catholic traditionalists—*integrists*, which has no exact equivalent in common, ordinary English. Now, one sometimes finds the word rendered “integralist” in scholarly English texts. Still, by and large, English speakers do not readily recognize the words *integralist* and *integralism*. The reason why is instructive. It is because the Anglosphere (Ireland excepted) never possessed integral Catholic cultures, which included *integrists* who resisted secularism.

What is an *integrist*? An *integrist* (or *integralist*) is someone who seeks *to maintain Catholicism as an integral part of culture*. He looks to the world of the Catholic past, where the Catholic Mystery

was not well-nigh invisible—as it has become today. He looks to a world where the bells of the Angelus summoned people to prayer morning, noon, and night. He looks to a world where his children might have had a thousand cultural reminders of the Catholic Mystery—instead of a thousand cultural reinforcements of secular ideology and consumer excess. This is to say, he mourns the fact that where his children might once have seen the Cross trumpeting the Central Mystery of the world, they now see a pair of golden arches trumpeting hamburgers.

In short, he looks to Christendom rather than Secular Materialism.

Integrists. In France, the word is usually used pejoratively: as though these integristes were simply backwards fundamentalists, who do not believe in progress or freedom. But is it true progress and true freedom to render children a purely materialistic education? Is it true progress and freedom to render the Catholic religion buried and invisible? Is it true progress and freedom to eradicate Catholic imagery (e.g., crucifixes) from the public square—whilst global corporations impose a million other images upon us, which, moreover, are expressly designed to manipulate the human psyche? Is not such advertising far more aggressively invasive than the peals of church bells? Yet how these integristes are mocked for not keeping in step with the “spirit of the times.” Or should that be *lockstep*—which is to say: forced to march in time? For in this book, we suggest a soulless crushing conformism characterizes our brave new global world, created in large measure by the new global corporations.

### **A Little Note on Globalization**

HERE we arrive at Globalization—another concern of this book. Controversially, however, I suggest another term—Anglo-Americanization—might sometimes describe this phenomenon better.

It is difficult saying this, knowing that I, an Anglo myself, will be labelled an “Anglophobe.” Still, on closer examination, “Globalization” often functions as a polite, politically-correct word, masking reality. For much, if not all, of what we call Globalization is driven by the Anglosphere. America, but also Britain, have been key players here. The British Empire of the Nineteenth Century covered a quarter of the world’s territory—wherein (famously or infamously) the sun never set—laying the foundations for the linguistic dominance of English today. Arguably, the American empire of the Twentieth Century proceeded much, much further. As the world’s greatest economy and outstanding superpower, she dominated the world of the Twentieth Century, militarily, economically, and culturally.

None of this is to deny Globalization also means what the word itself implies: that our globe becomes ever more interconnected and interdependent, as communications technology soars ahead and political boundaries crumble beneath mighty transnational corporations. Still, there is abounding evidence of Anglo-American hegemony: Whether it is the growing use of English throughout the former English colonies in Africa, Asia Oceania or the “British invasion” of pop spearheaded in the 1960s by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, etc.; whether it is the mighty reach of Hollywood and American media generally or Information Technology giants such as Microsoft, Yahoo, IBM and all the rest. (Indeed, the French even have an acronym: GAFA—Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon—for what they regard as American cultural imperialism.) Even aspects of Globalization that one does not normally consider Anglo-American begin to look different under closer examination. For example, we argue, in these pages, that the growing New Age movement is, *above all, an Anglo-American phenomenon.*

And so, whether it be controversial or not, I declare that our easy, casual use of the word “Globalization” often hides how very much the world today is driven by Anglo-American cultural attitudes.

Globalization risks being a euphemism for an Anglo-Americanization of the world which advances by stealth—at least sometimes.

### **A Little More on Windows**

IT SHOULD be clear this book is controversial—radically dissenting from mainstream secular narratives. I hope what follows will serve to evoke conundrums of a profound nature. There are indeed vast problems and vast questions in these pages. What is the very future of the world? What are the roots of world materialism? What are the occluded wellsprings of the New Age movement? What is the fate of the Church in the endeavor to modify Herself according to a so-called “spirit of Vatican II”? What has the Protestant dismissal of the Sacraments done to Western Civilization?

It seems that to really address these matters, one would need to be a theologian, a philosopher, a historian, and a sociologist—all at the same time! And I must confess frankly that I am not even any single one of these things. Given that I am master of none of these disciplines, what have I to offer? Perhaps the best I can say is that I am a writer and one who cares deeply about these matters and ponders them daily. Any soul who dedicates himself to such a task inevitably garners impressions over the course of time. Here you will find a tapestry of impressions taken from my life. And if you are interested in questions like the above, perhaps my impressionistic approach might contribute a little to your own exploration.

In any event, here is what I mean by windows: impressions—for example, of the New Age movement or Catholic France and Ireland. And if, Lector, Holy Providence has guided your life in a different direction to my own, and you know little of such things, perhaps you may gain a little from my reckonings. Perhaps I can contribute a jot to people across the planet, who ask the same aching questions as myself. Thus, no exhaustive exegesis is essayed here—only limited

impressions across a vast terrain: darting here, darting there—and sometimes not darting, but meandering a little.

Some final notes about these windows onto the world: Nearly all of them stem from my own life. But, unusually, there are windows from other lives, too. Thus, Lector, you will meet certain friends of mine here. I have already introduced Kim, my wife. Her experience will be present at times. But here is the place to say I belong to a little cyber-network of old friends. They are souls who strike me as unusually concerned about the world, though little else appears to unite them. Some are very secular in their orientation. Others seem to me decidedly New Age. None, apart from Kim, are passionately Catholic. And my reason for including them? I find their windows valuable.

Again: We need to *imagine* all the very different “ones of us.” Thus, I try to listen to the voices of my friends, who, as I say, care deeply about the world and yet—I will be frank—frequently lack the least idea of the Catholic Mystery. Too much has been done by our culture to conceal it from them. Now, the voices you will occasionally hear in these pages largely come from messages sent within this private cyber group. I reproduce them with the barest of editing. For it seems to me that in listening to these voices as they are, often crude and hurried, in the crushing, soulless pace of modern life, we gain a particularly authentic set of windows onto the world.

### **From France to Ireland**

IS THERE anything else to add? Just this, I think. A little earlier, I addressed you, Lector, from France, where this chapter was first drafted. You will find I often, if not always, speak from France in this book. This is because its initial draft exploded in me over a few short weeks, whilst I lived in France. However, that initial combustion was eight years ago now. Since then, providence guided me from France to

Spain. The original draft expanded considerably in the process, where more was written in the Sierra Nevada and then Madrid. Whilst living in the Sierra Nevada, Kim and I also began a website—likewise called *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*.<sup>4</sup> Fruits from this website fed my expanding manuscript. Later, we left Spain travelling very slowly through France in a camper-van to England. There, Lourdes and the Vendée—those last, lonely outposts of Catholic France—pierced my heart. In Britain, we tarried for a while in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in Liverpool. Finally, I resettled in my beloved Ireland, which, years ago, had first opened my eyes to the world beyond my own White Anglo-Saxon Protestant conditioning. There, most of the final chapters were written.

Thus, this book represents a literal as well as figurative journey. In the course of that journey, I address you, the reader, from points across a Catholic landscape which, even today, remain considerably different from the ascending Anglo-American world matrix. My brief interim return to England only poignantly heightened my sense of this—and how desperately “Anglo-Americans,” like myself, need to listen to the Catholic cultures that shaped this book.

Thus, I greet you, Lector, at the close of this first chapter, from Ireland. It is an Ireland which once exemplified, *par excellence*, Catholic resistance to secularization, but which is now devastated by the very things that concern us here—whether it be Secular Materialism, a Globalization which is much more Anglo-American than is often admitted, the rise of New Age neo-paganism or the ebbing away of the Catholic Mystery.

Lest all this sound too heavy for your heart to bear, I hasten to add that I greet you with trust and hope as well. For if the Catholic Church can regain full participation in *all* Seven Sacraments, in Her traditions, and a renewed refusal to compromise Her identity, *real hope exists*. Some might doubt whether this is possible. However, the Catholic Church has recovered repeatedly across two millennia. Time and again she has defied those who regularly predicted her impending

demise. And each time She recovered, *it has been through faithfulness to Her tradition—not negation*. The Catholic Church will recover once more, offering real hope for a world, which is so afflicted by the very things to which we now turn in earnest.

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably *Dominus Jesus*, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: A History of Vatican II* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1991 ), 91.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: A Social, Personal and Cultural History from the Fall of Parnell to the Realm of Mary Robinson* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997), 102.

<sup>4</sup> <http://corjesusacratissimum.org>.

# PART I

*(Mainly) On Secular Materialism  
& the New Age Movement*

## II

### Stepping Back to Look at Materialism

*One of us sees no meaning in anything save what can be proved or quantified.*

*One of us is only interested in the bottom line.*

**W**E BEGIN, in earnest now, by looking at contemporary materialism. In this first section of the book, we will consider the New Age Movement in depth. However, to truly understand this phenomenon, it is first necessary to understand the secular materialistic world from which it emerges. Particularly, it is important to understand the Anglosphere version of Western materialism. For I will argue that the New Age—despite its so-called “universalism”—both emerges from and remains especially colored by Anglo-American liberalism, steeped, as it is, in a Protestant legacy. And later, in the second section of this book, we hope to show how all this relates to the crisis of the Church, which in so many ways is also a crisis of worldly materialism.

For all these reasons and more, it is necessary to start with materialism and so, before turning to New Age ideology, I want to reflect—for two chapters—on the matrix of the modern West, especially the Anglosphere, and how that matrix has historically turned materialistic in every sense of that word: commercial, scientific, philosophical, and more.

For many fail to realize the full extent of the West’s continued plunge into materialism, decade after decade, century after century. Now, something can help to rectify this situation and I call it

“stepping back.” Stepping back, that is, from modern culture and taking in a wider perspective.

Here I am grateful to the mercy of God. For, by His Grace, my life has prompted, even compelled me *to step back* in numerous ways. For example, when I was sixteen, my father took me from my American homeland to a new life in Europe. This helped me to step back from my American culture and conditioning and see it from the European perspective. This stepping back from America led to a critical stance regarding certain aspects of my homeland that you will occasionally find in these pages. However, much later, I stepped back from the Anglosphere altogether, going to spend some years in France and Spain. Here, as I relate, I was enabled to see Protestantism from the perspective of non-Protestant cultures.

My conversion to Catholicism entailed another kind of stepping back, for only after my conversion could I really see the New Age movement properly and—as T.S. Elliot has it—“know the place for the first time.” But that is a subject for another chapter. Finally, all these things, with their conflicting claims on my conscience, produced certain torments in my soul and I found that reading history helped. Here is another stepping back to take in a broader vista—seeing the Twenty-First Century in the context of the wider sweep of millennia.

### **A Matrix—Anglophone, Secular, and Protestant**

I WANT NOW to start looking toward the materialistic cultural matrix of our era—with, again, special attention to the Anglo-American version of this matrix.

This is, of course, the principal matrix which molded me growing up, first in America, later in England. Now, the American matrix into which I was born in 1963 represented, needless to say, many different things at once. But, self-evidently, it was steeped in the *dominant values* of the Anglosphere over the last centuries. Naturally,

this means it possessed a distinctively secular hue. It also means it was rooted in the philosophical and scientific materialism, which gave birth to secular culture. This American matrix was also commercially materialist in its capitalist nature. Its culture was largely generated by corporate drive for material success. Last but not least, the matrix was profoundly formed by the Reformation.

All this may sound terribly obvious. Sometimes, however, new light breaks forth only by reflecting on the most obvious things of all. What is manifestly evident may be so banal as to slip below the threshold of awareness. Often, we must lift it into consciousness to appreciate how much it shapes our lives.

Thus, I stress the obvious: the English-speaking world into which I was born was steeped in Protestant heritage. And it is good to remember English-language cultures are *nearly always* steeped in Protestant heritage.

Yet unless we step back from the Anglosphere, we often cannot see the wood from the trees. Or we may fixate on the fact that a few Catholic trees do exist in the dense Protestant woods of the Anglosphere. For, obviously, a few exceptions to the general trend exist. Most notably, there is Ireland—though many will object that Ireland is, at root, Gaelic; English was only imposed on her. One could also argue a significant slice of American culture is not Protestant but Catholic. But that Catholic “slice” was originally a “ghetto culture” rooted in other European languages, German, Polish, Italian, etc. (A great portion of American Catholicism today, of course, consists of Latino origin.)

But, whichever way we slice it, a certain correlation is evident: *to be a native English speaker in the West usually means to have Protestant roots*. Or if Anglophones *do* have Catholic roots, these roots usually turn out to be Spanish, Italian, Gaelic, etc., in origin. Moreover, Anglophone Catholics have nearly always been encircled in a wider Protestant context (as the Irish were in the British Empire).

Yet one can spend years barely conscious of what this really means. Certainly, it only fully registered with me after living in France and Spain. There I realized, ever more keenly, something exceedingly obvious: the French and Spaniards did not share my Protestant roots. And as a result, their cultures were markedly different to my own—often in unexpected ways. Frequently, it is only in leaving our homeland that we realize how culture-bound we have been.

How much does it matter? I believe it matters very much indeed—far more than is usually acknowledged. Although it may take you the rest of these pages, dear Lector, to fully see why I believe this. Suffice it to say, for now, that many have tried to identify the profound differences between Protestant or Catholic heritage. No need, I think, to recycle all the theories here. However, we may briefly note the atheist sociologist Max Weber, who wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber argued Protestant culture led to capitalism, since Calvin's equation of worldly, material success with divine favor spurred enterprise. One may also consider the Catholic sociologist and Priest, Andrew Greeley. Greeley argues that Protestants and Catholics *imagine* the world differently. Protestants tend to see God as more remote and esteem independence and self-sufficiency more highly, according to sociological surveys. Likewise, Catholics tend to see God as more intimate and place greater value on family and community. For this, Greeley cites numerous findings—for example that Catholics telephone members of their family more regularly than Protestants.<sup>1</sup>

But is there any real need for sociological arguments, when it is plain that generations of people raised in such different environs will inevitably take on diverging characteristics? For as the great G.K. Chesterton once remarked: “A religion is not the church a man goes to but the cosmos he lives in.”<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, if we are Catholics of Faith (i.e., as opposed to lapsed or nominal Catholics) who take the Real Presence in the Holy

Eucharist seriously, is it not obvious that *something happens* to a society deprived of this Real Presence—something that is not to be reckoned lightly?!

No, my aim is not extensive documentation of the differences between Catholic and Protestant legacy. And you can certainly find superior reflections regarding these things than anything you will see here! Yet, throughout this book, I suggest we Anglophones remain far more shaped by Protestantism than we usually suppose. And often, we only become truly conscious of its legacy, if we can step back from English-speaking culture, as I did. Today, this task appears more urgent than ever. For, as English language and culture dominate the world ever more, it behooves us to realize what our dominance entails. For we are *exporting our religious and cultural patrimony* to the world. Whatever the ultimate significance of Anglo-American linguistic and cultural hegemony, we should be conscious of what it entails. Yet how often we English and Americans, scarcely seem conscious at all.

### **A Capitalist Matrix**

NOW, I WAS also born into a matrix profoundly shaped by capitalism. Without doubt, this is true for virtually everyone reading this book. Capitalism has become the air that we breathe.

But in saying this, it seems best to briefly consider the term “capitalism,” for the word’s meaning remains somewhat elastic and therefore confusing. For in some sectors, capitalism is regarded simply as free enterprise engaged in by private owners. Hence capitalism becomes defined, simplistically, as simply the opposite of socialism (implying a system of state ownership).

This is not the meaning of the word capitalism used in this book! If it were, we would not critique capitalism here—as *genuine* free enterprise is a noble thing and infinitely preferable to socialistic

ownership and control of industry by a monolithic state. And by criticizing capitalism, we hardly mean to advocate socialism!

No, if capitalism simply meant free enterprise and private ownership, then the Middle Ages would be capitalist! However, capitalism is a distinctly modern phenomenon. It necessarily refers to the historical processes of the industrial revolution whereby great power—capital—became concentrated in the hands of a relatively few industrialists.

Here we can profitably take a cue from the great Chesterbelloc—which is to say that dual literary phenomenon spearheaded by G.K. Chesterton and the man who was, in many ways, his mentor: Hilaire Belloc. Not only has the Chesterbelloc provided great inspiration for much that follows in these pages, but both men grappled with the same thorny problem regarding the precise meaning of capitalism. As Chesterton wrote:

Capitalism is really a very unpleasant word. It is also a very unpleasant thing. Yet the thing I have in mind, when I say so, is quite definite and definable; only the name is a very unworkable word for it. But obviously we must have some word for it. When I say “Capitalism,” I commonly mean something that may be stated thus: *“That economic condition in which there is a class of capitalists, roughly recognizable and relatively small, in whose possession so much of the capital is concentrated as to necessitate a very large majority of the citizens serving those capitalists for a wage.”*

...

But this is undoubtedly a very bad word, because it is used by other people to mean quite other things. Some people seem to mean merely private property. Others

suppose that capitalism must mean anything involving the use of capital. But if that use is too literal, it is also too loose and even too large. If the use of capital is capitalism, then everything is capitalism. Bolshevism is capitalism and anarchist communism is capitalism; and every revolutionary scheme, however wild, is still capitalism.

. . .

In that case, the word is useless. . . . If capitalism means private property, I am capitalist. If capitalism means capital, everybody is capitalist. But if capitalism means *this particular condition of capital, only paid out to the mass in the form of wages*, then it does mean something.

. . .

The truth is that what we call Capitalism ought to be called Proletarianism. The point of it is not that some people have capital, but that *most people only have wages because they do not have capital*. [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

Chesterton wrote this in 1928, but he was undoubtedly inspired by Belloc's earlier 1912 ground-breaking book *The Servile State*, wherein Belloc argued that both socialism and capitalism threatened to return Western humanity to a condition of slavery. Moreover, Belloc spent decades of his life arguing that capitalism—understood in the sense we use it here—was entirely opposed to the Catholic spirit:

Under Industrial Capitalism the command of men does not depend upon some overt political arrangement, as it did in the feudal times of Catholicism . . . but simply upon *the ridiculous, bastard, and illegitimate power of mere*

*wealth.*

For under Industrial Capitalism the power which controls men is the power of arbitrarily depriving them of their livelihood because you have control, through your wealth, of the means of livelihood and they have it not.

. . .

Everything about Industrial Capitalism—its ineptitude, its vulgarity, its crying injustice, its dirt, its proclaimed indifference to morals (making the end of man an accumulation of wealth, and of labor itself an inhuman repetition without interest and without savor) is at war with the Catholic spirit.<sup>4</sup>

But, of course, none of this crossed my mind growing up as a young American, in the 1960s and '70s. Such ideas remain alien to the American mentality—although they are a little less alien for Europeans or at least for Europeans who grew up during the same era as I did. Such Europeans did not know quite the same unbridled capitalist and consumerist culture as I knew from America.

Let me illustrate this point, for it is important in what follows. When I first met my European wife, she was *astonished* by the effects of American marketing on my childhood. For example, there was my acquired love of highly artificial, sugared food, saturated in chemicals. We spent a day in London once—young and in love—and she gasped at my affection for the soft drinks and donuts I found there. For American brands, familiar from my youth, but exotic to her, had started reaching London by then and I was thrilled to discover them. Such was the startling impact upon her that she has never forgotten (nor indeed let me forget). Yes, love of junk food still seemed somewhat foreign to Europeans—something distinctly American—

even two or three decades ago. Such things, however, hardly seem exotic to young Europeans today, caught in a consumerist matrix, which increasingly reflects the America of my youth.

Going back thirty-five years, how different even England was from that American matrix. In 1980, I first crossed the Atlantic and beheld the “strange” nature of British television. It was strictly limited to three channels then—and only one of them had advertising. The other two stations, belonging to the British Broadcasting Corporation, were government-funded and had no commercials. The BBC also struck me as downright peculiar: It was not “dumbed-down” to the lowest common denominator. The second BBC channel was actually *designed* to be less than popular—offering arcane, highbrow programs in *prime time*! Beyond these two, as I say, there was but a single commercial station permitted by law, whose commercials, moreover, were far more restricted than in America. Similar restrictions pertained elsewhere across Europe, where it was clearly recognized that it was wrong to subject people to the endless incitation to buy, buy, buy.

Americans never knew such cultural protection from capitalism. From the onset of television in the 1950s, market forces in America were allowed free rein. The result was competition for ratings, dumb content and incessant advertising. The British situation is similar now. And that lost, faraway world of a single commercial channel would seem quaint indeed to British youth today.

Yet as a teenager, I arrived in a Britain still markedly less materialistic than the America I had left behind. I was startled that my new English schoolmates seemed far less “hung up” on wealth, fashion, and social status than American adolescents. Only later, I realized why: They were never subjected to the market in the same way. They were not as *molded* by a consumerist matrix, as my fellow-Americans were.

In saying this, I have no wish to cast stones at America. I am American by birth and European by parentage. If Europeans abhor

America as brutally mercantile, it appears hypocritical to me. To one extent or another, most of us have long been engaged in supporting a brazen, consumerist culture. “He that is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone. . . . (John 8:7).”

The vicious disease of unrestricted hyper-capitalism is rife everywhere today. Increasing numbers are born infected with its contagion. Young Europeans enter a world that no longer seriously questions whether it might be undesirable to blanket them from their earliest years with “buy, buy, buy.” The principle is never questioned, let alone *legislated* to the contrary. Young people everywhere are now *manipulated* by an unrestricted capitalism similar to my American youth. From our earliest years, gigantic corporations explicitly aim to orient the human psyche to consumer capitalism.

What are the consequences of being mentally, emotionally, and spiritually molded by a world like this? Undoubtedly, they are more extensive than we can ever imagine—and far from easy to measure empirically. This is highly problematic for a society such as ours. For we live in a world ever more obsessed with data and suspicious of what cannot be empirically demonstrated.

### **A Matrix—Philosophically and Scientifically Materialistic**

My last observation points to another defining feature of the modern materialistic matrix: the idolatry of rationalism and empiricism. Like everywhere in the West, the Anglo-American matrix I was raised in was subjected, for centuries, to stripping away Holy Mystery.

The stripping of Holy Mystery—what is this? To this question, I respond as follows. In the high Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of a supernatural, transcendent order of reality, forever beyond our human capacities to know. Here was a world of Divine Mystery *revealed* by God and apprehensible only by Faith. But the fact this *revelation* cannot be cognized through our natural faculties never

prevented people of the Middle Ages from honoring it. It did not prevent theological teaching referent to Holy Mystery taking *central place* in the great universities of Paris, Cambridge, and Oxford. It did not prevent people walking in great processions, nor singing Gregorian chant. Nor did it prevent them building countless humble churches or vast Cathedrals with towering windows in stained glass.

In those times, we venerated Holy Mystery, frankly convinced that empiricism and reason were *deficient* for understanding things of ultimate importance. But the understanding of medieval scholastics is no longer definitive for modern humanity. Now, we only trust what lies within the human powers of observation and reason. And even if we privately recognize the Holy Mystery of God, we do not consider it vital for our culture and we certainly do not grant it political significance!

There are, of course, historical *reasons* for this dramatic turnabout of events. Yet the history I was taught at school in America and England never mentioned such things. Rather than philosophical and scientific history, political history was stressed, with its *political* leaders, such as George Washington or Adolf Hitler. We were not told how Divine Mystery—and thereby *meaning*—was expunged from the world. Now, this is not to say political history is unimportant in this regard! For the Tudor king Henry VIII destroyed the monasteries and stripped England of incalculable sacramental riches. And, as we shall explore later, the 1789 French Revolution likewise crushed Catholicism—with far-reaching consequences for the modern West.

Still, political history is not the only kind of history there is. History is also profoundly shaped by philosophy. Here we must consider the so-called Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century, which is often described as the “Age of Reason.” This is the era in which rationalism and empiricism began to dominate the Western mind.

Yet, although we identify the Enlightenment with the Eighteenth Century, in reality, it cannot be nailed down so precisely. The spirit of

the Enlightenment began earlier and continued long afterwards. Clearly, Enlightenment philosophy built on the ongoing Scientific Revolution that had started in Renaissance Europe. Magellan decisively proved the world round, and Copernicus and Galileo replaced a geocentric cosmos with a heliocentric one. Here and elsewhere, the cosmological ideas cherished by the medieval Church were now seen as fallacious. Thus was the human being destabilized as the center of God's creation. And how much more Darwin later amplified this! For Darwinian theory could "explain" human nature by natural selection alone. What *rational* need, then, to posit a Creator?

Newton, moreover, demonstrated gravity and an ordered, regular universe—one that could be reliably predicted. After Newton, it became easier to exploit nature in the service of growing technological proficiency. Perhaps the world was not as miraculous as once we thought and there was less need—and less room—for Grace.

These developments in science profoundly affected philosophy. If it is impossible to precisely mark the moment the Enlightenment began, we may briefly note Descartes, "the father of modern rationalism" as St. John Paul II called him. Simply speaking, Cartesian philosophy *took reason as its starting point*, replacing faith—with far-reaching consequences for the Western mind. Here I turn to St. John Paul II. His words not only amplify our present concerns, but indeed other major themes in this book (including French de-Christianization and the rise of secularism).

Descartes . . . marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought.

. . .

"I think, therefore I am" . . . is the motto of modern rationalism. All the rationalism of the last centuries—as much in its Anglo-Saxon expression as in its Continental

expression in Kantianism, Hegelianism, and the German philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to Husserl and Heidegger—can be considered a continuation and an expansion of Cartesian positions.

...

Descartes . . . turns his back on metaphysics and concentrates on the philosophy of knowledge. Kant is the most notable representative of this movement.

Though the father of modern rationalism certainly cannot be blamed for the move away from Christianity, it is difficult not to acknowledge that he created the climate in which such an estrangement became possible. It did not happen right away, but gradually.

In fact, about 150 years after Descartes all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside. This was the time of the Enlightenment in France, when pure rationalism held sway. The French Revolution, during the reign of terror, knocked down the altars dedicated to Christ, tossed crucifixes into the streets, introduced the cult of the goddess Reason. On the basis of this, there was a proclamation of *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*. The spiritual and in particular the moral patrimony of Christianity were thus torn from their evangelical foundations.

...

The struggle against God, the systematic elimination of all that is Christian has to a large degree dominated

thought and life in the West for three centuries. [Italics in original]<sup>5</sup>

## On Enlightenment Epistemology

ANOTHER way to understand the materialistic consequences of the “Age of Reason” is in the light of epistemology. In its simplest sense, epistemology concerns the questions of *what we know* and *how we know it*. How do we know what we know? Do we *only* know things observable by the senses or calculable by reason? Can we *only* affirm things like: “The sky is blue” or “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”? Or do we *know* things *beyond* reason and *beyond* empiricism? Is there TRUTH beyond the material world that can be known? And if so, *how*?

Here we can but briefly touch on complex things. Suffice it to note, then, that towering Enlightenment figure of Immanuel Kant. Although Kant, of course, hardly acted in isolation; he drew on the earlier rationalist philosophy of Descartes, as well as Locke and Hume. Building on these, Kantian epistemology served to relegate religion—and indeed everything else—to *subjectivity*. Following Hume, Kant argued humanity could never know anything with certainty, beyond the facts of its own sensory and perceived data.

And this data was subjective—and thus very possibly *compromised*. There could be no guarantees of any objective truth in an ontological sense at all. Claims to objective truth in this traditional sense were impossible, inasmuch as such claims, according to Kant, were inevitably based on our subjective *a priori* categories.

For instance, I spy a stop sign. But can I say for sure a stop sign is *truly* there? Or can I only say I *experience sensory data* which denotes a stop sign? And who is to say this sensory data is not so affected and corrupted by my own subjective systems, that I can say with certainty there *really is* a stop sign and that it *really is* red? What is *redness* anyway, except a way my brain interprets light? The stop

sign has eight sides. But what is *eight-ness* anyway? Perhaps it is only a category inside my mind. Stop signs, redness, eight-ness, even light itself—can we say for *certain* that any of these exist *objectively* outside and beyond *the way our consciousness organizes sensory perception*?

We cannot do justice to Kant in these simple lines! His thinking is far too sophisticated. However, I hope not so much to explicate Kant as to evoke something of Kant's legacy. For Kant served to convince countless intellectuals that *all* experience might be so filtered that no perception could be granted any definite objective reality. We could experience the appearance or *phenomenon*—redness or eight-ness, for example—but we could never know the *noumenon*—the “thing in itself” beyond the sense-data.

Nonetheless, despite the ongoing deconstruction pursued by Enlightenment philosophy, people continued to experience the familiar world around them—even if, according to Kant, there was no guarantee any of it was real beyond the level of appearances (or phenomena). This world of common experience—which science now so regularly, predictably, and successfully interpreted—nonetheless *functioned*. Did it matter then, if we could no longer grant it any ultimate reality?

That stop sign might not really be there. Its redness and its eight-ness might just be functions of my mind. But does it matter? I had better throw the brakes on, nonetheless! Even if reality cannot be known, *life goes on*. We may not even know the sun really exists, but we can still predict it will rise tomorrow. Better stick with the safe and predictable and DESPAIR of ever really knowing the truth. Has not all this contributed to our modern emphasis on functionalism, utilitarianism, and efficiency at the expense of Holy Mystery? At any rate, since the Enlightenment, what works, what is materially utilitarian, is ever in the ascendant.

To be sure, the Enlightenment also demolished vast tracts of medieval fallacy and myth. We Catholics need to recognize this—even

whilst our hearts weep for “the baby thrown out with the bathwater.” For even if millennia of superstition has been peeled away, the West has abandoned the Mystery of Calvary—and idolized empiricism and rationalism in its stead.

### The Rise of Materialism

NOW, IDOLIZING empiricism and rationalism inevitably means *idolizing materialism*. For it is material things, which are known via the senses and reason. It is *only matter* that can be dissected into units, quantified, and calculated. When empiricism and reason are prioritized above faith and spiritual sensitivity, we inevitably *prioritize* that which *can be seen, counted, and measured*: MATTER.

When this happens, the realm of the Spirit—which can neither be proven, calculated, nor converted into statistics—becomes *de-prioritized*. Thus has the Soul of the World been afflicted, not simply by commercial and capitalist materialism, but scientific and philosophical materialism as well.

Despair has become the order of the day. It is a despair characterized by the oft-repeated refrain: “We do not know and we can never know.” A vacuum has arisen, which permits numerous explanations of religion to emerge. And *nature abhors a vacuum*. The vacuum once created—is it any wonder content rushes in to fill it? Thus Marx lamented religion constituted “the opium of the people, the sigh of the oppressed” whilst Freud reduced it to repressed libido.

Now, this iconoclasm of values was seldom more explicit than in Carnap and Ayer’s *Logical Positivism*, which gained a notable following in the Twentieth Century. For Logical Positivism maintained only statements capable of rational or empirical proof could be deemed meaningful. And so it dismissed all statements incapable of such verification as “meaningless.” Abortion is a crime! Meaningless. Behold the beauty of Glendalough! Meaningless, as well. God is love?

Hopelessly meaningless. Children depend on their mother's love? Still meaningless—at least without proof

Here I am reminded of something Kim, my wife, once saw on television. For there, she saw that learned Cambridge scientists had succeeded in proving maternal touch was beneficial to infants. Presumably, sufficient cold, hard data had now been collected to verify this. And this epic “discovery” was deemed worthy of television coverage!

### **Enlightenment Despair**

HERE, I say, are historical trajectories that have literally created hell on earth—whether it be the collective hell of the atheist regimes inspired by Marx or the individual hell of the soul lost in despair and turning to Freud. In the past, untold millions of souls possessed faith as their birthright. Now, they spend their lives with all hope crushed—crushed by the malign fruit of the Enlightenment. Here I would introduce a term we will use recurrently in these pages: *Enlightenment Despair*.

Let me elaborate by telling you, Lector, how the terribly agony of Enlightenment Despair was brought home to me, not so long ago, by a dear friend of mine. For my friend presented me with a poem. Now, my friend, I think, is agnostic, if not downright atheist, and clearly this poem spoke to him. Moreover, this poem comes from one of the most celebrated poets of our age—Philip Larkin—and no doubt Larkin's success owes much to the fact that he captures what countless people feel today. But let us consider some lines from Larkin's poem and imagine what it must mean to feel like this:

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.  
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.  
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.  
Till then I see what's really always there:

Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,  
Making all thought impossible but how  
And where and when I shall myself die.  
Arid interrogation: yet the dread  
Of dying, and being dead,  
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.  
The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse

. . . .

But at the total emptiness for ever,  
The sure extinction that we travel to  
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,  
Not to be anywhere,  
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.  
This is a special way of being afraid  
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,  
That vast, moth-eaten musical brocade  
Created to pretend we never die,  
And specious stuff that says No rational being  
Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing  
That this is what we fear—no sight, no sound,  
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,  
Nothing to love or link with,  
The anaesthetic from which none come round.<sup>6</sup>

Here is the work of a man in hell—suffering acutely from the deathly vacuum materialism has generated. May God have mercy on his soul and the souls of all those afflicted by the same terrible dread, ennui and meaninglessness.

Here we see some consequences of the “enlightened” loss of faith. Yet not simply faith that is endangered, but every value—whether specifically religious or not. *Meaning itself* is decimated by a legion of reductionisms. Here is the result of idolizing all which can be

measured and calculated. Here is the outcome of marginalizing the unseen.

Be that as it may, the educated, conscientious reader may object that I ignore the benefits of the Age of Reason. Many things we take for granted today—such as the right to practice one’s own religion—certainly emerged with the Enlightenment. Does this mean the *entire* Enlightenment worldview was necessary for progress, then? Was there no hope of advancing culturally, other than with a rationalism that usurped faith and a materialism that killed the Spirit? Was the *wholesale destruction of religious values* needed to birth Enlightenment ideals of liberty and democracy? Was it truly necessary to cast souls like Larkin’s into materialistic hell?

I do not deny certain human rights emerged with the Enlightenment—but I will not labor the point either. This point is already labored *ad nauseam* by the triumphalist secular culture, which remains utterly blind to Larkin’s hell and the hell of millions like him.

In any event, there is staggering irony here. We are told secular, “enlightened” thinking has ushered in a glorious era of undreamed human rights. One may legitimately wonder, however, whether there has ever been so much surveillance, control and pressure to conform, than during the present epoch of “freedom.” And what with increasing bureaucracy, so-called “political correctness,” corporate power and all the rest, there is grave cause to suspect that still worse is yet to come.

### **The Destruction of Traditional Values**

BUT let us return to Logical Positivism. Because this philosophy discarded not simply religious values, but indeed *every other kind* of value, it eventually appeared too radical for many souls. However, one might argue the Logical Positivists were only the *visible* tip of the Enlightenment iceberg. In other words, their forthright denial of

meaning only rendered explicit what lurked beneath the surface of modern thought.

Beneath the surface of consciousness, there hulked an enormous, icy, rigid, mass, which subliminally worked to devalue, relativize, or outright dismiss meaning in nearly every sphere beyond that of scientific materialism. And so, even if Western culture has not yet stigmatized every value as meaningless—like the Logical Positivists did—it remains headed in the same direction.

For how else to explain the predominant *relativism* of our age? We have become terrified of any objective truth beyond empirical reality. The *fact* of two sexes male and female, for example, is an empirical reality. But the *truth* that marriage is the God-given way of uniting the two sexes cannot be empirically demonstrated. Thus, it is claimed that marriage between a man and a woman possesses no objective reality. Instead, it is simply *relative* to our cultural conditioning. For relativism, values are referent not to God, but *conditions in the material world*. Thus, stepping back from Relativism, we see that it is yet another expression of materialism—a *de facto* materialism, at very least.

The cultural consequences seem clear. For example, pornography was once *self-evidently* wrong: indecent and disturbing. And now? Well, one cannot *prove* our forebears' outrage at gratuitous sexuality was justified. Perhaps they were just conditioned that way? Perhaps it was just a meaningless taboo? Perhaps graphic sex and violence are not such bad things after all? Certainly, we are no longer sure pornography should be controlled by law.

Do you ever wonder, Lector, if we are headed for a culture where non-monogamous “marriage” (amongst three people say) or even sex with animals might no longer be condemned? What of incest and necrophilia? Can you *prove* these things are wrong with cold, hard data? I am sorry if I evoke nausea, Lector. But my point is, we no longer *trust* our feelings of disgust. We were once disgusted by

gratuitous sex and violence; now we scratch our heads and ask if our feelings are not just societal constructs. We doubt. Is it not possible my disgust is just relative to my cultural conditioning? How can I be *certain*?

### **On Naming the Monster**

MATERIALISTIC ideology now rules our lives in all manner of ways, which may be hardly obvious at all because they all appear so normal today. However, one way of making things obvious is *by naming them*. This is what I have tried to do in this book by introducing terms like “Enlightenment Despair” or “Secular Materialism.”

Still, the immense, overarching phenomena I try to name with these terms hardly lends itself to neat and tidy labels. Naming such things seems crucial to me, yet it remains difficult indeed. Moreover, we face a further, related difficulty in these pages. This has to do with common names that are frequently misunderstood. Earlier, then, we dealt with the term “capitalism,” which, alas, is frequently misunderstood as nothing more than “free enterprise.”

And now, I want to say something of the names “liberal” and “liberalism.” For I use them with a certain regret. But why? Does not liberalism sum up the last centuries’ trajectory toward ever more materialistic “freedom”? Economic liberalism: Does this not describe capitalists seeking almost-unlimited freedom for the market? Theological liberalism: Does this not describe theologians seeking freedom from the “constraints” of tradition (e.g., by attempting to “demythologize” it)? Social liberalism: Has this not resulted in travesties such as the “right” to abortion and flooding the world with heretofore unimaginable filth in the name of “free speech”?

What is my regret? Is it not evident I am a conservative author? Is it not natural that conservatives like myself lambaste their “enemy” with terms like “liberal”? However, I feel no relish for making

enemies with polarizing binaries such as conservative-liberal. Moreover, I see heartfelt compassion in many so-called “liberals,” which only elicits my respect. From my youth, I recall with a shudder that uniquely American pejorative: “Bleeding Heart Liberal”—as though *a heart that cared* were a sorry thing! People actually sneered at bleeding hearts! Yet a bleeding heart is all to do with the Sacred Heart of Jesus! There was, in fact, once a Catholic order of the Bleeding Heart. The exact origin of the American pejorative “Bleeding Heart Liberal” is lost to us—but it is quite possibly rooted in the anti-Catholic bigotry that once thoroughly pervaded the United States.

At any rate, I pray for more Bleeding Heart Conservatives. And this book aspires to a bleeding heart conservatism that realizes our flight from tradition *hurts* people, just as much as capitalism hurts people. Indeed, for the Catholic of Faith, it is clear the liberal destruction of tradition is hurting people—real living, breathing people—even more than the liberal economics of our age.

Here, then, is what we mean by liberalism in these pages: an exaggerated emphasis, even idolatry, of liberty—to the exclusion, even suppression, of the faith, tradition, and religious sensitivity, which open the soul out to everything that transcends purely material things. This liberalism, then, is inextricably intertwined with materialism and secularism. It has advanced across the world since the Enlightenment and it took another mighty step “forward” with the cultural and sexual revolution of the 1960s, which paved the way for “rights” to abortion, pornography, gay “marriage,” and all the rest.

Today, the idolaters of liberty claim the mere presence of religion in the public square amounts to oppression. Meanwhile, the fact that untold religious people feel their liberty robbed by a difficult-to-name secular ideology counts for nothing whatsoever.

A monstrous ideology is at work in the modern world. Here, again, is why it must be named. For the fact this monster is almost impossible to name precisely is part of the problem! The monster

draws strength from the fact that it is not named—whilst souls are ravaged in the process. Lacking better words, I evoke this monster with terms “Enlightenment Despair” or “liberalism”—in the sense indicated above.

However, I know my language is far from ideal. For liberal people are seldom monsters! Whilst I know theological liberalism destroys precious faith, social liberalism destroys unborn children, and economic liberalism destroys the poor, I also know the problem here is usually ideology and not people. And so I cannot help but admire genuine Bleeding Heart Liberals everywhere. For to the extent their hearts are truly bleeding, to that same extent, they imitate the *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 127–28.

<sup>2</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (Norfolk Press, VA: IHS Press), 122.

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity* (Norfolk, VA: IHS Press 2001), 26–27.

<sup>4</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1992), 223.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 51–52, 133.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Larkin, “Aubade,” *Philip Larkin: Collected Poems* (New York: Farrar-Straus-Giroux, 1988), 208.

### III

## The Wind of the Tudors

*One of us is English-speaking and Protestant.*

*One of us is not a Protestant, but has no concept of Christianity—save that which Calvin wrought.*

*One of us has not the slightest idea what a Sacrament is.*

*One of us has always had the wind at his back.*

**I**F WE ARE riding bicycles, with the wind at our backs and we ride at exactly the same speed as the wind, we may be unconscious of any breeze at all. All the while, it pushes us, supports us, carries us forward, perhaps even toward destinations we do not really want to go. But it is certainly easier this way. Unconsciousness is often easier! Then, one day, we stop and turn to face the wind. Only then, when we stand against the prevailing current and feel it smack us in the face, do we become *conscious* that, all our lives, we have been borne by the wind—perhaps along with all our friends and family as well. But what are we to do, if we now see that we have formed one headlong collective rush—like lemmings for the sea? Clearly, the first step entails becoming conscious of the true nature of this wind.

In this chapter, we continue looking at materialism, particularly the Anglosphere variety. But we will turn especially to the Reformation, which not only profoundly shaped the Anglo-American mind, but also very definitely led to materialism. My book revolves on these points and it may seem that I belabor them. If I do, it is precisely because, like the wind at our backs, our cultural heritage can

remain scarcely registered at all.

For many Catholic converts, however, the situation is different—for, as G.K. Chesterton clearly recognized, the convert now stands in a different *cosmos* to the one he was reared in. Certainly, it was only after my conversion that I became conscious of a subliminal Protestant heritage I had never noticed before. For once again, it appeared “normal” to me—“just the way things are.” Yet the Catholic convert often realizes that “just the way things are” is actually quite peculiar to his own cultural upbringing. Here is something he will notice particularly, if he is given much to study. For now, he begins to read rather different literature than he did formerly. Now, he encounters very different minds—saints, theologians, philosophers, historians—who further evoke this strange, new cosmos. And the Anglo convert with Protestant roots will notice the disjunction between this Catholic universe and the Protestant influences he inherited at birth, but perhaps never really reflected on. Now, this unconscious inheritance stands out *in relief*.

Let me illustrate by returning to my own origins. There was hardly any *conscious* Christianity in my childhood. Certainly, by the time I was baptized as an adult, my father had long ceased to consider himself a Christian (if indeed he ever had). However, my father still had Christian roots. His own father was a Congregationalist missionary. And after I became Catholic, how I recognized the subtle, yet enduring, power of Protestant Englishness. For my father was visibly disturbed by my conversion! I had been baptized Anglican and had I remained an Anglican, my father would never have become agitated. Nor would I have seen his anti-Catholic prejudice, for I had lived with it all my life, without ever realizing its existence. It was only by turning and facing the wind that I registered the Protestant currents that had always been, unconsciously, at my back.

Later, I would not simply be a convert, but a Catholic living in Catholic countries: Ireland, France, and Spain. This experience of

being an Anglophone Catholic in these very different lands transformed my perspective. Not only did my Protestant heritage become starkly visible in those settings—so, too, did its innate connection with my Englishness.

I turn to my teenage memories of England. Having left America in 1980, I went to live with my nonagenarian grandfather, who could still recall seeing Queen Victoria as boy. Probably sometime in the 1890s, he had seen the monarch of the British Empire. He had, as I say, spent his adult years as a Protestant missionary. Through him, I can still see something of that Protestant English Nineteenth Century, which gave birth to the Twentieth and still lives on in British attitudes today. (In 1982, for example, St. John Paul II visited London and fully nineteen percent of Londoners objected.)<sup>1</sup>

As a teenager, I thought nothing of such things. Their significance only emerged later, as I puzzled over my father's reactions to my conversion. But as I did, it became clear my Victorian grandfather was immersed in that general Nineteenth-Century British prejudice against "Papists." This orientation was evidently passed along to his son. And it persisted in my father's soul, till the day he died.

Although my father was no longer Christian, still he was carried by the wind of the past. A Victorian wind, one could say. But why stop there? A Georgian wind? Why not? A Tudor wind of Henry VIII, who razed the monasteries to the ground and made himself head of a new denomination, denying the Holy Father? A Tudor wind, which likewise denied the Blessed Virgin and the *Seven-fold* Mystery of the Sacraments? (For however one regards the Anglican-Catholic dispute regarding the Sacraments, the *Seven* Sacraments did not survive the Tudors. And the cultural effects of an entire people being deprived of even a single Sacrament—Confession say—are obviously immense.)

At any rate, the Tudor Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I begat a tornado of change. And whilst it cannot be denied that there

were those who genuinely adhered to the Lutheran and Calvinist doctrines being introduced into the British Isles, baser motives cannot be denied either. Not only the Crown, but also the wealthy, ruling classes benefitted enormously from the seized monastic property that was transferred into their hands, and the use of ruthless political power was crucial to sustaining the new order. Thus, Catholicism in England was brutally repressed for centuries—a repression that included executions, torture, imprisonment, fines, plus a variety of penal laws to ensure conformity amongst the English (and Irish). And the effects of this “wind of destruction” still reverberate across the Anglosphere to this day. But it was only after converting to Catholicism that I could see this clearly. And it was only many years later, that I could appreciate some telling words by that great Anglo-French Catholic Hilaire Belloc. For Belloc possessed a penetrating understanding of the Anglosphere’s predicament:

With the exception of Ireland, the area covered by English speech—that is, Great Britain, the white Dominions, and the United States—have *a character of their own* so far as the Catholic Church is concerned.

The English-speaking world, though now morally broken up, had *a common root*. Its institutions, at their origin, sprang from the *English Protestant Seventeenth Century*.

The American social groups arose for the most part as emigrant colonies with a definitely religious origin, and nearly all of them with an origin strongly anti-Catholic. In England, Scotland and Wales the Catholic Church had been defeated by 1605. Even at the highest estimate and including all who vaguely sympathized with Catholicism, we find it was by 1688 no more than a seventh or an eighth of England in numbers, much less of Scotland, and

in both countries failing.

It dwindled after 1688 [following a further wave of Catholic oppression] to a tiny fragment—about one percent—and that pitiful atom was of no account in the national life nor of any effect on national institutions. From such a source flowed first the colonial system of America, next that of the Dominions. Of course, so general a statement needs modification. South Africa was . . . Dutch; the New World had Dutch origins in one of its states and Catholic traditions in two others. But, in outline, the generalization is true.

The stuff of all this culture was one from which Catholicism had been driven out, and till the mid-Nineteenth Century the United States, Great Britain and her Colonies had little need to reckon with the Faith within their own boundaries.

In our own time all that has largely changed. The chief agent of the change has been the Irish people dispersed by the famine. They brought a large Catholic body into England, Australasia, Canada and America. . . . Catholic minorities and Catholic influences have appeared in the English-speaking world, but have appeared in societies of an historical foundation different from that upon which other parts of the Protestant culture repose. [Italics mine]<sup>2</sup>

*Other parts of Protestant culture repose:* Belloc is referring here to other Protestant countries such as Germany and Holland. And he explains why the situation of the *Anglophone* Catholic is different from the Catholic minorities in those countries:

Where a very large Catholic population is part of the State . . . where the character of Catholicism is familiar to all, holding an ancient historic position, and where large Catholic societies of the same blood and speech lie just over the frontiers. *Catholic literature, ideas, history are known.*

*But in the English-speaking world it is otherwise.* There Catholicism reentered late as an alien phenomenon after the character of society had become “set” in an anti-Catholic mold. There all national literature, traditions, law and especially history were (and are) fundamentally anti-Catholic.

All the Philosophy of Society was long settled in the anti-Catholic mood before the first recrudescence of Catholicism appeared.

Therefore it is inevitable that the Catholic body within this English-speaking world should breathe an air which is not its own and should be more affected by a non-Catholic or anti-Catholic spirit than could be possible in the other Protestant nations wherein an ancient Catholic culture exists with unbroken traditions.

. . .

Similarly the great body of [continental] literature in the Catholic culture is closed to these minorities of Catholics in the English-speaking world. They have no powerful daily press. They get nearly all their news and more than half their ideas from papers anti-Catholic in direction. The books which make the mind of the nation help to make

the mind of its Catholic minority—and that literature is, in bulk, vividly anti-Catholic. [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

All this became conscious to me when I finally went to live in Catholic countries. There I saw Belloc is right: The Anglophone Catholic (apart from the Irish) is in a *unique position*—different even from German or Dutch Catholics. He has far less access to writing and thinking that has *not first been filtered* through an alien—usually hostile—lens to his Catholicism.

Now, the situation has somewhat improved since Belloc wrote the above in 1929, yet it subtly persists, often with insidious effect (as I hope to show in these pages). The Wind of the Tudors has cut English Catholicism off from the rest of the Church in a peculiar way. Elsewhere, it was different. Catholics had more immediate access to Catholic literature and press. Yes, Catholicism is markedly different outside my native America and England. But I only recognized this by living in Ireland, France, and Spain. Only then were my eyes opened to how much the Anglosphere peoples, even English or American Catholics, still pay the price of the Wind of the Tudors.

### **On Christian Materialism**

BUT the Wind of the Tudors (and indeed the Protestant wind elsewhere) entailed a further price—it led to materialism within Christianity itself

And here we turn to another theme in this book—that of materialistic Christianity: both Protestant and Catholic. Here we will not attempt to sketch out a lengthy historical argument as to how reformed Christianity, stripped of the Sacraments, along with other aspects of the Catholic Mystery (e.g., the mysteries of the Rosary) inevitably fostered materialism in the West. That point should already be obvious to Catholics of Faith. But I do want to consider some

specific instances of contemporary Christian materialism that are particularly relevant for the chapters on the New Age that follow. For, as I shall suggest, the Anglo-American New Age phenomenon exists as a revolt against materialistic Christianity—above all Protestant Christianity. And perhaps the best way I can illumine my meaning here is to turn, again, to my own life-story.

For, as I have said, my American upbringing gave me no understanding of the Christian Mystery. But after I went to live with my retired missionary grandfather in England, I gained a limited sense of Protestant Christianity. Out of duty, I attended his low Protestant congregation each Sunday and heard long sermons, which said nothing to my soul. Bored stiff, I fidgeted in my pew. Had the sacramental Mystery been present there, something might have stirred in my depths, but there was not a hint of anything remotely like this.

Later, I returned to live in the United States. My mother, who had remained there when I left, needed me. She was dying. My mother had changed in the years I was away; she had joined that vast American contingent that is “born again.” Living with my mother, I now encountered a different Protestantism—evangelical Christianity. (Although I no longer endured interminable Sunday sermons in a pew, for my mother was somewhat housebound.) Instead, I dutifully watched Sunday morning television with her, where nearly every channel was blanketed by Protestant televangelists.

These long mornings also said nothing to my soul. For this Protestantism seemed so very *literal*—which is to say, again, *materialistic*. Why does literalism amount to materialism? It is because *only matter* can be understood in *purely literal, unequivocal* terms. Think, for example, of gold. As a *material*, gold literally only means one thing: the metal gold, which occupies Number 79 on the periodic table of elements. This is because an atom of gold has exactly 79 protons in its nucleus. If that number is anything else—one subatomic proton more or less, 78 or 80—it is not gold. As a material

element, gold means unequivocally one thing.

But if we speak of *spiritual* gold, we might mean many things. In America, an evangelical Christian tried to convert me. He assured me Heaven would be made of gold—a city *literally* made of gold! I pressed him. What would we be living in? Golden houses he replied. What would we travel in? Golden cars. *Everything* would be gold. I wonder if he would have said the cars were fueled by liquid gold? For him, a scriptural metaphor employing “gold” could mean *nothing other* than a literal metallic substance. Here is materialism.

Then there was Creationism, in which “seven days” meant *nothing other* than “seven twenty-four hour periods.” Literal thinking like this spells materialism. It means renouncing spiritual mystery, which can never be calculated or quantified in precise literal terms. Here is a different sort of materialism from the Enlightenment philosophy we met previously. Yet it amounts to the same thing: stripping Holy Mystery from the World.

American Evangelical Christianity was materialistic in another way, too. It was steeped in the Pentecostal “prosperity gospel.” After all these years, I still recall being enjoined by televangelists to “attack my lack”—that is my lack of wealth—by handing over my money to them. By donating money to their work, God would surely reward me! This breed of Christianity may seem exotic to many Europeans. But a global perspective is called for. The so-called prosperity gospel is endemic to Pentecostalism and Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity now amounts to twenty-five percent of global Christianity. As John L. Allen Jr. remarks, Pentecostalism might be construed as the second major world “denomination” after Catholicism—larger than the Orthodox, Lutheran, and Anglican numbers combined.<sup>4</sup>

In a materialistic society, countless souls hunger for mystery. Materialistic religion will never satisfy this hunger. At any rate, my own hunger for the transcendent led me, in time, to the New Age movement. For I had not the slightest inkling of the Catholic Mystery.

I felt no mystery on those interminable Sunday television shows, nor in my grandfather's congregation. I neither saw, nor experienced any Sacraments. How many of us Anglophones—with the Tudor wind ever at our backs—*have not the least idea* of what a Sacrament even is?

I wonder what would have happened to me, had I encountered *another* Christianity: the Christianity of Sacramental Mystery? And, whilst this Mystery certainly exists in Orthodox Eastern Europe, it is the Catholic Church, which has long-guarded this Mystery in the West and (until recently, at least) treated it reverently *as* Mystery.

In any event, I know the Protestant Christianity painted here is not the only one there is. But it was *the only Christianity I saw*. For many Anglophones, it is the only Christianity *they will ever see*. Years after my English wife converted to Catholicism, her agnostic mother enquired if this meant she now believed in biblical literalism! Tragically, one can be far removed from the Church and know nothing whatsoever of Christianity—except materialism like this.

Whilst this tragedy often happens in the Anglosphere, it is less likely in countries of Catholic heritage. In Spain or France, people might accuse Christianity of being priest-ridden, superstitious mumbo-jumbo. But they are far less likely to imagine golden houses in heaven or creation in precise twenty-four hour periods!

Whatever the case, Christianity stripped of sacred mystery is not limited to Protestant Fundamentalism. For it certainly exists in Protestant Liberalism as well. Here we recall that school of liberal theology pioneered by the likes of Rudolf Bultmann. For learned doctors like Bultmann devoted their lives to intellectual pursuits such as *demythologization*. They argued, for example, that the Resurrection must be dismissed as mythological—because miracles were incompatible with the creed of scientific materialism. (We cannot, in good conscience, say science—because science *by itself* cannot declare the non-existence of miracles. Only the *faith* of scientific materialists

affirms this dogma.)

### A Brief Note on Catholic Materialism

HERE, Lector, you may well ask: what of Catholic materialism? Is there not Catholic Fundamentalism as well? Well, *strictly* speaking, no—because Catholicism, by definition, is not concerned with going *back* to fundamentals, but rather going *forward* with developing tradition. Fundamentalism: the word was coined in a Protestant American context, which sought to get “back to basics.” This means to say: stripping away tradition, which is the *precise opposite* of Catholicism! Still, in a looser sense, it would be a lie to deny Catholic Fundamentalism exists as well.

And is there materialistic Catholic liberalism? The pitiful answer is yes, of course. For Catholic theologians followed that abject trail into the wilderness blazed by Bultmann *et al.*—particularly since the so-called “Spirit of Vatican II” paved their way by stripping down the Catholic Mystery. Many a Catholic theologian today is but the heir of liberal Protestantism. We will not say much more at this point, for the theme of liberal Catholic materialism is explored in-depth in the second section of this book. For now, let the following severe words from Valentin Tomberg suffice to amplify our meaning:

Christ’s saying to Pilate: “My Kingdom is not of this world,” is valid also for Christianity and for the Church. Now the so-called “demythologizing” humanist theologians want to adapt Christianity and the Church to this world, to make it into a piece of this world. They call it “modernizing”—adaptation to the “spirit of the age” and its requirements, including its “progress.”

...

A German theologian and Priest “consoled” a friend of mine in a conversation by stating that the angels (including the archangels Michael and Gabriel) have *no reality*—according to the most recent and now apparently universally accepted theology. They are merely personifications of human soul-forces and thus and only thus did an “angel” come with the annunciation to the Virgin Mary. It seems that psychology takes priority over the Holy Scripture and Tradition.

This and similar methods and teachings of theology are clearly symptoms of *apostasy from Christianity*—which indeed works in this world, but is not of it.

...

A strong movement is working within the Church which has chosen “this world” with its pretensions and demands. It seems that this movement is drawn with irresistible force to the human sphere belonging to the realm of time. It wants to be human (and humanistic) and up-to-date (“progressive”). Thereby it subjects itself to the laws of time, which is the path of inevitable degeneration, decline, and death.

...

Demythologization carried to its conclusion yields nothing other than the “dialectical materialism” of Marxism. “Judas, what thou doest, do quickly; but if thou betrayest, at least do not do it with a kiss” [italics mine].<sup>5</sup>

## A Sclerotic World

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, we considered various routes by which the supernatural Christian worldview of the Middle Ages yielded to Secular Materialism. Now we have seen how even Christianity is hardly exempt from ongoing processes of sclerosis, whereby the faith becomes coarsened and resistant to the spirit. The Christian religion abjectly aligns itself with the mounting materialism of the West.

This world of deepening materialism—I call it a *sclerotic world*. It is a world that hardens and becomes more rigid as God-given Mystery and Soul depart.

Death: its exact definition is departure of the soul. Soulless, sclerotic, materialistic, rigidifying, reifying: all these words mean somewhat different things. Yet I often use them interchangeably in this book to evoke *related* phenomena. For materialism is the result of interrelated processes, even if these appear, at first, unconnected. Thus, we see this stripping of spiritual mystery in scientific and philosophical materialism. But we also find it in consumerism. And we witness it in a Biblical literalism, which sees Heaven paved in streets of gold.

Countless examples of cultural sclerosis can be given. What of brutal modern capitalism? Of course, for Marx was perfectly right that treating human labor as a *commodity* was a reification of the person. It treats the human being like an *object*. Pornography does the same. What of junk food from those ubiquitous temples of the Golden Arches? Sclerosis exists there too, for food originally imbued with the life and mystery of God is rendered as inorganic and inert as it is humanly possible to do (which in turn serves to render dead and inorganic all those who eat it). What of contemporary architecture, constructed to meet the bottom line of cost, with no hint of creativity in all its monotonous ninety-degree angles? Some folk solemnly decree that one should celebrate modern architecture alongside the old.

But I wonder how much they contemplate children's tender psyches formed in concrete environments, where not the slightest hint of poetry exists amidst the near-uniform slabs of buildings that will engulf them from their earliest years.

All this we will continue to explore in this book. But in closing this chapter, I turn to Harrie Salman who, in the space of a single, short passage very much sums up what I am trying to say here regarding our hardening, sclerotic world:

Modern culture shows a journey into hell. . . . Tendencies that promote a materialistic hardening of the human soul are to be observed everywhere. Music has gone through a development ranging from war marches and rock and roll to heavy metal, rap and techno-music. . . . In films and videos, ever more taboos are broken in the domains of violence and sex. Wars and violence become ever more inhumane. Political protest has hardened into terrorism. Youth culture has walked a path from the hippies to the skinheads. The manipulation of consciousness is becoming ever more subtle. In international politics we see increasingly aggressive military interventions and in international economy the defense of individual and national interests is turning social life into a battlefield where the poor can only lose.<sup>6</sup>

We must move on. I turn now from the materialistic culture of the de-Christianized West to a subculture that exists *in reaction* to materialism. The people in this subculture aspire, at least aspire, to be less materialistic and more “spiritual” (whatever that might mean). Whether their aspirations succeed or not is another matter. Still, here is an arena many turn to, as I once turned, thirsting for Mystery in a desert of materialism. For in a sclerotic world, many a soul seeks out

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Sewell, *Catholics: Britain's Largest Minority* (London: Viking, 2001), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1992), 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> John L. Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 378.

<sup>5</sup> Valentin Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!: Meditations of a Christian Esotericist on the Mysteries of the Raising of Lazarus, the Ten Commandments, the Three Kingdoms, and the Breath of Life* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2006), 121–22.

<sup>6</sup> Harrie Salman, *The Inner Sun* (Cape Town, South Africa: Novalis Press 2000), 98.

## IV

### An Initial Look at New Age Ideology

*One of us believes that Dogma, Hierarchy, and “Popery” are obstacles to Freedom.*

*One of us believes that only “holistic spirituality” renders freedom to find “one’s own truth.”*

HOW MANY souls today feel unable to adapt themselves to the materialistic currents of mainstream society! They remain haunted, it would seem, by a mysterious, inchoate sense for a world unknown, a world beyond the diktats of materialism. Moreover, they even thirst for this world—as if feeling themselves parched and dry in a dusty, arid land. Such souls experience genuine spiritual hunger. But where can they turn?

Whilst some indeed find their way to the Catholic Mystery, many remain forever disenchanted with “organized religion” (as they often disdainfully denote it). Put more precisely: they are disenchanted with their *preconceived images* of religion. For how many of these folk have never really experienced religious discipline?! How often the only thing they know are stereotypes! Yet how confidently religious institutions are dismissed as passé now, with the bold assertion that religion only limits one’s spiritual horizons. But frequently these people have simply uncritically absorbed prejudices propagated by secular elites. Or, as we mean to explore, they have uncritically absorbed an Eastern, esoteric ideology, which claims humanity is now evolving beyond religion.

All this entails millennia of Judeo-Christian tradition being

thrown to the wind. Instead, something vaguely called “spirituality” is honored, but a spirituality lacking the clear discipline of religion. Yet whilst such “free spirits” deny a common creed, they remain united by the same ideas, the same literature, the same associations, customs, and networks!

Yes, “spiritual seekers” gather around mutually accepted notions, which function, we will argue, as *de facto* doctrines—even dogmas. They gather, too, in *de facto* congregations, festivals, and communities. Here may be entailed a temporary locale, such as a small, weekly “sharing” in some individual’s front room. Or there could be a virtual arena, such as an Internet forum. There might even be a “feast,” attracting thousands for a few short days—such as the annual *Mind Body Spirit* festival in London. Indeed, there are even full-blown permanent collectives, such as the Findhorn community in Scotland. I have experienced all these and more, during my decades of engagement with the New Age movement.

Thus, a distinct cultural movement exists, which we call “New Age” in this book. However, I well know the designation “New Age movement” remains controversial in some quarters. Some will say: “There is no such movement—there are only ‘free spirits’ who have awakened to the truth that religion is unnecessary. Such individuals freely choose their own independent spiritual paths.” And perhaps they will add: “speak of a Marxist movement or a Jungian movement, if you must—with their clearly defined *weltanschauungen*. But do not class these awakening individuals as a movement—still less a ‘New Age’ movement. Do not limit us by names like New Age!”

All this is somewhat understandable. What I call the New Age movement is sprawling. It *appears* greatly diversified, diffuse, amorphous, not easily categorized. However, the fact a phenomenon is not easily nameable, hardly means it does not exist! For real identity may be extant at levels not easily captured in words. Subtle, cohesive—even binding—structures may exist, which remain unrecognized by

the “free spirits” entangled in them. A New Age movement (even creed) can actually flourish—paradoxically, we shall argue—precisely because it remains so vague and undefined.

In my case, however, the movement *was* clear. I never had any problem calling myself “New Age.” At an early age, I dropped out of mainstream society to join Findhorn—perhaps the premier New Age community on the planet. And even after I left, I identified with the *core* of this movement. Other souls feel neither so identified, nor so radical in their commitments to this movement as I did. And yet they remain subtly part of it.

Whether it be controversial or not, I am persuaded of something by thirty-five years of life-experience: There IS a modern spiritual movement that is far more coherent and unified than commonly admitted. Moreover, the “free, broad and inclusive” New Age possesses a definite ideology that naturally excludes all sorts of people (e.g., those who esteem traditional religion). Thus, I can no longer take seriously claims like this: “We are not a movement; we have no creed; we represent a universal, perennial philosophy.” But I declare my conviction knowing full-well, that many—if not most—of the people I have in mind would rather not identify as “New Agers.” In fact, a defining characteristic of these folk is their resistance to labels in general and the “New Age” one in particular!

It hardly seems fair to give people names they do not want. Another appellation is definitely desirable. But which one? Many favor the term “holistic.” The word “holistic,” however, speaks to a legitimate aspiration. It means avoiding materialistic reductionism and understanding things in relationship to a greater whole, rather than simply as isolated parts. True Christianity is very much holistic in this sense. New Agers have no special claim in this department. Moreover, if you probe so-called “holistic” folk, you will usually find they mean something additional by this word—something linked to the notion of being “inclusive.” You may hear them claim to

“include” the whole of spirituality or religion, for example, or that they aspire to be open and embracing toward every spiritual path, without prejudice toward any.

Such people, I know, are sincere when they say such things. They genuinely believe what they espouse. Yet, their movement neither appears “holistic” to me in terms of embracing a greater whole, nor in being inclusive. Instead, it is reductionist and exclusionary. It is reductionist inasmuch as it reduces complex religious concepts down to simplistic notions of a universal common core—something we will discuss shortly. It is exclusionary inasmuch as it marginalizes anyone who will not share its own reductionistic agenda—for example, Christians. No, I cannot call this movement “holistic” (at least not without quotation marks).

Sometimes other terms are used, like “modern spirituality.” But neither am I prepared to endorse such a sweeping, arrogant implication! What of “alternative?” This humbler designation is better, but seems rather vague. No, “New Age” will have to do. It remains, at any rate, the most recognizable name for the movement. It is also what I proudly called myself for long years. Finally, it is a name that, as we shall see, stems from the esoteric roots of the movement—the seminal writings of Alice Bailey.

But I express a certain regret. I speak of New Age friends of mine, whilst knowing many will not like it. But what to do? Even if New Agers frequently dislike them, names remain necessary. Categories are needed to think clearly. Yet the New Age avoidance of names goes hand-in-hand with a tendency to avoid thinking clearly. Indeed, New Agers often reveal remarkable disdain for intellectual discipline with clear terms. My contention is this serves no one—when an amorphous, elusive new religious creed is emerging, with very little consciousness as to how or why.

## **An Underlying Hidden Unity**

THE New Age phenomenon eludes easy identification for many reasons. The subject is so complex—with deep, occluded roots—that the task of exhuming it is far from easy. No short, tidy, crisp definition of the New Age will be offered at the outset. Bear with me, then, Lector, whilst I assemble images: recollections, elements of history, personal impressions, and more. From these, a tapestry, which evokes the hidden unity underlying the New Age, should form.

Indeed, we have begun this work already—invoking at the outset “spiritual seekers” alienated by Western materialism. In a previous age, perhaps these disaffected souls would have become nuns or monks. In our time, however, they appear convinced that religious institutions offer absolutely nothing they cannot find by themselves. How did they arrive at this certainty? Were their confident conclusions rigorously tested through long, sustained enquiry? In my experience, the answer is “no.” Usually, it is a matter of mindlessly regurgitated New Age hearsay. An unconscious ideology is at work. At least, I myself once mindlessly regurgitated such hearsay. Looking back, the same seems true of many others I knew. We automatically assumed Christianity, for example, was replete with antiquated, rigid limitations. It never occurred to us these “limitations” might represent the accumulated wisdom of centuries. No one ever suggested we seriously test our surety that religion had nothing new to offer. Complacency reigns in the New Age, which is hardly based on true comprehension of religion, but rather on incomplete, superficial images of something it hardly understands.

This is true, above all, regarding Christianity. Clearly, Christianity forms the cultural heritage of most New Age folk. And more often than not, this *heritage is Protestant*. As we shall explore, New Age-ism emerges primarily from the countries that were formerly Protestant—English-speaking most of all. It is understandable, therefore, that New Age concepts of Christianity are deeply colored by Protestant inheritance.

With this in mind, I relate my own Protestant heritage and rejection of Christianity. Like so many New Agers, I knew virtually nothing of Catholicism and rebelled against a Protestant Christianity, which appeared to me as dull, platitudinous, and literalist. How many New Agers are just like I was! Indeed, we will argue New Age-ism is more linked to Protestantism than is usually recognized. It parallels the Reformation rejection of religious authority. It emerges principally within Protestant cultures—not Catholic ones. And, like I did, it reacts to a Christianity steeped in Protestant associations. (Admittedly, however, New Agers sometimes rebel against the modern “Protestantized” Catholicism that has emerged since the 1960s and is so “reformed” that it appears nigh-indistinguishable from Reformation Christianity itself)

New Agers, hungering for spiritual mystery, have rarely been exposed to the Catholic Mystery—and in this book I muse on what might happen if they were. Indeed, I dare to ask if the New Age movement would even exist without the Protestant matrix it both emerges from and reacts to.

In any event, New Age-ism is all to do with revolt against a dull, arid conception of religion. Instead, it proclaims an essential, universal, spiritual path that transcends every religion. This transcendent spirituality —so it is said—is only limited and distorted by religions like Christianity. And, although the New Age denies doctrines, here is its first, fundamental dogma: the claim to a superior, unitive spirituality, which is compromised by inferior, divided religions. It follows that the more one “transcends” the separate, divisive religions, the more one achieves that “great universal truth,” which limited religion conceals.

It should surprise no one, then, that Christianity becomes stigmatized for obscuring this “transcendent spirituality.” For like any religion, Christianity, it is said, remains necessarily distorted by its own time and culture. Rarely, if ever, do New Agers suppose their own

spiritual brand could be just as “culture-bound” as they claim Christianity is! Somehow, the idea has taken hold that Twenty-First Century “holistic spirituality” represents a new zenith for the human race: attainment of THE timeless core to every religion ever there was! Where others failed for thousands of years, New Agers have now transcended religious limitations to arrive at an original, pure, uncompromised spiritual essence.

Stated in such bald terms, the arrogance here can fairly take one’s breath away! And if you search New Age texts, dear Lector, you will not always find this stated with such explicit hubris. But dig a little deeper, as you read assertions regarding “the core to religion,” the “universal essence of all faiths” etc. See if you do not detect a breathtaking certainty: “We know better now.”

At any rate, I once supposed something like that myself. It never occurred to me how inflated this claim really was. Certainly, I never imagined my own spiritual vision might be more “culture-bound” than Christianity or indeed that the New Age movement itself stemmed from a very narrow slice of time and culture. One would not go far wrong, I think, in naming this slice as *the North Atlantic Protestant cultures in the aftermath of the 1960s*. And had anyone had told me, then, that Catholicism was more universal—in both time and space—than New Age-ism, I may well have laughed out loud.

Yet paradox of paradoxes! Or perhaps inconsistency of inconsistencies! Whilst the New Age claims to represent a single perennial path, it revels in notions of unparalleled diversity. For there are said to be many ways to “choose one’s own path.” But amidst this putative multitude of “ways,” how is one free to choose one’s own path, *if only one spiritual path exists?*

How to resolve this inconsistency? Personally, I have come to believe New Age spirituality is far less about choice than it claims. It has much more to do with a highly-specific spiritual formation, with a specific history and specific aspirations. All this—as we will explore

in-depth—involves something very different to the Catholic Mystery.

However, the idea of a Catholic Mystery beyond the New Age, a spiritual mystery, which is genuinely, essentially different to their “holistic” spirituality, is likely to bowl New Agers over. A largely unconscious chain of reasoning is seen here—reasoning from false premises. It runs something like this:

- i) There is fundamentally *only one spiritual path*.
- ii) New Agers already possess that path—and therefore:

It follows—*ipso facto*—that the New Age *already offers whatever is genuine within Christianity*.

Self-assured that Catholicism provides nothing of real importance beyond New Age spirituality, the faith of the Church becomes reduced to irrelevant trappings. “Window-dressing” is how one old colleague of mine described it. What she meant was that Catholicism was just another shopfront for the “true, essential spirit” within the shop itself. That was what interested her, not the facade. What can I say? Catholicism is not window-dressing for the “universal New Age path”! But this is what New Agers genuinely believe!

As I say, the New Age masks highly-specific aspirations, with little in common with Christianity. Once again, I return to *the need to step back*. New Agers need to step back from the movement—to gain distance from it—before they can start to recognize its peculiar agenda.

Alas, the difficulty in stepping back is part of the problem! Not only have New Agers rarely experienced the religions they have supposedly transcended, they are frequently—like other religious adherents—buffered inside an environment that rarely looks outside itself. Once I finally left the New Age bubble, I tried to express this to my group of old friends in cyberspace:

Imagine you have spent your WHOLE life getting food

from one single cafeteria. And you think this cafeteria has the most incredible selection—all these different plates. It seems so diverse. You and your friends all love this food. Indeed, you have never eaten anywhere else. There is no need and the food is just wonderful. The variety especially is incredible.

Then one day you step out of the cafeteria, and you realize that all the food belongs to a specific cuisine. Say, Indian or something. So within this cuisine, it appeared so varied. But now you realize that all along, it was actually distinguished by one kind of flavor—say “Indian” flavor. And now [outside] is this totally different food to eat.

The cafeteria in my metaphor is the holistic movement. All those years I thought, what a huge variety. Shamanism, astrology, psychotherapy, holotropic breathing, Alice Bailey etc., etc. How could anyone fault the New Age for not being diverse? But now I stepped out of it—and “left” all my friends, I realized the menu, seen from OUTSIDE the cafeteria, was far less diverse, far less heterogeneous than I realized. It was a united menu composed of very similar ingredients—right across the spectrum.

Moreover, I would add now—it was a *hidden* united menu. What is this menu, why does it exist and where does it come from? These are grave questions. Let me proceed with my tapestry of images, dear Lector.

### **A Transcendent and Essential Spirituality —or One Bound to a Cultural Context?**

NEW AGE spirituality. Now that I am no longer carried, unconsciously, by your wind at my back, how terribly “culture-bound” you look. From whence your off-repeated claim that religion is filled with “secondary, useless elements”? Whence your bold contention these elements must be stripped away to reveal a deeper, underlying, and original truth?

These New Age assertions of superiority to established religion: are they not redolent of Protestantism, that *Northern* European phenomenon, which likewise tried to “purify” the Faith of “secondary, useless elements”? Moreover, as we further explore the “Age of Reason,” I hope it will be patent how much New Age-ism owes to Enlightenment ideology, which, likewise, attacked the Catholic faith.

Yes, the New Age movement is enormously indebted to the Reformation and Enlightenment destruction of tradition. It is furthermore shaped by another, later revolution that drew from these: *the sexual and cultural revolution of the 1960s*.

For in the 1960s, new revolutionaries again sought liberation from past tradition and morality. They built on earlier revolutions and proceeded further. Today’s New Age is shaped by the liberal values spearheaded by the Sixties’ hippy and protest movements.

Instead of standing free of human accretions, then, New Age philosophy is *determined by definite cultural agendas*—with, above all, Northern European origins.

All this becomes visible when one considers the things New Agers condemn as obsolete. These include matters like centralized authority, hierarchy, dogma, and indeed obedience, poverty, and chastity! Here are the selfsame things, which Tridentine Catholicism defended for centuries—defended against the successive waves of Protestantism, the Enlightenment, Liberalism, Communism, as well as many, if not all, aspects of the Sixties’ Revolution. For starting five hundred years ago, the Reformation rejected the old structures of authority, hierarchy, and dogma. And later, Enlightenment rationalism,

liberalism, and secularism did the same. But, during all this time, the Tridentine Catholic Church remained steadfast: the strongest, most resolute, opponent to these currents of “progress.”

Now, if we are Catholics of Faith—trusting that Sanctifying Grace is transmitted via authority, hierarchy, and dogma—what shall we say to all these revolutionary waves? Can we regard wiping-out the Holy Sacraments as anything but reprehensible? Or if one truly believes in the Blessed Virgin, the Holy See, the hierarchy, and the prayers of nuns and monks, can one pretend it matters not when all these are denied? Can one honestly believe the Reformation was anything other than catastrophic—and remain consistent in one’s Catholic faith? Can one easily escape the notion that the *individualistic* interpretation of scripture and *individualistic* assessment of truth has inexorably led to the world of today—with all its hyper-individualism?

The cultural revolution of the 1960s was not created *ex nihilo*! It did not happen out of nowhere. The road had been staked out for centuries beforehand—a road leading toward an ever more liberal, anarchic society. And now, many wished to proceed still further. For previously unacceptable, once *radically liberal* attitudes became commonplace in the 1960s. The Sexual Revolution, of course, manifested in everything from “free love” to miniskirts to widespread pornography, divorce, and the cohabitation of the unmarried. As Philip Larkin sang in *Annus Mirabilis*, his famous poem celebrating the Sexual Revolution:

Sexual intercourse began  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(which was rather late for me)—  
Between the end of the “Chatterley” ban  
And the Beatles’ first LP.<sup>1</sup>

We met Larkin earlier, of course, trapped in the hell of

materialistic despair—something which cannot be entirely disassociated from celebrating libertinism. It is an index of how very much has changed that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was still banned in the late 1950s—even though it is extremely tame compared to hardcore pornography, which no one even considers banning today!

The Sixties revolution was, of course, more than simply sexual. Certainly, there was noble concern and real progress in civil rights and social justice, which is widely and rightly celebrated today. All too often, however, the push for liberation went far beyond what is just. Thus, a new radical feminism protested “oppressive patriarchal structures,” and a woman’s “right” to abortion was championed over the moral tradition of Christianity. Similar revolts against “oppression” led to further liberalization of laws relating to drugs, divorce, pornography, euthanasia, and more.

It is ironic the Sixties’ revolution radically extended the liberalism of recent centuries. It is ironic, I say, because the culture that the Sixties overturned, had, in large measure, been formed by previous liberal revolutions! For although the Sixties rebelled against the last vestiges of Judeo-Christian sexual morality, the West was no longer a deeply Christian society by that time. No. The much-protested “Establishment” was hardly composed of Catholic “reactionaries,” but rather secular elites positively saturated in Enlightenment philosophy. Thus, in addition to repudiating traditional Christian structures of marriage etc., the Sixties’ romantics also rejected the dry, rationalist values of a secular, materialistic order, which they perceived—not without reason!—as bereft of meaning, poetry, and soul.

Yes, the irony is striking. Because, here, the traditional Catholic agreed with them. One may note J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, which exploded into popularity during the 1960s. It was taken up by a youth movement, hungry for the magic their arid culture denied them. However, Tolkien was a deeply traditional Catholic. He was, in fact, a Catholic monarchist and *The Return of the King* can be

read as an expression of his yearnings for Catholic monarchy, indeed for the Sacred Order at the heart of Christendom.

For Tolkien's mind, like any devout Catholic mind, the rational, secular order was bankrupt in a very real sense. The deposited wealth of Western culture—the Sacraments, devotion to Our Lady and the Saints, the prayers of nuns and monks—had long been cleared from the accounts of the English society in which he lived. The vast majority of the Sixties' rebels never knew these treasures. Yet even whilst they revolted against Secular Materialism, their revolution only generated more of the same: the increasingly liberal, materialistic values of the Twenty-First Century.

Still, today's New Age heirs to the Sixties' are unlikely to heed Tolkien's conservative diagnosis of cultural decay. For despite their claims to diversity, News Agers are not conservatives! Almost always, they unthinkingly favor the 1960s liberalization of society. Unbeknownst to them, they are the children of the Protestant Enlightenment and 1960s revolutions.

Speaking personally, however, I could only see this once I stepped back from the world-dominating Anglo-American culture. Yet after I went to live in Catholic Ireland, Spain, and France, it was patent how much the New Age is bound to the once-Protestant Anglosphere.

Now, whilst I was at Findhorn, much was made of how "international" the place was. People remarked how the community brought different peoples together in harmony. Now, there *were* several distinct nationalities living together in this large community. And there was a steady stream of visitors from different lands. Throughout my daily interaction with members and visitors, it was clear that, from Europe, British and Germans predominated, as well as folk from certain smaller northern European countries. For example, Findhorn attracted a disproportionately high number from the (*very* liberal) Netherlands. There were also people from the New World lands,

largely settled from these same countries. Thus, there were Americans, (Anglo-) Canadians and Australians in plenty. All this was considered very international. What was less observed was how very few French, Italians, or Spanish were involved.<sup>2</sup> There were also virtually no Latinos or others from the New World settled by Catholic peoples. By and large, Findhorn's internationalism was confined to Protestant provenance.

Later, this New Age Protestant provenance was further confirmed by my years in Spain and France. It was patently clear the movement found it much harder taking root in these countries. The New Age lacks the same appeal in such lands, because their Catholic heritage still provides a considerable prophylactic. New Age dreams of international and universal appeal are just that: dreams. They do not easily account for the cultures beyond their own Protestant and liberal roots.

### **Rooted in an Anglophone, Esoteric Stream**

WHILST New Age-ism clearly descends from Protestant culture, one can pinpoint its provenance even more specifically. Its epicenter lies clearly in the Anglosphere (above all, in places like California and Britain). Moreover, the movement is rooted in a specific stream of esoteric thinking, *which first expressed itself in English*. That esoteric stream is Theosophy, initiated by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the late Nineteenth Century.

Now, Madame Blavatsky claimed to reveal an ancient Eastern esoteric tradition, for the first time, to Western humanity. And she furthermore asserted inspiration by hidden Indian Mahatmas who now sought to contact Western people. Blavatsky, moreover, was a Russian—yet a Russian who ventured far beyond her native land to deliberately write her works *in English*. Most notable of these is *The Secret Doctrine*—first made un-secret in 1888. Blavatsky's definite

choice of English assumes deeper significance, if one only recalls that, in 1888, English was not the world-conquering language it has become today.<sup>3</sup> Back then, French remained the international language of diplomacy and German perhaps the predominant language of science. Later, Blavatsky's English writings inspired principally British authors who carried her Theosophy forward into the Twentieth Century: Annie Besant, Charles Leadbeater, and, *most significantly*, *Alice Bailey*. All this English writing is critical to understanding the largely English language origins of the New Age movement—a theme we will develop at length in later chapters.

However, as the title of this chapter implies, our present task is a brief, initial survey of Anglophone Theosophy. Later on we hope to unpack Blavatsky's legacy in much greater depth. Although largely forgotten today, Theosophy was highly influential, above all in Britain. In its time, the movement counted hundreds of thousands. And they were hardly a fringe group of lonely eccentrics! Several members of the British Parliament, for example, were self-declared Theosophists. One even finds E.M. Forster's heroine Margaret Schlegel studying Theosophy in *Howard's End*. Clearly, Theosophical ideas spoke to the British and disseminated throughout English culture.

Thus was a prodigious esoteric vision bequeathed to the Anglosphere. We shall explore its detailed contours later on. Let us simply note, for now, it entails a vast, arcane cosmology, which purportedly reveals hidden or occult dimensions of reality. A welter of non-corporeal entities is postulated, working on various "spiritual planes." Some of these are considered "Masters"—beings who were once ordinary humans, but have now transcended the human condition via mysterious processes of initiation. And amongst these once ordinary human beings, it is said, is the "Master Jesus."

It is claimed these "Masters" guide humanity toward ever-higher consciousness. In Theosophy, an evolutionary hermeneutic is applied

to consciousness. Whereas Darwin established the evolution of species, Blavatsky now proclaimed human evolution in terms of spiritual awareness. Theosophists believe *The Secret Doctrine* marked a further evolutionary stage in human consciousness: Humankind had now sufficiently evolved that her grand esoteric vision could be plainly revealed for all to see. For human beings, it is said, can now attain lofty spiritual heights, unattainable by the “unevolved humanity” of ages past.

These concepts were publicly brought to the West via Theosophy and they continue reverberating within the New Age today. Thus, the New Age aspiration toward *synthesis* clearly echoes earlier Theosophy. It entails a hoped-for *united spiritual worldview*, which will supersede the “divisive religious currents of an Old Age.” Likewise, Theosophy anticipated a synthesis of religion and science in the near-future. For, according to Theosophy, the dividing wall between these two realms will be demolished—once the underlying esoteric reality behind them stands revealed. Widespread realization will then follow that spirit and energy, mind and matter are simply interchangeable forms of the same basic stuff of reality. Here is a definite precursor to the “interconnectedness of all life,” which New Agers like to emphasize.

Not all of this, of course, is completely foreign to Christianity. Christians have long recognized Creation possesses a unity—the Hand of a single Creator. Nor should Christians rule out the possibility that science can approach God’s mysteries (to a limited extent, at least). However, there is no replacement for faith. The God of Christianity remains utterly beyond the limits of physical science.

Moreover, New Age aspirations to synthesis sometimes leads to practical applications that rightly and gravely concern the Church. For example, one finds “spiritual technologies” that begin with positive thinking, but lead to notions of mind over matter and—proceeding still further—practical magic. What is absent here? Why, nothing except a personal God who hears our pious prayers of supplication and

daily pours Himself out on the altars of the Church! Yet frequently Our Lord is replaced by a magical operator who aspires to power and control, without heed to humble himself before God.

Now the above constitutes—I well know—an all-too-simplistic précis. It is not easy to introduce the abstruse immensity of Theosophy and its New Age progeny in one fell swoop. But, as we proceed, I hope to clarify how this Eastern, yet English esoteric vision militates against Christianity. For Blavatsky was nakedly, militantly anti-Christian and her legacy has persisted—though usually in less naked, more subtle ways.

By contrast, the situation in the non-English-speaking West is worth noting. Grandiose esoteric visions also arose on the European continent. However, they were markedly less hostile to Christianity. For example, the Austrian Rudolf Steiner broke with the English Theosophists over precisely this issue: They completely failed to comprehend Christianity. Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, was, for Rudolf Steiner, the pivot on which the entire universe turned. However, his esoteric Christian vision remained highly critical of the Church, a tragedy we consider later on. Whilst in France, the situation was different again. Bizarre as it may seem, French esotericists emerged, who not only adored Jesus Christ, but venerated His Church! Here, once more, we glimpse the Latin Catholic resistance to things New Age. Back in the Anglosphere, things were clearly different—and they still remain so today.

### **Further Roots of the New Age**

In this book, we will argue that Theosophy formed the initial matrix of the New Age movement, far more than is generally acknowledged. However, Theosophy is hardly the only source of New Age thinking. Other forms of Eastern philosophy began entering the West, especially the Anglosphere, during the Nineteenth Century. By then, India was

an important part of the British Empire. This status facilitated innumerable cultural exchanges between East and West. Hindus, Buddhists, untold numbers of swamis, gurus, and the like began learning English, bringing new concepts to the Occident: karma, dharma, reincarnation, prana, yoga, and all the rest.

Moreover, Indian culture has long been inclined to *syncretism*—that attitude whereby differing religious beliefs are considered easily combinable, equally valid or interchangeable. Although syncretism certainly found potent expression in Theosophy, Blavatsky nevertheless drew on a much broader Indian cultural matrix.

Yet, if the New Age cannot be reduced simply to Blavatskyite esotericism, neither is it strictly oriental either. Although my conviction, Lector, is that New Age spirituality is *much* more Eastern than is usually conceded. Still, the movement has further roots in Western Esoteric traditions, which likewise publicly emerged during the Nineteenth Century. Before then, these traditions were reserved to long-hidden Masonic and Rosicrucian groupings. Much of this Western esotericism was Anglophone too. Masonry was forged, above all in, in Scotland and England (although there is certainly French and Italian Masonry as well). However, not all European esotericism is Masonic. Rather, Western esotericism is indebted to Rosicrucians, Romantics, Cabalists, Sufis, and many more. It embraces figures as varied as Boehme, Blake, Swedenborg, and Steiner. And many of these people regarded themselves devoutly Christian—unlike most Masons. Yes, Freemasonry proceeds largely from Britain and has long been notably contemptuous of Christianity. But on the European continent, esoteric traditions flourished, which, even if heretical, nevertheless recognized Jesus Christ in ways that neither Madame Blavatsky, nor Masonry ever did.

Now, Catholics may rightly deplore the aberrations of continental esotericism. But the distinction should be made between esotericism that condemned Christianity and that which affirmed it—if not always

the Holy Church. And it is notable indeed how often the first kind of esotericism—whether Blavatskyite or Masonic—took root in English-speaking areas, whereas the second kind was frequently German Protestant.

Further roots of the New Age are easily located in German-speaking *mitteleuropa*. Clearly, “holistic” culture is indebted to the psychotherapy of Freud, Jung, Adler, and Reich, for example. Indeed, both psychotherapeutic theory and practice, which were originally confined to psychoanalysts and their analysands, have generalized outwards throughout the New Age movement and modern culture alike. Moreover, the religiously-minded Jung has been at the forefront of a field of therapies—often called Transpersonal Psychology—which enjoy great favor with New Agers. We explore New Age indebtedness to the therapy culture more fully in our [next chapter](#).

Beyond therapy for the psyche, the New Age is replete with innumerable therapies for the body as well—often labelled as “alternatives” to conventional Western medicine. A few of these, such as homeopathy, are of occidental origin—yet it is remarkable how many do indeed stem from the East: Reiki, acupuncture, Shiatsu, Qigong, yoga, and all the rest.

And there is more, of course! We have to reckon with the enormous influence of so-called “channeled” books. Like many of the key Theosophical books from an earlier era, much more recent works have emerged, which claim the listed author is not the book’s true inspiration. Rather, another entity (so it is said) speaks through the author—one who is invariably received as greater and wiser than a mere human being. This entity is variously cited as a disincarnate spirit, spiritual master (including the “Master Jesus”), or even an extraterrestrial.

Lastly, we can hardly stress enough how much New Age-ism remains beholden to the “progressive” currents of the 1960s counter culture. Second wave feminism emerged in the liberal parts of America

during this time, asserting reproductive “rights,” as well as liberation from “the patriarchy,” “repressive sexual structures,” and more. And, as we shall continue to explore, the New Age cannot be understood without reference to modern liberal dogmas, particularly of an Anglo-American kind. We should also note the global environmental movement, which surfaced in the wake of Rachel Carson’s 1962 ground-breaking book *Silent Spring*. It is hardly surprising that the Green movement has profoundly influenced the New Age. New Agers are, as I say, sensitive, idealistic souls who are frequently appalled by modern materialism. Their shared countercultural origins with the Greens easily account for the faith New Agers frequently display in things like “ecospirituality,” “deep ecology,” “arrogant anthropocentrism,” and all the rest.

### **Some Broad Consequences of Theosophy**

WHAT diversity apparently exists in this New Age! Ecology! Psychotherapy! Eastern religions! Alternative medicine! Western esotericism! Channeled “teachings”! And still further inspirations can be found in paganism, druidism, astrology, paranormal research, indigenous peoples, and more—still more! Here is a vast “spiritual cafeteria”—how can I claim a hidden, unitive ideology lies behind all this?

Nonetheless, Lector, here is my conviction, after decades of experience: the deeper you will dig, the more you will find Anglophone Theosophy at the core of today’s “holistic” thinking. As we shall see, Anglophone Theosophy promoted a syncretism able to embrace almost anything—*except the Judeo-Christian tradition*. Moreover, Blavatsky and her heirs introduced a staggering panoply of esoteric concepts into Western culture. For the first time, Westerners started publicly discussing countless notions entirely novel to the Occident. At least, prior to Theosophy, few Western folk had ever

heard of things like an astral plane, the human aura, chakras, initiation, telepathic Eastern Masters—all of which are still going strong in today's New Age movement. The Victorians were also not overly-acquainted with another commonplace “holistic” idea: namely, that Jesus was not the Son of God, Second Person of the Trinity, but rather a spiritual initiate into whom “the Christ consciousness” entered. (We will return to Theosophical concepts as to how “the Christ” “incarnated” into “the physical plane” through “the initiate Jesus” who later became the “Master Jesus.”)

Yes, Theosophy will be detailed later on. For now, let us remain with the central notion of a universal spiritual path, one that both transcends and is compromised by “divisive” religion. This has clear antecedents in Blavatsky and Bailey. With Bailey, the idea goes even further: she maintains this universal spirituality will soon form the basis of a united “New World Religion,” which will shortly replace an obsolete Christianity. Not every New Ager goes this far, but many will affirm that “transcending limited religion” represents humanity's *evolutionary goal*.

Looking closely, a further Theosophical notion begins to emerge at this point. Here it is not only a matter of positing transcendent, unitary spirituality, but *more*: this spirituality is the *destined paradigm* toward which the human race is evolving! In Theosophy, this is linked to the Zodiac sign of Aquarius. For in the coming Age of Aquarius, we will be shortly liberated from “negative old age patterns”—including that of separate religions.

Thus, the previous Age of Pisces is dismissed as obsolete, and, along with it, Christianity. For the Piscean Age is linked to Christian devotion, as well as piety, asceticism, the need for faith, the authority of the Church, and so forth. In Alice Bailey's cosmology, Pisces is also inextricably connected with an arcane force called the Sixth Ray, which, like Pisces, is likewise seen as passing away. Moreover, the “Master Jesus,” we are told, is Master of the now-outmoded Sixth

Ray. We need not be detained by Bailey's theories regarding twelve zodiac signs and seven rays. The point here is that for Bailey (or at least her acolytes) the Piscean Age is so bound up with the Sixth Ray that the two appear virtually interchangeable. The Age of Pisces passes, the Sixth Ray fades and, as they do, traditional Christianity must necessarily decline—this is the gist of the matter.

To render justice to Alice Bailey, not everything she said regarding the Piscean-Sixth Ray complex was negative. There *are* passages where she praises Christianity, at least as it existed in the medieval past. As Bailey writes, Christian devotion was important—in a previous age. Thus, a sardonic compliment is sometimes heard in New Age circles: Yes, indeed, “Piscean” Christianity is not without value, but only of a temporal, fleeting nature. Whilst Bailey was not always as dismissive as her heirs, she repeatedly stresses the “Piscean” approach is no longer justifiable. Although the Sixth Ray was necessary to its time, it has now bred unhealthy authoritarianism, dogmatism, narrow sectarianism, and fanatical devotion—such is her general claim.

Far more can and will be said as to how all this plays out in the New Age movement. For now, we must content ourselves with but a few key points. These entail, as we say, passing from belief in religious authority to discovering truth for oneself—even “one's own truth”! Alongside this, there is a decided shift from the notion of Grace—certainly Grace mediated by an ecclesiastical hierarchy!—toward autonomous self-sufficiency.

The New Age scene is filled with jargon like “self-development,” “self-empowerment,” and “personal transformation.” And there are countless exercises—meditations, visualizations, affirmations, mantras, yogic techniques, and more—all of which may be employed to “empower oneself.” All this has antecedents in Theosophy. For in Theosophy, as we will consider later on, the goal is to become an initiate. That initiation involves self-mastery exercises, rather than the

plaintive cry of *Kyrie Eleison*. In the New Age, one does not beg for mercy—one takes charge of one's own destiny! But whilst one has no need of Grace, one may still rely on astrology, palmistry, tarot cards, and a host of esoteric *techniques*. The New Age is replete with esoteric technologies for achieving “spiritual evolution,” as well as personal success and even monetary wealth! In New Age jargon, this is often called “working on oneself”

Now, if Protestant Christianity emphasized faith and grace alone, Catholicism has always stressed both Grace *and* works. Work—human effort—is not absent from the Rosary, novenas, or the active examination of conscience. A New Ager may well ask: Are these not Catholic versions of “working on oneself?” The answer—which may surprise New Agers—is *no*. One does not pray the Rosary to become an initiate or achieve self-mastery. Moreover, whilst Catholic practices demand effort, they are pointless without Grace. One kneels penitently and seeks the Grace of Absolution via a Priest. Or one prays for the intercession of the Mother of God. By comparison, New Age rituals generally do not involve humbling supplication. *Ora pro nobis peccatoribus* (Pray for us sinners) is not included in New Age “universalism.” Catholic practice entails confession of our need—our desperate need!—for Grace.

The Pelagian heresy would seem central to New Age-ism. We refer to the Fifth-Century teaching of Pelagius, a British monk, who denied all need for Grace. One might even be tempted to consider Pelagius as a proto-New Ager. For he seems to have possessed an extraordinarily optimistic view of human nature, claiming one might find heaven by one's own efforts. In any event, the doctrines of a British monk fifteen hundred years ago eerily persist in the largely British authors of Theosophy.

And they are hardly without repercussions in today's New Age! How frequently have I seen people patronized as “backward,” because they still need religion! How New Agers have spoken condescendingly

of my retrograde movement “back to religion” since I turned to the Church! Yes, yes, I have been “assured,” my desire to cling to the comfortable safety of the Church is understandable. For New Agers sometimes concede religion is perhaps still necessary for certain people —“less conscious” types—who must be allowed extra time to achieve the transition from Pisces to Aquarius.

Much more charitably, a Findhorn friend of mine tried to affirm me: “It’s so good you want to do something to heal the Church.” To heal this poor, backward, limping Church!—as if it were self-evident I was in a superior position to the Church. I turned to him and said: “It is not I who am healing the Church! It is the Church that is healing me!” I think my response surprised him. For the thinking has become ingrained: Although the Church is stuck in the “Old Age” past, perhaps we New Agers might deign to lend a helping hand, here and there.

But what if the Sanctifying Grace mediated by the Catholic Church affords the greatest imaginable healing, beyond anything offered by any New Age therapy? One can comfortably live within the New Age milieu for decades, without such a thought even crossing the surface of one’s mind.

As lamentable as this is, wild, optimistic dreams of progress remain *de rigueur* in the New Age: Human history appears as nothing but an endless ascent through higher, greater stages of consciousness. Yet such an excessively sunlit hermeneutic can be blinding. In particular, people may become obtuse to the tragic side to our existence. For the more one affirms the evolution of consciousness, the more one may be insensate to cultural decay. And if one believes a magical Aquarian Age will shortly wipe away millennial global problems, the more ephemeral those problems start to look. Indeed, an astonishingly buoyant—or blasé—attitude to the human condition often develops. And so, just as New Agers tut-tut at my “retrograde” movement back to the Church, they have likewise lectured me not to

be so “negative.”

Perhaps I deserve it. For in my liberal New Age youth, I lectured people to be upbeat. I would tell them that in the past we had racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and the like. The Victorians, I reminded them, sent their children down the mines. I felt extremely optimistic about human evolution into a glorious New Age. Yet I was blind to the ravages of global capitalism, the widening gap of rich and poor, rising mental illness and gender-confusion, the ever-more materialistic and self-seeking ethos all around me. (To say nothing of the loss of Christian piety.)

In my own case, I was blinded by Alice Bailey’s sunlit *weltanschauung*. Something similar is true of countless New Agers. However, they need not be students of Alice Bailey. For New Agers, by and large, are not avid students of Theosophy. Rather, the Blavatsky-Bailey corpus is so abstruse that few even bother trying to read it! Yet even if New Agers are not avid esoteric scholars, they remain submerged in popular versions of Blavatsky—because the New Age is shaped by self-styled “spiritual teachers” and gurus who *are* such esoteric scholars. Such influential figures write books and give tours, lectures and workshops, interact on the Internet, etc. And these so-called “teachers”—or at least a few of the most influential ones—remain steeped in this English esoteric stream. (Thus, for example, Findhorn’s David Spangler is held in wide esteem. He has been praised as the “spiritual teacher’s teacher.” And Spangler, as we shall see, is deeply indebted to Theosophy.)

No, it is not *de rigeur* to study Theosophy in the New Age. It suffices to subscribe to “holistic” magazines; to hear complacent chatter about Aquarius or be told that harmonic convergences, Mayan calendars, or a critical mass of “good vibrations” will shortly dispel the human tragedies of centuries. For amidst all this varied phenomena, a New Age “grapevine” emerges—permeated by Blavatsky-Bailey ideology.

In saying all this, I am aware of many possible objections. I readily concede the New Age phenomenon has other progenitors besides Theosophy. Yet if one were forced to name one great matriarchal figure—the “grandmother” of the New Age—it would be Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Her “daughter” Alice Ann Bailey would then be the “mother.” But one is not forced to name names. Instead, one may freely acknowledge multiple streams do feed into the “holistic” subculture. Yet how easily these streams converge with Blavatsky’s legacy, mutually reinforcing each other. For, as we shall consider later, it is remarkable how books such as *The Da Vinci Code* or *A Course in Miracles* subvert Christianity by means astonishingly similar to Theosophy. Other channeled books are far more obviously derivative of Theosophical sources than the *Course*. Neither is it hard to find hostility to Christianity in Freudian and Jungian psychotherapy, nor how psychotherapy easily supports a Pelagian ethic of “self-integration.” All this is easily accommodated in the basic Theosophical framework of the New Age movement.

At any rate, my life-experience persuades me of this: the New Age movement is united not so much by universal, perennial truth as by peculiar ideology. That ideology is not only denied, but the movement appears so variegated that many dispute a clear movement even exists! Across the West today, there are all these astrologers, shamans, counsellors, consultants, magicians, druids, gurus; there all these so-called spiritual teachers, channelers, energy workers, holistic healers, transpersonal psychotherapists, and positive thinkers. Few, if any, will ever read my book. But if they did, many would challenge my attributing their attitudes to Theosophy. Be that as it may, I cannot help but concur with Christopher Bamford, when he writes:

Much of what we think of as “New Age”—from Buddhism through “inner development” to channeling—was part of the original Theosophical mission. Despite the

apparent differences in their individual teachings, the capacious being of Madame Blavatsky, deep as it is wide, lies behind most alternative “spiritual” teachers still read today—Gurdjieff, Krishnamurti, and Schwaller de Lubicz, for instance, to name but three. In fact, it is difficult to imagine anyone escaping her influence.<sup>4</sup>

No, few New Agers appreciate their enormous debt to Madame Blavatsky and Alice Bailey. Fewer still will understand if I say the Catholic Church offers something more universal than their own peculiar subculture. The idea that Catholicism is nothing more than a narrow, outmoded relic will likely seem preposterous to them.

But what if I were to ask: “From whence your dogma that religion becomes obsolete? Whence your faith that you are the heralds of a new universal culture?” Well, from long experience, I can wager that few possess any clear idea as to the provenance of these *doctrines*. Even whilst, like I myself once did, they live, breathe, and propagate these *doctrines* daily.

For they heard it through the grapevine: Institutional religion is reserved for less-conscious souls; Jesus was just a man; there is no need for “Old Age stuff” and, in the coming Age of Aquarius, we shall all achieve “Christ consciousness.”

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<sup>1</sup> Larkin, “Annus Mirabilis,” 167.

<sup>2</sup> I recall also virtually no Irish when I lived there in the 1980s—despite Ireland’s proximity to Scotland. This *might* be explained by the small Irish population. However, the same cannot be said for the near absence of members of the large populaces of Catholic countries in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Blavatsky reportedly spoke five languages, including German, which she learned at a young age.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Bamford, “Introduction,” *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky & Theosophy: An Eyewitness View of Occult History*, by Rudolf Steiner (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2002), 7.



## The Noble Intentions Within the New Age Movement

*One of us was abused as a child and turns in desperation to psychotherapeutic healing.*

*One of us “channels” an Atlantean Warlord.*

*One of us has no interest in Atlantean Warlords, channeling or the Occult, but seeks a New Age of goodwill to all, free of dogmas and religion.*

**T**HE NEW AGE movement—how much authentic goodwill exists within its confines! How many genuine idealists are drawn toward its dreams! How much sincere, self-sacrificing effort goes into building a New Age world!

The present chapter could surprise certain Christians who associate the New Age with the devil himself. But it must be said: New Agers are decidedly not devil-worshippers. This is not to deny the devil’s presence in the New Age! For the devil certainly exists and he is certainly interested in ensnaring people possessed of goodwill and idealism. However, Lector, perhaps you are thinking, “Everything that has been said about Christianity being ‘transcended’ by a so-called universal spirituality, even a New World Religion, is bad enough. But is not more involved in the New Age movement? Does it not entail other dangerous aberrations? Is it not about channeling Atlantean Warlords, contacting UFOs, scrubbing one’s aura, and opening and rotating one’s chakras (in fourth-dimensional order,

perhaps)? Is it not about refracting crystals, pagan rites, witches, wizards, and all the rest? Is it not, in the end, about the *occult*? Why have I made such little mention of these things?” Bear with me, good Lector, if you find yourself with thoughts like these. Hopefully, as we continue, a little further light will be cast onto the New Age connection with the occult. However, let me also say that, in my experience, hardly anyone in the New Age is actively engaged with satanic rituals and we will mainly consider the way esoteric traditions like Theosophy ensnare good people, whose attraction to the New Age landscape often lies in noble aspirations.

### **United in Sincere Aspiration**

AT RATE, when I turned to the New Age as an adolescent, it was not due to the thrill of the occult. Rather, the movement seemed to proffer a noble vision, unlike anything I perceived in either the materialistic mainstream or my (Protestant) concept of Christianity. I was attracted by the dream of building a better world, alongside good souls who shared the same dream.

Here lay much of the allure of the Findhorn Community, which I first heard of during the late 1970s. Back then, the community consisted of nearly three hundred adults living and working together in impressive harmony. They had genuine ideals—including a life of greater simplicity and being good stewards of the earth. Findhorn began with a focus on organic gardening and maintains to this day considerable ecological awareness and environmentally conscious innovation. Whatever else the Findhorn folk were, they were not materialists, scrambling over each other in the rat race. And they worked, often long hours, for nothing more than a meagre allowance.

Intrigued by all I read, I began visiting Findhorn from 1980 onwards. There, I encountered unusual and remarkable people, often possessed of considerable compassion and psychological awareness.

New Age culture owes much, as I say, to psychotherapy. And the people drawn to it are, usually, introspective and soul searching by nature. Many are more sensitive than the norm and keenly aware of their childhoods. Whilst many souls in mainstream society can readily repress the wounds of childhood, New Agers are often acutely conscious of psychological trauma. Many of them, as a result, gravitate to therapy.

Certainly, numerous folk at Findhorn had been involved in some form of therapy or counselling—something less common back in those days. They had thereby integrated the therapeutic ideals of psychological attention and unconditional regard. Likewise, authenticity was a celebrated virtue. What was valued was the honest, sincere “owning” of emotion. Here was also a means to avoid blame and resolve conflict. In other words, at Findhorn, one tried to avoid saying something or someone was “wrong.” Rather, it was better to “own one’s feelings” instead. Thus, not: “You stole that Jung book from my room, you jerk!” But rather: “When my missing Jung book turned up unexpectedly in your room, I experienced acute feelings of disappointment in our relationship, even rage.”

Clearly, all this owes much to psychotherapy. At Findhorn, the kind of intimate dialogue that exists in the therapist’s office had generalized outwards to the community as a whole. Community members aspired to be authentic, as well as to give sensitive “feedback” to others who did the same. Looking back at my Findhorn time now, I have to say this fostered often unusual and moving empathy. Later New Age settings I experienced were nastier, sometimes with a fake veneer of compassion. But something truly gentle and caring prevailed at Findhorn.

All this was bound up with *deliberately* nebulous notions of spirituality. People at Findhorn did not use much religious language. Yet a spiritual reality was widely affirmed in a variety of vague terms. A few felt happy to speak of God. Most, however, preferred fuzzier

language such as “the Universe” or “the Source.”

Many of the reasons for this deliberate blandness can be found in the currents we have been exploring—for example the Eastern syncretism of Theosophy, which heaps scorn on Western theology. However, I declare Findhorn’s calculated blandness frequently arose from genuine aspiration toward sensitivity and harmony. This entailed, of course, the desire to be inclusive toward different spiritual perspectives. And although I believe the New Age is far more unified than it appears, it must be acknowledged the Findhorn folk did *appear* to pursue different spiritual traditions with different “spiritual languages.” Thus, common terms were desirable to promote mutual accord.

But which names would not cause offense? God? For many, if not all, this was seen as “too Christian.” It was, moreover, regarded as “patriarchal.” Here is another example of how the “universal” New Age is conditioned by post-Sixties liberal currents, such as radical feminism. Thus, it was an article of faith for some Findhorn folk (if not all) that talk of God amounted to male domination. Here is one reason that Christianity, as well as Judaism and Islam, is problematic for the “inclusive” New Age. Vast tracts of the religious heritage of humanity are excluded.

But whether such post-Sixties liberal thinking is a good thing or not, Lector, is beside my point. My point is that *even if* radical feminist ideology *were* right and talk of God *does* constitute oppression, this contention remains a tiny “minority report” within the long history of global religious traditions. For if you wish to do so, dear Lector, you are certainly free to spearhead a “modern approach to spirituality.” You are likewise free to fashion your new spirituality, according to relatively recent Western liberal values. But you cannot turn round and claim your *specific* choices—fashioned in accordance with a *specific* slice of time and culture—mean your new spirituality is *universal*.

Many Findhorn folk would have said talk of God is too “loaded.” The term is indeed loaded—charged with millennia of prayers of countless saints, mystics, geniuses, and humble pious souls. But neither the value of simple piety, nor the soaring, spiritual heights of the saints mean anything at all to iconoclasts.

As for Jesus—this name, in particular, could generate genuine shudders at Findhorn. Of course, feminist objections to “patriarchal Christianity” factored here. But in the background the persistent legacy of Theosophy continued—dismissing Jesus as simply an initiate into whom “the Christ energy” had once incarnated.

And so Findhorn demanded less specific, more vague and abstract terms for the things of the Spirit! Energy, Consciousness, “Love and Light,” the Universe, the Source, Spirit, etc. Many New Agers would argue there is much to be gained by adopting such “non-offensive” terms, which (supposedly) can be commonly assented to. Here one sees how New Agers are often taken up by secular fads such as “political correctness.” For if you press New Agers why vague, impersonal terms like “Light” or “Spirit” are preferable, you will eventually arrive at the doctrine that people can agree on these. But is there anything to be *lost* in resorting to such banal, neutral, and impersonal terms? This question is hardly ever asked in New Age circles, in my experience.

These “neutral” affirmations of the Transcendent also manifested themselves in *literally* concrete ways at Findhorn. For although the community possessed no chapels or temples, there was instead something called a *sanctuary*. What this denominated was an indistinct space for contemplation—a space where no “divisive” religious imagery would be present, but where, instead, one could simply sit in silence, contemplate, or meditate as one wished. Typically, circles of chairs were arranged in concentric circles around a table with a candle in the center.

Thus, in these ordinary, featureless rooms, one found chairs where

members of the community silently meditated. Or did they? Because the truth of the matter is that the chairs were usually empty and the members rarely used these sanctuaries themselves. Rather, it was the tourists and visitors to the community who frequented them. But—and this was a point of concern, if not despair for some—the majority of Findhorn residents were rarely there. And why not? Could it be these bare, colorless rooms were lacking, somehow? Could it be there was something inherently uninspiring or uninviting about them? In all my years associated with Findhorn, I never once remember this question being raised.

Let me ask you, Lector, to now jump ahead in time with me. Years after I left Findhorn, I worked, with others, to create a New Age center in Cambridge, England. Our express purpose was to create an outpost for Findhorn-style spirituality in this ancient seat of learning. We hoped to influence the young minds and future leaders in this world center of academic brilliance. As it happened, we succeeded in establishing this New Age center, wherein, not surprisingly, we offered a sanctuary: a bare and neutral room with circles of chairs. Just like at Findhorn, it was not particularly frequented. Now, our Sanctuary had an inscription on the door, which I myself wrote and placed there:

This sanctuary is dedicated to the idea that there are no words or forms that can express the ultimately REAL, without also limiting it, and that no religion or belief may be said to be the TRUTH but only a refraction amongst many such refractions that serve to guide the way. This room is therefore dedicated to silence and simplicity that every seeker may feel welcomed here to find within the Sacred REALITY for which no words suffice, but from which healing, inspiration and renewal FLOW.

Here from my own pen is a small, encapsulated “gem” of New

Age ideology—with all the requisite vague and imprecise terminology! Years later, a friend asked if I still agreed with the words I erected on that door. My response to her was “Yes and No.” Yes, of course, I explained: God is infinite and ultimately beyond anything which mere words can capture. But no, if we take from my inscription what it *tacitly advocated*. Here is to say: a highly-specific spiritual approach—one which first despairs of representing God and then draws the conclusion that although there may be refractions that “serve to guide the way,” these refractions have no claim to truth or importance, over and above any other such refractions.

Here is relativism in a somewhat muted form, dear Lector: Christianity itself is just one more limited refraction. You may as well choose another refraction or do away with it altogether, if you like. Nothing will be lost, if you do. Centuries of tradition are not worth much at all, really. Without them, you can still find “the Sacred REALITY” within yourself. This is the message I erected on that door in Cambridge. *Mea Culpa*. And here, too, is iconoclasm in a somewhat muted form. Away with all the icons, statues, stained-glass windows, away with the Pieta of Michelangelo and away with all the crucifixes! Away with theology, philosophy, scripture, and a myriad of attempts to “limit” God in words! We no longer need these things, which only serve to bring disunity. This is the cause I also served in Cambridge. *Mea Maxima Culpa*. Even if I was twenty-eight years old and like many a New Ager, not really conscious of what I did.

### **An Unconscious Iconoclasm**

NOW TO SAY baldly “Away with all the icons!” is to speak a language more extreme than most New Agers favor. For “holistic” people genuinely believe they are open and tolerant. Only beneath the surface of their consciousness, does one frequently discover marked hostility to religious tradition. This is not only true with (particularly Western)

religious icons and imagery, but also theology in general. In other words, all manner of means to represent God in a particular or even personal way.

But *to represent God in a particular and personal way* is the very essence of Christianity! God became human to represent Himself to us in the most particular and personal way He could! But all this is lost to the New Age refusal of tradition and theology. Charity, however, demands we recall how unconscious this refusal usually is. For New Agers, as I say, *do* sincerely believe in their ideal of a new, tolerant, and inclusive spirituality.

Sincere idealism is attractive. Do not misunderstand me, Lector, if you are Catholic of Faith. For this all-too-secular spirituality can have little allure for us. Not for us, a life where no one ever sees the beauty of the liturgy, but only sits in a bare, colorless sanctuary. Not for us, a life where people never feel the Sacramental power coursing through their souls. Not for us, a world where you never hear of the personal Jesus Christ, but only impersonal terms like “spirit,” “the Universe,” and “Love and Light.” If you are a Catholic of Faith, you will easily understand how grateful I am, having left this world behind. Having tasted the Mystery of the Church, how unsatisfying Findhorn would be now.

However, the New Age is *not* unsatisfying for New Agers, who have never encountered the Catholic Mystery, which remains utterly invisible to them. The majority of my former fellow-travelers do not regard Christianity as a sacred, sacramental Mystery, but more like a caricature of Calvinism. Coming out of such impoverishment, New Age spirituality can appear attractive indeed!

Certainly, it was for me. I was a young man who believed in a benevolent spiritual reality. I was skeptical of materialists who told me nothing else existed. But within Protestantism—the only Christianity I knew—I found no meaning whatsoever. I was also idealistic. I sought then, as I do now, something better than the crass capitalism of today.

And in the New Age, I saw impressive souls with similar ideals. This milieu can be captivating indeed for those who know *nothing* of the Holy Church.

### **Affirming—and Denying—the King of Hearts**

AT FINDHORN, I saw honesty, sincerity, empathy, self-sacrificing aspiration toward an ideal—here are things of beauty. Such things *can* be found in the best of New Age culture. For there, one sometimes finds a regard for other human beings that would and should put many of us Catholics to shame.

Regard for the other: Is this not the essence of the Sacred Heart? For the Sacred Heart is, in the words of the litany, “king and center of all hearts” (*cor jesu rex et centrum omnium cordium*). And as the Gospel says of the king of hearts:

For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and fed thee; thirsty, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and covered thee? Or when did we see thee sick or in prison, and came to thee? And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me. (Matthew 25: 35–40)

Yes, the Sacred Heart feels our suffering so completely that He experiences it as *His Own*. Therefore, the more one truly identifies with another’s experience, the more one imitates His Sacred Heart. For our natural tendency is simply to acknowledge our own suffering.

Naturally, I will feel the emptiness of my own stomach, not yours, good Lector. Naturally, I will feel the cold of my own body, not yours. And as a man, there are things I will never feel, which woman feels. I will never feel premenstrual tension, nor the agony of childbirth, nor easily register the sensitive perceptions to which femininity tends. And women will never feel the same testosterone that went through my adolescent body and tempted me to shameful things.

Each of us has our own private world of experience, with which we easily, naturally identify. But it takes the work of love to *identify with the experience of the other*. Love entails the effort to render another soul's experience as real as one's own: "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Is this not the ultimate *identification*: to so honor another human being's interiority, that one prepares to lay down one's life? Is this not what St. Maximilian Kolbe must have felt in Auschwitz, when he volunteered to exchange his own life for that of a man with a family? Did not the Priest Kolbe—without family—so identify with the importance of family, that he volunteered himself for a slow, agonized death?

I saw no saints at Findhorn like Maximilian Kolbe. And New Age organizations, like Findhorn, are far less involved in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked than the much-maligned Church. Still, the Holy Church has no monopoly on love—even if it is the Beating Heart of the Church, which brought *incarnate* Divine Love into this world. Yet I did see real aspiration to empathetic identification at Findhorn—with one's "neighbor." And at times, this love of neighbor struck me as considerably developed.

Am I, then, writing an apologetic for the New Age movement and not Christianity?! Let me respond with the following example. For decades, people have gone to Freudian psychotherapy, perhaps as often as five times a week. And no doubt many analysts feel profound regard

and compassion for their analysands. Such analysts frequently hear appalling trauma, perhaps the agony of a childhood terribly severe. The analyst takes all this seriously, forgetting himself and striving to help. There is no reason to deny what transpires in Freudian therapy may often partake of love.

Is Christ—who is God—present in these therapeutic conversations from heart to heart? The answer is undoubtedly, yes—at least to a certain extent. But at the same time, Jesus Christ is effectively *denied* in these selfsame conversations! The analysand is not encouraged to pray for God's mercy, but instead to understand his situation in terms of repressed libido and introjected parental conditioning. And guilt? In psychoanalysis, one may learn nothing of what it means to be *genuinely* guilty in the face of sin. For Freudian analysts do not generally treat guilt feelings as a call to examining conscience and moral vigilance, but rather as the symptoms of the introjected Superego.

Findhorn is not a center for Freudian analysis; nonetheless, the legacy of Freud and particularly Jung is marked there. Thus, if you ask me, dear Lector, whether Christ is present in Findhorn and the New Age, I will reply: Yes and no. Yes, because Christ is love. And Christ is God. And as the Evangelist says: "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:7).

It would be unjust to deny that moving, genuine love is sometimes present in New Age circles. Yet it would also be wrong to deny Jesus Christ is frequently cast out—even mocked and scourged—within those selfsame circles!

For Jesus Christ is *rendered invisible* in the "holistic" milieu. This tendency is so marked that I had not the least idea of Jesus Christ, until I was 34 years old. That is until, at last, I finally encountered the Catholic Mystery—a story for a later chapter. For now, I simply say I am hardly alone. I was one of millions deprived of Jesus Christ because the true nature of His Church is buried by New Age

ideology.

And yet another New Age tendency obnubilates His Most Sacred Heart. For human-centered psychotherapy often leads to focusing on human emotion—and *very little else*. Whilst love demands psychological awareness, such awareness is only part of love's endeavor. It is not the whole. For what happens when attention is concentrated *only* on psychological factors? What happens to what *transcends* human psychology? Might not the results be lopsidedly humanistic?

Here, at any rate, is what years of experience have confirmed for me: in the New Age, one's resources are sometimes consumed almost entirely with human emotion. Crucial things are thereby lost. Prayer and pious devotion to what transcends emotion is lost. Lost, too, is intellectual rigor, which is frequently denigrated as nothing but "head tripping." Many New Agers are suspicious of the intellect. They are concerned with psychological repression of emotion, and treat the intellect as the culprit. But Jesus Christ is approached through honest intellectual work, through prayers, through piety, and the Holy Sacraments of His Church. All these become sidelined in the New Age. And so access to Jesus Christ is denied—often with ignorance and little but good intention.

### **A Little Tale of Good Intention**

IGNORANCE and good intention! Here I would tell a story to illustrate my meaning. It is a paradoxical tale of New Age spirituality, Findhorn-style, which reveals genuine goodwill—yet denies the way to Christ.

For years after I left Findhorn, I met a radiant young woman, possessed of rare kindness and sensitivity. She had long been involved with Findhorn and I had not-long converted to Catholicism. Our conversation turned toward the differences between Catholicism and

New Age spirituality. In frustration, she turned to me and said: “But why do you have to NAME everything?” Why must I use terms for Holy things? What need was there for *names* like Christ, Trinity, Incarnation, Body and Blood?

This encounter remains engraved in my mind, because it amply expresses the hollowness of New Age inclusiveness. For it must be said, her sincere aspiration *was* inclusiveness. Yet her frustration with “names” revealed prevailing New Age antipathy for clear concepts for things of the Spirit. It follows that her New Age-ism was—unconsciously—highly exclusive, rather than inclusive. For such antipathy marginalizes not simply my own Catholic theology, but the *whole of theology* itself (whether it be Islamic, Jewish, Sikh theology, etc.). All this is excluded—at a single stroke—by objecting to clear names for spiritual realities.

Yet theology remains essential to humanity’s spiritual quest. Because the vast majority of “spiritual seekers” are not New Agers. Rather, they *belong to the world religions*. Thus, they affirm the need for clear language, expression, and doctrines. But the “inclusive” New Age is, generally speaking, exclusive of religion—Christianity in particular. Not only are theological concepts routinely dismissed, but also religious doctrines. However, doctrines still exist, even when they remain vaguely formulated. This young woman *had* a New Age doctrine. It went like this: “Names are bad”—at least for spiritual things. Hence, her frustration when I could not agree to her doctrine.

Beneath her words, I recognized the old Theosophical syncretic quest for unity. I also heard a familiar secular refrain: “Religious concepts are dangerous: the source of so much division, war, and persecution.” (All the while, the fact that history’s greatest genocides were not religious goes unnoticed.)

Her attitude revealed something further: the humanistic New Age emphasis on emotion, which denigrates the intellect: Spirituality denotes experience that is *felt*, rather than something articulated in

words: “What matters is what your heart feels.” By implication, clear thinking is regarded as comparatively unimportant, even dangerous. Certainly, I heard things like this at Findhorn many times: “Feeling is what matters. Not head-stuff and all these mental concepts. Can’t we all just get along?” I exaggerate only somewhat, I think, if I say it amounts to something like this: As long as we have no concepts, we can all agree on everything!

This, of course, is not simply ludicrous, but pernicious. Not only does it negate every religion and philosophy—it proceeds further: It works against consciousness itself—because one thinks in concepts. To renounce concepts is to renounce thinking. And, at any rate, it is impossible to renounce concepts. One can only render them more fuzzy and deprived of consciousness. Yet it would appear many New Agers actively seek to renounce mental clarity! The anti-intellectual bent is, as I say, marked in the movement.

It is poignant watching sincere, well-meaning people, who genuinely mean to be inclusive—by dismissing the global aspiration of millennia.

But there is something even sadder here. Unwittingly, materialism is promoted, because whilst New Agers dismiss clear concepts for the spiritual reality, *material* concepts—e.g., those relating to quantity, mass, volume etc.—are obviously *not* dismissed. Here are things on which everyone can agree. Obviously, these remain in place in the “holistic” vision.

Materialism is subtly fostered in this way—*because imbalance results*. As we have said, when culture can *only* collectively affirm material concepts—with no collective way to articulate the Spirit—material concepts inevitably gain the upper hand. This is precisely what has happened in secularism: Material reality—on which everyone can agree—is prioritized, whereas religious concepts are marginalized. In secularism, spiritual concepts have no value beyond the private realm of the individual. What has resulted is *the privatization of*

*spirituality*. When society is deprived of a common religious vision, it is understandable that material concepts—as the only commonly agreed “currency”—gain ever more credence and power.

Certainly, this is what has happened within secular society. And the New Age seems all too happy to play along. Secularism and the New Age often sing the selfsame song. The cruel result is the continuing barrage against religion—Christianity in particular.

However, New Agers are not without a point—moreover one that is heartfelt. Religious concepts *do* belong to a historical process that certainly includes intolerance, sectarianism, hate, cruelty, and destruction. New Agers join with millions of sincere people, who long to see the end of hatred. Herein lies much of the New Age’s appeal. Catholics should see the underlying goodness of the New Age dream—whilst thoroughly rejecting it, of course. For it *is* a dream: vague and unthought-out, fuzzy and ultimately sterile. For hatred arises from the darkness of our fallen hearts. It is not produced simply by thinking in clear concepts! And hatred does not disappear, when we cease thinking clearly. Hatred belongs to the condition of the Fall. And the Fall is not overcome by abandoning clear thinking. The Fall is only overcome through Jesus Christ.

This confusion is bad enough. However, yet another New Age dogma lay behind this young woman’s words. Because her objection to theological names meant, I think, something else: These are mere names—*only* names! “What matters, Roger, are not your names, but only the One, True, Spiritual Reality, which transcends your names!” She did not say these precise words to me, of course. Still, behind her words, I could hear the same old New Age super-dogma: no true, significant spiritual differences exist; these are only superficial window-dressing.

The fallout is not hard to spot: Buddhist Nirvana is the same as the Christian Heaven; a church is the same as a mosque; a “spiritual Master” is the same as the Son of God; modern channeling is the same

as Revelation—the list goes on.

All this denies the way to Christ in subtle, insidious, yet highly effective ways. The upshot is this: *what is distinctive to Christianity is neatly disposed of*. Here is the logical outcome of refusing to name Sacred things. For religion rests on theology and theology rests on naming things of the Spirit. The New Age is not inclusive of all religions. *Rather, New Age spirituality is opposed to them.*

Religion is endangered today and Christianity in particular. Secularism and the New Age form a twin-barreled assault on the uniqueness of Christianity. On the one side, Christianity is shot down by materialism; on the other side by a regression to fuzzy, indistinct forms of pre-Christian paganism.

### **A Questionable Sufficiency**

DEAR LECTOR, I have shared with you my memory of a kind soul. I confess I could not help but see her as anything other than ensnared by “holistic” ideology—an ideology rooted in an Anglophone, esoteric literature, which posits an evolutionary transition from Pisces to Aquarius. This hypothetical transition serves as both code and justification for moving to a post-Christian world, with the Church dismantled.

Of course, even without the New Age, Anglophone culture everywhere is moving rapidly toward a post-Christian world. In places such as London, New York, or San Francisco, post-Christian civilization would seem to be decisively achieved. It is not surprising New Age-ism is strongest in such places. For New Age-ism is not only rooted in Anglophone esotericism, but deeply indebted to the secular culture.

Neither the New Age, nor liberalism, nor Secular Materialism is “universal” or “inclusive” or “all-embracing” or “holistic.” The New Age, in particular, is highly exclusive and often downright peculiar in

ways that New Agers genuinely cannot see.

Yet genuine goodwill, morality and idealism are often marked in “holistic” or secular arenas. Whatever is truly noble here—there is Jesus Christ present. How could He not be? Yet this is hardly the same as saying Jesus Christ can just as easily be discovered within the New Age and Secular landscape! For modern culture everywhere repudiates the tender beating heart of Christ. His Sacraments, His Church, His Sacred Heart of Love are all denied. And yet still, morality and ideals struggle on.

However, in our brave, new “tolerant and inclusive” world, morality is threatened on an ever-new array of fronts. What to say to those who see no need for Christ and His Church? Here, I place an exchange from my cyber group, between Conor and Les. Both men appear entrenched in secular perspectives to me, though both have also participated in New Age culture. And perhaps they are more markedly shaped by it than either realize. Conor, a cradle Catholic, who now rejects the Church, had posted: “What do others think? Can we do without talk of Gods and souls? Can we have a way to feel about the world, and to act morally, if we are empiricists?”

And more recently:

What would it be like to believe absolutely and categorically that there is no God, afterlife, Angels, transubstantiation etc., etc., that Catholicism taught me. Then what would happen to the feelings that it represents—transcendence, love, identification, peace, creativity, etc.—would they, for me, be freed? Or would they disappear? I maintain that those are HUMAN feelings not religious ones. But they have been obscured and crusted over by the lives we lead and what Rog calls “the horror of the world”—I often think that the project for me is how to reclaim these things, free of any religious connotation.

And Les responded:

I don't see that belief in God or the supernatural is a prerequisite of having strong moral values or for having any of the feelings that you list above. In fact it appears to me more likely that such beliefs can get in the way of clarity in these areas. . . . Personally I am not aware of having any belief in god, afterlife, Angels, transubstantiation etc. However, I am aware of having strong values and of experiencing feelings of transcendence, love, identification, peace, creativity, etc.

Now, Conor invokes morality here. Les speaks of "strong values." I see my friends' nobility of soul. What do I say to Conor who feels empiricism is sufficient for a moral life? And what to Les, who seems to join the New Age chorus that feelings are what is important?

Feelings and empiricism: here are respective leitmotifs of the New Age and Secular Materialism, born of the Enlightenment. Dear friends in cyberspace: For me, you represent a *microcosm* of caring, thinking humanity in the Anglosphere. You also represent how deeply *divided* this caring, thinking humanity really is:

*One of us crusades for a vegan world in which will be renounced all honey, milk, and eggs.*

*One of us holds to the healing power of Freud.*

*One of us believes that if only the Workers of the World unite.*

*One of us preaches "trickle-down" economics as the answer to the woe.*

*One of us regards population control by contraception*

*and abortion as solution to the world.*

*One of us campaigns against contraception and abortion  
with every last drop of her life's blood.*

One of us, one of us, one of us: Humanity is deeply divided and yet so often united by a basic idealism. As a New Ager, I was not unlike the young woman from Findhorn. I sensed this underlying unity and sought a world wherein this accord would be emphasized, and ideological division de-emphasized.

Yet I have found this is not enough. The good are divided, whilst the evil are not. Conor's Enlightenment empiricism is not enough. Les's feelings of transcendence are not enough. Friends of old: You ask me why we need Christ and His Church? Here is the *beginning* of my answer: The things you show me—whilst often beautiful—are not enough to save us, either individually or collectively. For the Soul of the World becomes ever more sclerotic and, as even you plainly admit, the Body of the World, the environment, is now ravaged like never before. Still, it will take the rest of this book to really respond to your questions.

## VI

### Worlds of Desire

*One of us wants to smoke hundred-dollar cigars.*

*One of us detests cigars, but wants to be seen smoking them, anyway.*

**W**e want... We want... We want...

We want manifold forms of stimulation. We want regular, varied stimulation of the taste buds, for example. And we do not want to be like certain Africans, who drink exactly the same vegetable broth, day after dreary day. We want stimulation of the mind: how dreadful to be truly, truly *bored*—in solitary confinement without a soul to speak to, nor even a book to read. We want the stimulation of beauty. We want sensual and sexual stimulation. We want... we want... we want. We want attention. We want comfort. We want to feel safe and secure. We want cleanliness. We want to be appreciated. Told we are important.

All existence is suffering and all suffering is caused by desire, the Buddha taught—who thus sought to extinguish desire. And Jesus? Jesus certainly desired. And nothing that He did negated the importance of desire. Jesus *wanted* the moneylenders out of the temple. And, weeping tears, he *wanted* Lazarus to come forth from his tomb. And before the Last Supper: “He said to them: ‘With desire, I have desired to eat this pasch with you, before I suffer’” (Luke 22:15). Jesus wanted not to be crucified and yet He wanted the Father’s Will still more. For He wanted the Redemption of the world.

However we define the human condition, perhaps few things

characterize it better than desire. We are born into this world, helpless and exposed, wanting warmth and nourishment and life. We want and our wants take on a multiplicity of forms. In the East, detachment from desire is taught. Because, there desire is deemed regrettable: the source of an illusory bondage to the wheel of karma. The control of desire, the mastery of emotion: here is the goal according to many in the East—and, as we shall see, many in the New Age, as well.

Christianity is different. Christianity sees desire that is fallen—that is, disordered—and desire that is sanctified. Thus, the Lord sanctified the wedding at Cana by His Presence, turning water into wine. And Marriage became a Holy Sacrament of the Church, which sanctifies not only human love, but human yearning for one another. The sacrament of Catholic marriage calls for sexual union, which is why lack of sexual union provides grounds for annulment, that is, decreeing that the sacrament of marriage never took place.

### **Desire—Healthy and Disordered**

FROM the Catholic perspective, it is necessary to distinguish between desire that is healthy and desire that is disordered. What a task this discernment is! As these lines are written, I have recently returned to France from a brief excursion into Switzerland. There, I spoke to the Swiss of the sacred cité of Paray-le-Monial, where Christ revealed his Sacred Heart to the world and which remains the most astonishing place on Earth I ever encountered. A lady expressed her wish to visit Paray. But her companion voiced a warning: French accommodation is more “scruffy” than pristine Switzerland. There followed an expression of retreat, as if to say: “Oh, I would like to visit Paray, but I do want my level of Swiss comfort!”

Here are the Swiss, a little nation locked between much larger lands. I recall my first visit there, a quarter of a century ago: The cleanliness was almost spooky. It felt as though one might almost eat

from the pavements. The comparison with “scruffy” Britain was marked indeed! Switzerland is scruffier now than once it was, but it retains this *collective desire* for pristine order and spotlessness. So much so, that some Swiss feel threatened crossing the border into France. And the French? I recall meeting a Frenchman near the frontier, who expressed a small shudder about Switzerland—as if to say: “Over there things are just too tight and rigid. I need a little mess and freedom, please. I need some room to breathe!”

These Swiss, these French, have become *conditioned to desire* in different ways. Even across a border between two European nations, human desire can be channeled in opposite directions. Likewise, across a span of time—even a few decades—human desire can be also conditioned in opposite directions. Later on in this book, we will see how recent Irish history, for example, demonstrates this amply. For in the space of forty years or less, Ireland transited from a profoundly Catholic society to a secular consumerist one. And likewise, we will consider France, too, where the turnabout was very similar, if not quite so accelerated.

We want... We want. And unless we achieve detachment from every desire, what we desire assumes a distinctive form. One can want sexual gratification without love or one can want to practice chastity. If a man is married, this will mean restricting sexual desire only to his beloved. Here is a relatively clear-cut example. Often, distinguishing between desire that is healthy and desire that is disordered is far more difficult.

### **Burning with Indiscriminate Desire**

ONE THING seems clear, though. We live in a world facing serious ecological degradation, if not outright catastrophe. The felling of the rainforests, the holes in the ozone, acid rain, rising temperatures, elevated levels of seawater, growing desertification: all this and more is

provoked by consumerism on unprecedented scale. At the root of this is *desire stimulated indiscriminately* as never before. More and more and more, we are bombarded by what explicitly aims to entice desire. I think again to that faraway Britain of 1980, where the government only permitted a single television channel with advertising. How different Britain is now—and France and Switzerland as well. Hundreds of satellite channels broadcast everywhere, with endless incitement to buy, buy, buy. And then the ubiquitous Internet, desire, desire, desire.

The natural desires of the human soul—from childhood onwards—are subjugated now to enormous manipulation. One need hardly mention the endless stimulation of erotic desire. It would seem more critical than ever, to discriminate between healthy and unhealthy desire. For not only the Soul of the World but the Body of the World—the biosphere—is now menaced.

Yes, dear Lector, you and I have been born into a world with desire that is natural, and desire modified in highly unnatural ways. Now, the Church can be most effective in channeling human longing in directions that are sanctifying, even holy. The lives of countless saints and ordinary pious people prove this. Moreover, integral Catholic societies—such as Ireland’s was, even very recently—reveal how the Church once guided entire peoples toward simplicity, rather than materialism. By contrast, our modern, de-sacralized culture reveals the precise opposite: entire peoples steered toward excessive consumption. The consequences are unholy indeed.

Much of this book has turned on cultural decadence. Decay like this is difficult to measure empirically. But now cultural degradation is mirrored by ecological degradation. And this *can* be empirically observed: oceans are poisoned, fresh water depletes, whole species die. Everywhere, the earth is poisoned by chemicals. There are now dead soils where it is no longer possible to grow anything—without adding still further chemicals. Then there is our climate. What controversy exists regarding climate change! But, as Catholics, let us heed the

Papacy, which has spoken very clearly on this matter—a theme we will return to.

We cannot continue with our vast, indiscriminate experiment of stimulating consumerist desire. Unimaginable damage is being done. Yet how frequently this stimulation is judged as relatively harmless. Now, the American media stimuli of my childhood were more crass and commercial, than Europe's, during the same era. Yet compared with today, even it appears relatively innocent. The cultural quota of sex and violence was certainly much less back then.

Still, in my mind, I can hear long-ago “innocent and harmless” advertising jingles for products like *Kool Aid*: intensely sugared water, or instead de-sugared “diet water,” which tastes, oh, so phenomenally good. In my youth, I could not chant you any litany of the Holy Church. But I could chant you litanies to *Burger King*, *Hostess Ding Dongs*, *Almond Joy*, and *Diet Pepsi* to this day. And I recall another advertising slogan from the 1970s: *Coke adds life*. This slogan bombarded not only America, but Europe as well. And walking amidst poor neighborhoods in Europe today, my wife has, in horror, witnessed tiny children, toddlers even, suckling cola. The parents of these toddlers grew up with such advertising.

Here is the world we have been born into and it matters less and less, whether it is America, France, Switzerland, even Japan or China. Cultural differences persist, but we are globalizing. It is harder for me to resist saying “Americanizing”: we are all Americans now. Certainly, I have witnessed Europe transformed in my own life-journey, such that, today, it far more resembles the American matrix of my youth, with its unrestricted television, flagrant manipulation of desire, and fixation on wealth. This matrix becomes the matrix for the world now. Global human desire is increasingly conditioned by agendas, which owe significantly to my native land.

Despite Globalization, even the cultural differences persisting between places like France and Switzerland are worth noting. There are

the once-Catholic French, so much more “scruffy” than the Swiss, often sporting clothes and accoutrements that are well-worn indeed. “Just how long have you had that glasses case, monsieur? Fifteen years! Good Lord, I buy a new one every year! But on the other hand, how much is your desire fixated on gastronomic excellence? Why over there in Britain, they hardly care about the palate at all!”

Here are relatively minor variations in the cultural collective desire of Western Europe today. These variations can be witnessed in *space*—in crossing the space from one European border to the next. But what of variations in *time*?

### **Provincialism in Time**

I RAISE this question, because humanity is not only clearly conditioned by different cultures, but cultural epochs, as well. And I want to consider the way people simply absorb the assumptions of their own time and culture—but often very little else.

Living in France and Spain, I have exchanged messages with my cyber group of old friends in the English-speaking world. How often, in these exchanges, I have been struck by *cultural bracketing*. By this, I mean the extent to which we are enveloped by the culture we inhabit. This culture extends not only in space—but also in time.

*Extends in space.* Here I think of the cultural landscape we have pondered already: Anglophone, secular and Protestant heritage. The Anglosphere appears wide indeed, taking in hundreds of millions from Britain to her former colonies in North America, Australia, etc. Nonetheless how restricted this Anglosphere appears, even provincial, when we step back and view it from other cultures!

*Yet this provincialism also exists in time.* Here I think of one British friend in particular. Dear friend, you strike me as acutely reflective and moral! And I think I will not offend you with what I am about to say. You were born in 1970. But how profoundly your

assumptions appear bracketed by these last decades of mainstream British culture: 1970–2016. Like so many others, your harried, hectic life does not easily permit you to read history. And your media diet does little to compensate this deprivation. You have never had the grace of living outside your own country. And it is only by God’s mercy, that I have this particular Grace myself Providence took me beyond the Anglosphere, giving me the opportunity to regard my own Protestant-cum-secular heritage from a distance. If I am honest, I feel I have broken from a box.

Friend of mine: I address you in these pages, but you stand for countless good folk everywhere. Friends, seen and unseen, I see your horror of global materialism. I see your earnest longing for solutions. Often, I see your *despair*. How I want to cry out loud: Do not allow yourself to be bracketed—bracketed by a narrow slice of culture in time and space! Do not let yourself be limited to provincial Anglosphere assumptions, circa 1970–2016. Otherwise, there may be nothing left to do, but despair indeed!

### **A Brief Look into a Very Different World**

WITH this “temporal provincialism” in mind, I would rescue from obscurity a very different voice to that of contemporary “Anglo-Saxondom.” That voice belongs to Josephin Péladan, who wrote a long-forgotten series of novels in the Nineteenth Century. Péladan was writing as a French Catholic, a hundred years after the 1789 Revolution had murdered the king, Louis XVI—as well as untold thousands of nobility, Priests, monks, nuns, and commoners faithful to the Church.

Here we return to the theme of desire. For Péladan does not *desire* the society that resulted from the Revolution. He does not desire a desecularized secular order, which he sees falling ever more into cultural decadence. No, Péladan *wants* a different order. Like many Frenchmen

of his day, he *wants* Christendom again. He wants a society centered piously on the Mystery of Christ. He *wants* the Church, the Pope, and the King bound together in a Sacred Order. And he *does not want* a materialistic society falling into capitalistic decadence. He does not want the “Godless French Republic,” which usurped Altar and Throne.

Now, I do not mean to advocate everything Péladan finds desirable. For some things Péladan desires seem definitely undesirable to me. Péladan, of course, was likewise culturally limited by the prejudices of his time. Thus, he seems to have participated, to one extent or another, in the deplorable xenophobic attitudes to Germans, Jews, and even English, which were rife in France at that time—before Twentieth-Century war and genocide made dreadfully clear what such once-commonplace attitudes eventually led to.

My intent, then, is not to unconditionally extol everything Péladan desires. Rather, I mean to suggest how Péladan’s culture *led him to desire* very different things than our culture *leads us to desire*. What follows is mainly intended as a stimulus to imagination. Can we imaginatively enter into the passionate desires of a Western man, who represents a culture *not far removed from us in time*? Let us try to see how radically different his desires are from Anglosphere men barely a hundred years later.

For Péladan’s Catholic monarchism was hardly unusual in his era. Indeed, Péladan represented a traditional Catholic culture, which extended across southern Europe, even as late as the early Twentieth Century. Yes, in France, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and other nations, millions of integristes longed for an integral Catholic civilization. And they resisted the imposition of secular ideology. In Ireland, Catholics resisted the Protestant English; in France, Catholics resisted those who had murdered the king and massacred tens of thousands in the name of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité*.

However, Péladan, it needs be said, *did* represent a somewhat

unusual Catholic and hermetic tradition. This tradition informs Valentin Tomberg's *Meditations on the Tarot*, which we mentioned at the outset. But this is not to say Péladan's longings for Christendom were by any means eccentric in his day. It should be noted Péladan's writing achieved widespread success. His first novel, *Le Vice Suprême*, created a sensation, rapidly going through several printings during the 1880s.

*Le Vice Suprême* concerns the cultural decadence of secular, republican France and its enormous success owes, in part, to the fact that Péladan spoke for the ideals of *millions of Catholic French* during that epoch. Indeed, even decades later, when cinema arrived, Péladan's oeuvre remained popular—so much so that a serious proposal existed to film his fiction.<sup>1</sup> Translations of his work appeared in numerous European languages. All this speaks to broad appeal. However, Péladan's works were almost never translated into English. It is not hard to imagine why: passionate Catholic traditionalism did not go down well in England and America during that era!

Here is another example of how we Anglophones may scarcely register even widespread European cultural aspirations—if they lie beyond our Protestant-conditioned orbits. Let us harken, then, to a voice from a lost universe, which may well strike us as bizarre. In *Le Vice Suprême*, Merodack, the novel's hero, encounters something he finds repulsive—which has become all-too-commonplace in our modern world. However, in the Paris of 1884, the Stock Market was still a relatively new institution:

Merodack crossing the Plaza of the Stock Exchange, saw Mérignas who—in contrast to his habit of intellectual idleness—seemed preoccupied. “Where is your idleness?” “My idleness is very shaken,” and with a gesture, he indicated the squalid building from which came a clamor. “Would you have an interest in this brothel?” asked

Merodack.<sup>2</sup>

Merignas persuades Merodack to visit the Stock Exchange. And Merodack, like his creator, is revolted by this early manifestation of capitalism. For he beholds an upset in the market that day, yielding the impression of “Angry mob, delirious . . . jackals fighting over a carcass, beasts, wild with hunger, drunken savages.”<sup>3</sup>

From the novel’s context, it is clear Péladan’s hero Merodack voices his own sentiment:

“What desecration of the Word!” Merodack said . . .  
“prostituted in the cant of gold and its screaming. The day the prayer of the churches no longer drown out this uproar . . .” He made a gesture as if to say: finished.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Péladan belongs to a civilization in which the prayer of the Church *still seems louder* than the crash of the Market! In 1880s France, he is *shocked* by what we have long since ceased to be shocked by. Yet ominous foreboding pervades the novel. Its author sees what is coming: what will finish civilization—if it is not stopped. The Supreme Vice: For Péladan, it involved a new materialism, which, everywhere he looked, began to rear its ugly head.

Conversely, Péladan upholds things, which shock us today. Merodack’s beloved friend is a Priest called Alta, who, in the course of the novel, gives a homily in *Notre Dame* in Paris:

An idea must only persuade and the Inquisition of Spain and Flanders is the shame of our order; an idea has not the right to be armed, when we one has not armed against it. With the idea alone, only the idea can oppose.

. . .

But laity—if the sword touches your faith, then serve yourself of the sword! If the atheists blaspheme, pray. If they dispute, respond. If they profane the altars, slit their throats. The sword must reopen the temple that the sword has closed.<sup>5</sup>

The modern Anglophone reader may ask: What on earth is going on here? For in *Le Vice Suprême*, both Merodack and Alta are the young Péladan's heroes. They articulate his own views. Who was this best-selling “maniac novelist” who would “reopen the temple” by murderous violence?! To understand Péladan's fury, it is necessary to understand the age he lived in. Today, many souls suppose secularism naturally evolved over time, but Péladan's perspective is different—as well as more accurate. For Péladan was eye-witness to events long since forgotten.

In a history written by the victors, we are frequently told secular ideals gradually triumphed in the public mind, whereas traditional religious notions slowly receded as they were found wanting. Péladan knows different. He has witnessed the brutal suppression of his beloved Catholic culture in France. He knows how the sword was employed to close the temple of the Catholic Church. For nearly a century, at the time that Péladan writes, the French state had—on and off—been destroying churches, closing monasteries, exiling monks, nuns, and Priests from the French nation, forcing Priests to marry and sometimes killing them. Now, these religious and clergy had once been the educators of the young. And Péladan watches their schools being closed and their lessons replaced by a secular, materialistic, and nationalistic education. He watches, whilst children formerly educated in worship of God, are now educated to worship French secularism.

Péladan fears worse is to come. He is right. For in 1905, he would live to see the final expropriation of all church property to the French state. He would then witness riots, as Catholic France

objected, when its churches were ransacked by the state. He would die, thirteen years later, broken in despair, for his lifelong failure to defend all that he held dear.

Here we foreshadow a major concern in this book: the brutal politics of secularization. Later on, we will explore how secularism only triumphed by naked aggression in Catholic France: the sword. Now, one may be horrified by Péladan's Priest, Alta, calling for the sword in return. One cannot condone such a sermon, but perhaps one can understand it. For many French Priests of that epoch recognized what Péladan saw all too clearly: that future generations of the French would be stripped of the Holy Sacraments and force-fed secular propaganda instead.

### **Secular versus Sacramental Desire**

FOR the moment, my intent is not to further delve into that lost French world. That will come later. My real point is how, less than a century ago, great tracts of the European population still *collectively desired* such very different things to our society today.

Earlier, I invoked my friend Les, who appears to me highly conditioned by Anglosphere assumptions *circa* 1970–*early* 2000s. Les belongs to a number of folk I admire as genuine idealists. Here, I compare Péladan's aspirations *circa* 1870–*early* 1900s with those of many idealists *circa* 1970–*early* 2000s. Such people frequently have no idea what the Church is. Nothing in their culture has ever told them what a Sacrament is. And when I tell Les of Sacramental power, he wonders aloud to me if it might simply be my imagination. But what if modernity might condition *his* imagination? What if this is why he imagines, perhaps, that the Sacraments are nothing but fantasy? By contrast, everything in Péladan's French Catholic world informed him of the nature and power of the Holy Sacraments. He was educated by Jesuits who refused to give him a lopsided education, stripped of the

Sacred. He lived in a world pervaded by ubiquitous signs of faith: church bells, roadside crucifixes, the prayer of the Angelus, morning, noon, and night. My British friend lives in a world where the most ubiquitous imagery often involves the female body.

Péladan does not want the emerging crass, capitalist, secularist France that he fears, all too presciently, will drown out the Church. He yearns for Christendom—a culture centered on Christ and His Church. And a hundred years ago in France, how many souls still shared his yearning!

But we need not even go back that far. Even fifty years ago, one could still find Western populations with values not unlike Péladan's. We have mentioned, for example, Ireland! And whilst Ireland remains the subject of a later chapter, let us briefly note that, even very recently, Ireland remained staggeringly different from the rest of the Anglosphere. Almost the entire population was bathed in the Sacraments. Over ninety percent of its Catholics went to Holy Mass weekly and many went daily. One could hear the faithful praying the Rosary everywhere, daily in the churches, nightly by the hearth. It was commonplace for Irish homes to be equipped not only with receptacles of Holy Water, but also a votive lamp perpetually lighted for His Sacred Heart. Catholic Ireland also strongly rejected Anglo-American standards. For example, the Irish *desired* strict censorship. Mary Kenny details how the Irish, right up through the 1950s, violently objected to the “filth” coming across the channel from Britain—filth that would seem to us, today, like nothing at all.<sup>6</sup>

Yes, even very recently, entire Western populations wanted very different things than we do today. Vast tracts of France wanted the restoration of Christian monarchy and freedom from secular oppression. Ireland wanted an integral Catholic culture, free from Protestant oppression. Catholic France, Catholic Ireland *dreamed different dreams* than those of Secular Materialism. They dreamed of a society oriented to Christian values by a Catholic hierarchy. They dreamed of

Christendom.

How frequently our “forward” liberal society tells us their dreams were nothing but bad dreams imposed on “backward” Catholics by a “retrograde” Rome! Here is a mantra intoned across the Anglosphere: secularism spells progress toward freedom; Roman Catholicism represents regressive hostage to the past. How little this mantra is ever challenged! History is written by the victors and their victory is now so complete that few today will ever question it. It has become axiomatic that Catholicism owes its very existence to repression and control.

Now, none of this is to say that members of the Church have never been guilty of such things. As Péladan’s Alta admits: “An idea must only persuade and the Inquisition of Spain and Flanders is the shame of our order; an idea has not the right to be armed, when we one has not armed against it.”<sup>7</sup>

Yes, *in the Middle Ages*, Catholics were indeed guilty of any number of abuses and atrocities. Reams of secular propaganda regularly remind us of the fact. We are right to be reminded: this terrible reality should never be forgotten. At the same time, secular propaganda singularly fails to remind us of its own bloody past. For in terms of *more recent history*, it was not the Church that led bloody crusades, but rather the forces of social and revolutionary upheaval. The massacres and wars to establish French secularism cost hundreds of thousands of lives (as we shall see later on). Further revolutionary movements inspired by the French Revolution led to millions of atrocities in Spain, Latin America, Russia, and elsewhere. Whilst Catholics need to remember the barbarities committed in the name of the Church during the Middle Ages, the champions of secularism should recall the monstrous massacres that established the “liberal” regimes of today.

## **Secularism, Addiction, and Freedom**

YET HOW rarely the question of secular domination is even raised—let alone seriously considered! How seldom is it seen how much Secular Materialism has been imposed, often by stealth, but sometimes outright, brutal repression.

By contrast, we are repeatedly told secularism has yielded unprecedented liberty. License, of course, is indeed everywhere. However, we witness new forms of addictive behavior all around us—entailing everything from *Gameboy* to pornography to cocaine. One cannot hold up an ever-more addicted society as a model of authentic freedom! Nor can the question of “wage-slavery” be avoided either. For 120 years after *Rerum Novarum*, the question remains moot, as to how much things have truly changed since Leo XIII declared:

The ancient workingmen’s guilds were abolished in the last century, and no other protective organization took their place. Public institutions and the laws set aside the ancient religion. Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition. . . . The hiring of labor and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.

One may also legitimately ask whether a society progressively ravaged by mental illness is free. The West has clearly witnessed an explosion of mental disease in recent decades, though its precise extent remains difficult to measure. We have no scope here to properly consider rising levels of autism, bi-polar disorder, and more. Still, in *Affluenza*—a book dedicated to the malady of modern affluence—the psychologist Oliver James invokes studies suggesting a twenty-five-

year-old American today is anything from three to ten times more likely to suffer depression than in 1950. When the *conservative* estimate points to a 300 percent growth in depression, something is plainly, terribly wrong. Tragically, James is able to cite far more evidence than this, indicating alarming rises in depression, anxiety, and psychosis since the Fifties—or the era just prior to the Sixties’ “liberation.”<sup>8</sup>

The West was once dominated by the ideal of Christendom. Péladan dedicated the whole of his life to preserving and restoring this ideal. Today, the West is dominated by a Secular Materialistic complex, parroting uncritical ideology about human liberty. But Catholics of Faith know that materialism—whether philosophical or commercial—cannot possibly yield real freedom. This is because materialism is not true and therefore the claims that modern materialism creates freedom contradict the words of the Master: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Throughout these pages, we explore the manifold ways and means Secular Materialism manipulates people—and far more invasively and callously than the Church. All this, however, is not to deny how Catholicism profoundly shapes people! Certainly, its Sacramental Mystery exerted a powerful hold on our ancestors’ souls. It frequently sanctified their desire—rendering it more wholesome, even holy. Catholicism—at least once upon a time—led souls to desire higher cultural standards, which run completely counter to the decadent standards of today.

The Tridentine Catholic Church was profoundly, fiercely countercultural. Péladan belonged to that Church. Like the Popes Bl. Pius IX and St. Pius X, he would resist secular culture to the teeth! He belonged to a Catholic “sacramental counter-culture,” which refused the values of the French Revolution. This Sacramental counter-culture was *alert* to the crushing trajectory of modern materialism. It

saw how much that is sacred (or even simply wholesome) was continuously trampled beneath the “forward march of progress.” And it actively mourned all that was being lost.

Today, neither Secular Materialists, nor New Agers grieve like Péladan grieved. They do not mourn the destruction of sacred tradition. Their hearts do not share his horror of the stock market drowning out the Church. Many of them would feel intensely irritated by the man—wishing he were more tolerant and remembering that, after all, the glass is at least half-full. But whilst many a New Ager fancies himself countercultural, Péladan was *genuinely* countercultural. He did not sing liberal myths regarding progress. He did not believe materialism spelled freedom. He did not tolerate the intolerable.

This is what we have been comparing in this chapter: sacramental versus secular desire. For the Church, once the beating heart of Western civilization, has effectively been replaced by gigantic global corporations, which now drive the culture. These corporations are given free rein in a secular materialistic society. We will continue pondering what this means. But first, we return to the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment. For if we are to understand anything whatsoever regarding the enormous issues here, we cannot do so without considering what I have earlier called “Enlightenment Despair.”

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<sup>1</sup> Christophe Beauvils, *Joséphin Péladan, 1858-1918: Essai Sur Une Maladie Du Lyrisme* (Grenoble, France: J. Millon, 1993), 445.

<sup>2</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Le Vice Suprême* (Paris: Libr. moderne, 1884), 258.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>6</sup> Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 141 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Péladan, *Le Vice Suprême*, 256.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver James, *Affluenza (Aeflu'enza): How to Be Successful and Stay Sane* (London: Vermilion, 2007), xiii.

## VII

### Enlightenment Despair and Economic Liberalism

*One of us no longer believes in a soul and will shortly assist at suicide.*

*One of us no longer believes in a soul and will shortly assist at killing an unborn baby.*

**W**E HAVE been gazing toward two worlds in these pages, two separate spheres that radically diverge. With Péladan, we engaged the dream of Christendom renewed—the sphere of integral Catholic and Christian culture. Yet how this contrasts with a different sphere: the sterile, materialistic society, sans the Sacraments, in which I was reared, knowing nothing whatsoever about the Catholic Mystery. We can call this world many things. Faithless or Godless, modern or post-modern, liberal or “liberated” are only just a few descriptors. We might also talk of economic liberalism—for clearly post-Sixties social liberalism was rapidly followed by post-Eighties liberation of the markets, which transformed the culture even further.

How many different terms exist for clearly connected facets of the modern world! A common complex of inter-related factors underlies what I call “Secular Materialism” in these pages. For intimate connections exist between secularism, liberalism, and capitalism, as well as philosophical and scientific materialism. To understand these interlinked domains, it helps to recognize they possess a common ancestor. That ancestor is the Enlightenment, which was marked by the epistemology we invoked earlier with Kant and the

epistemological vacuum that followed him.

One could equally speak of *epistemological despair*—despair of establishing any deeper truth beyond rationalism and empiricism. Such Enlightenment Despair has led to the capitalist Secular Materialism of today. Materialism, I say, because reason and empiricism—by themselves, stripped of faith—bind us ever more tightly to the things of matter: verifiable, quantifiable, calculable matter. Secular, I say, because secularism has spread by the selfsame despair of establishing any higher truth than science and reason permit. Capitalist, I say, because unbridled markets arose in this moral vacuum and run amok in a world stripped of higher moorings.

*Enlightenment Despair.* Throughout these pages, we have briefly sketched the path by which our world transited from faith in Christ to faith in a materialist ideology. We have suggested how a world that once favored virtues such as obedience, poverty, chastity, and chivalry fell into meaninglessness, cynicism and consumer excess.

Here are faltering words for immense issues, which permeate every aspect of our lives. Paradoxically, these immensities are not always easily visible. For they belong to the familiar, everyday fabric of our existence—taken for granted and barely noticed. Earlier, I compared Enlightenment Despair to an immense iceberg, lying beneath the waters of modern consciousness. Often, only an extremity—the tip of the iceberg—reveals what is subliminally present. One such extremity we mentioned was *Logical Positivism*, which declared that religious statements were, by definition, meaningless. For, at least according to Logical Positivism, statements incapable of verification by reason or observation had no meaning!

### **Moral Despair**

THIS extremity of Logical Positivism reveals not simply epistemological despair, but also *moral despair*. Thus, Logical

Positivism gave rise to the “problem” of how to account for moral values. One “solution” to this “problem” was *Emotivism*, whereby moral values were reduced to emotions: “I like vanilla fudge, but I don’t like murder.” For Emotivists, these two statements belong together. Both entail emotive states of one and the same kind. Morality is reduced to subjective emotional preferences.

But, again, I say things like this only represent the visible tip of the enormous Enlightenment iceberg of despair beneath the waters of modern consciousness. Notions like Emotivism are simply the results of Enlightenment Despair carried to its logical conclusion.

In other words, we have lost hope of knowing where the foundations of morality lie—or whether they even exist! We may also consider *Utilitarianism* here—another attempt to reduce morality to reasonable, calculable terms the “enlightened” mind might grasp. Utilitarianism asserted morality meant nothing more than calculating how much pleasure or pain would ultimately result from any given course of action. Here was the so-called “Hedonistic Calculus” of Jeremy Bentham in the Eighteenth-Century English Enlightenment. Since Bentham’s time, Utilitarianism underwent numerous modifications—because a simple Utilitarianism too easily suggested absurdity. For example, a utilitarian might justify capital punishment for speeding—*If* one could prove fewer road deaths would result by executing speeders and thus lesser suffering for the population as a whole. “Better to execute one man for speeding, than untold road deaths.” Could anything be more materialistic than *quantifying* morality in units? At any rate, two thousand years ago, Divine Love was crucified by an early argument for Utilitarianism, which likewise decreed morality was *quantitative*:

The Pharisees, gathered a council . . . one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high Priest that year, said to them: You know nothing. Neither do you consider that it is

expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. . . . From that day therefore they devised to put him to death. (John 11:47, 49–50, 53)

Dear Lector, I speak of epistemological and moral despair, whilst invoking absurdities like Emotivism or capital punishment for speeding. Perhaps you will ask if I report little-known eccentricities of Western culture? Alas, no! When Bentham introduced Utilitarianism to the “enlightened” Eighteenth Century, it was not immediately rejected as ridiculous. Instead, it provided fodder for two centuries of busy academic activity! And still today, untold academic texts and university hours dedicate themselves to materialistic accounts of morality.

Indeed, John Stuart Mill was a leading utilitarian. Mill’s materialistic morality lies at the source of current notions one may do as one pleases, as long as there is “no harm to others.” But this is to say no *calculable* harm—harm readily apparent to everyday observation. Mill wrote in Nineteenth-Century England. For many years, his once-radical ideas remained largely within academia. However, Utilitarianism eventually burst beyond academia. This should hardly surprise us, for the leaders of governments, business, and media are formed in academic contexts. Neither is it surprising when public policy is dictated by utilitarian considerations or popular culture is stripped of any higher mooring.

Here is what the Enlightenment has bequeathed to us: *the despair of knowing what is wrong*. What is unethical must be reduced to demonstrable, provable harm. Hence, the utilitarian attempt to calculate units of suffering versus units of happiness. Any moral basis, beyond *visible* evidence, becomes suspect.

Euthanasia? Well, *in this world* we might reduce the *visible amount* of suffering, if we assist our loved ones to end their lives. And

the fate *in the next world* of a soul that has committed suicide? One cannot prove what will happen in the next world—or even that the next world exists. And so it does not matter. Gay “marriage”? Well, *in this world*, we might reduce the *visible amount* of suffering, if “marriage” were conferred upon homosexual partnerships. And certainly homosexuals have suffered untold fear and agony in a world that hated them. Is it not high-time we grant them “marriage” too? But this argument, again, is all about *this world*. The world beyond this world is entirely dismissed. Marriage is not regarded as a sacramental reality that originates beyond this world, but rather something *confected* in the here and now. Once again, one cannot *prove* a sacred reality stands behind marriage between man and woman. So it goes. Morality is reduced to the things of the material world. Here is materialism, pure and simple.

“I like Vanilla fudge, but I don’t like abortion.” How can we establish a fetus is a human being with a human soul in a materialistic society? The soul might just be a subjective construct! All this speaks to epistemological crisis. Despairing of any deeper foundation to morality, we readily turn to “explanations” like relativism and utilitarianism. Thus, we fail to agree on virtually anything beyond the *lowest common denominator*. Secular Materialism rests on this—a society that can only agree on the “bottom line.” “It’s the economy, stupid.” It is hardly surprising Clinton’s grotesque maxim gains credence in a world, which increasingly thinks government has more to do with enabling markets than upholding justice. (What is justice, anyway?)

Our society is presented with overwhelming problems as never before. There is a *maximization of moral and ethical problems*. Whilst at the same time, a *minimalist approach to ethics* is increasingly adopted.

Sincere Catholics represent those who do not succumb to this *moral minimalism*. Instead, they maintain faith in the moral tradition

of the Church. Rather than trust Enlightenment reductionism, they trust in a transcendent perspective, inspired by Christ and sustained over two millennia, through the sustained endeavor of saints, popes, and pious people everywhere. However, others prefer the Enlightenment Despair of Locke, Hume, Bentham, Mill, et al.—or worse, pop culture reflections of the same. Meanwhile, religious sensitivity and tradition becomes marginalized—treated as purely subjective and relative. Increasingly, the only thing that matters—is matter. Material things are all that we can universally agree upon. Or as we put it earlier: *Spirituality becomes private-ized.*

Let us be clear once and for all: a privatized spirituality spells a materialistic society. How could it be otherwise when spiritual or religious values are denied access to the public sphere? When a society progressively reduces its commitment to the spirit, it eventually becomes thoroughly materialistic.

## **Liberalism and Capitalism**

ENLIGHTENMENT Despair has led to Secular Materialism. But the process does not end there. Secular Materialism is inextricably linked to capitalism. Capitalism was also born amidst the “enlightened” secular destruction of tradition. In England, the original global pioneer of capitalism, this flowed naturally and easily from the earlier Reformation destruction of tradition. We have already noted (alongside countless other authors) the profound link between Protestantism and Capitalism. In France, things were not so easy—as Péladan saw violent revolution was required to exchange the pre-capitalist alliance of Throne and Altar for rule by the bourgeoisie. Here is what pierced Péladan’s heart—a theme we will explore in depth later on.

At any rate, capitalism has flourished in liberal, secularized countries, above all. Until recently, less secularized countries—such as Catholic Ireland or Spain—were disparaged as “economically

backwards.” Even today, as I write these words, certain capitalist “underachievers” of the European Union are still being stigmatized as PIGS. The acronym stands for Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain. Greece, of course, is Orthodox, not Catholic. It is also perhaps the least secularized country in Europe. But whether a country is Orthodox or Catholic, my point remains the same: historically, less secular countries were also less successful in terms of consumer capitalism. And the mightiest capitalist empires of recent centuries—British and American—were amongst the leading pioneers of secular values.

Clearly, secular liberalism is good for economic liberalism. The market thrives on stripping away moral values. Sex sells. Greed is good, so it is better for the economy to open shops on Sundays. Capitalism thrives in a culture where epistemological and ethical despair is ingrained. It becomes easy to *exploit* doubt regarding what is right and what is wrong. In such “enlightened” contexts, innumerable dangers to body and soul are practically deemed “innocent until proven guilty.”

Tobacco is only one example. Smoking thrived in an unregulated environment for many years. Whilst mounting evidence clearly indicated smoking killed people, that evidence remained (very slightly) less than absolute proof. The tobacco industry won a long series of court cases, claiming any relationship between lung cancer and cigarettes was merely coincidental. But tobacco smoke is only one amongst many toxins, which have too long been regarded “innocent till proven guilty”—proven, that is, by only the strictest empirical verification. Thus, decades of effort were spent amassing conclusive proof that cigarettes were dangerous.

Not only material toxins exist in this world, but also more subtle, spiritual poisons as well. How does one *prove* what is toxic for the human soul? Here is a serious problem when our definition of “wrong” is limited to harm, and harm is further limited to what is empirically, demonstrably damaging!

Once I saw an American television commercial featuring former presidential candidate Bob Dole. Dole lamented the aches of old age, but extolled a revitalizing, anti-aging *tonic* he had discovered—which turned out to be *cola*. The Christian heart can only shudder when a political leader recommends a leading cause of tooth decay, stomach rot, and obesity as *medicinal*. But it is much easier to construe Dole’s message as “just harmless” in a world where ethical insight is easily derided as subjective—or as logical positivists tell us: “meaningless.”

Here is how capitalism thrives in societies that reduce morality to notions of demonstrable, calculable harm. Whether it is *lying* in the name of cola or peddling gratuitous sexuality, the market seeks maximum freedom from the traditional morality once spearheaded by the Church. Today—as Péladan foresaw—the crash of the market has indeed drowned out the bells of the Church.

The plight of future generations looks grave. For many European children today, the Church is something utterly unknown. Our children are reared in a world where Christianity increasingly seems rare, even exotic. By contrast, consumer capitalism is hardly exotic to the young! Our offspring may never experience the vast, silent interior of a Cathedral—but they certainly experience the vast, manipulative interior of the shopping mall. More intimately still, the interior of a child’s *home* has been transformed by the barrage of media through television, radio, and the internet. Outside and inside, there is no escape: brands are everywhere—on posters, billboards, clothing. Even in nature! We are driving through rural Switzerland, my beloved and I. Near the road is a hill of agricultural fields. In times past, this was no doubt a bucolic setting. But now, this former beauty is perverted. For the farmer had hewed out a gigantic sprawling logo on his hillside—REEBOK.

## On Secular Imposition

THERE is a terrible irony here. For secularism prides itself on freedom, having swept aside the “useless and repressive” religious prohibitions of the past. According to common secular ideology, religions impose themselves on people, whereas secularism sets them free.

Yet what has liberated global corporations to invade and manipulate our psyches is *nothing other than secular society*. And even whilst these corporations impose more and more and more, there are still those who would happily stamp out the final vestiges of Christendom. In America, one endeavors to rename the Christmas tree a “holiday tree.” And in Birmingham, England, it was proposed to rename Christmas “Winterval.” For traditional names, so it is held, *impose* Christianity on non-believers.

Yes, some people are greatly agitated by the usage of traditional names—whilst remaining entirely undisturbed by massive advertising campaigns, fundamentally designed to alter the way they think, desire, shop, spend their time, etc. Whilst global corporations manipulate their children like Pavlov’s dog, they are up in arms about Christmas. Anything pointing to an alternative vision to secular “consensus” provokes must be squashed—post haste. Seldom is it questioned how this secular “consensus” emerged in the first place, or whether this “consensus” might have been (as Chomsky has it) manufactured.

Elsewhere in Europe, religious attire, including even a tiny cross, has been proscribed. Yet I have already recalled the endless American advertising, forever stamped on my young psyche: “Coke adds life!” and all the rest. I mentioned, too, my wife watching toddlers in deprived neighborhoods suckling cola. And, yet, as I witness the banning of tiny crosses—indicating Christ as the source of life renewed—I ask how people may ban the Cross, but no one ever thought of banning fifty-foot billboards screaming: “Coke adds life!”

Yes, time-honored traditions stir great ire. Yet flagrant effort to impose a vast, consumerist ethos scarcely raises an eyebrow. This consumerist ethos, of course, not only does not contradict secular

ideology—it actually depends on it. Whilst the icons of Christianity served to orient human desire to the Holy, the icons of consumerism frequently manipulate human desire toward ever more unholy ends.

The pious Christian heart easily registers a chilling public decadence all around us. It sees the hyper-sexualization of culture, the laxity toward drugs, abortion, gory and pornographic imagery, and more. The pious heart feels nausea.

A modern, de-sacramentalized world stares at me aghast. Are you not *absolutist* with such prudish, boorish, judgmental language? How do you know your nausea is not just a cultural construct? Can you not be more inclusive and tolerant toward values different from your own? All the while, its “inclusive” attitudes are decidedly intolerant of my Christian values and millennia of Christians before me.

The roots of this intolerance, we have argued, can be clearly discerned in Enlightenment Despair. And not only did the Enlightenment pave the way for violent revolution against traditional order and morality—it was also predicated on reductionism.

And *reductionism, by definition, is not inclusive*. Anything that transcends a reductionist agenda becomes marginalized.

No, Enlightenment denial of Christianity cannot be exonerated from the widespread cultural decadence we see today. Unbridled capitalism, materialism, and secularism have resulted and they cannot be separated into neat, discrete packages. Here is why I use compounds like “Secular Materialism.” I cannot support my claims with hard, empirical data, Lector. But the Christian heart has no need of such. The Christian heart is clear: our materialistic civilization becomes ever more disordered and chaotic.

And in place of the One who came to render us “life and life more abundant” (John 10: 10), we now have *Coca-Cola*.

## **Epistemological Despair and Global Warming**

IN this book, we are primarily concerned with the menace to the Soul of the World—something unmeasurable by science. But let us briefly consider the Body of the World—which *is* empirically observable. For the disease of the Soul of the World now spreads to her corpus. Vast swathes of measurable, ecological degradation exist everywhere. Forests are dying, oceans are polluted, deserts expand, bee colonies collapse, and perhaps most terrifying of all, changes in the climate endanger countless species and, before long perhaps, human beings as well.

Still, denial comes naturally to capitalist culture. In a world addicted to consumer gratification, it is easy to avoid warnings regarding climate change rather than confront our addictions. Moreover, there certainly appears to be a capitalist campaign—well organized and financed by industry and free-market think tanks—which generates confusion on a vast scale. Either it is refuted that the climate is changing significantly or it is claimed human beings have little to do with the change and thus we can all proceed as normal—guilt-free. The reasons for denial are not hard to spot. Clearly, many in the West are loathe to break ingrained habits of high-consumption.

We have been considering secular efforts to reject, relativize or privatize religious insight. But now we witness painstaking effort *to reject empirical evidence* as well—at least until such evidence is sufficient *to prove things beyond doubt*.

We have already considered the long decades it took to reach empirical certainty that smoking causes lung cancer. Today, there is mounting empirical evidence of a threat ultimately far more dangerous in terms of climate change. But our culture may well remain in the same decades-long denial, as it did with tobacco. However, this time, it is not merely nicotine addicts at risk. And we may not have decades, waiting pedantically until the last shred of evidence is in. By then, more than likely, it will be too late.

This is a book about Catholicism and not ecology. I lack both

scope and competency to comprehensively address the controversies here. Incomplete notes are all that can be offered. Nevertheless, climate controversy plainly illustrates the epistemological crisis of our age. Our culture is addicted to scientific verification and frequently will not move without cold, hard data—of an absolutely incontestable nature.

Yet if our civilization should collapse, and if future historians should survive to tell the tale—what tale will they tell? For my part, the answer is chillingly clear. At the heart of our present culture lies the ticking time-bomb of Enlightenment Despair: the refusal to grant faith to anything that cannot be proved—and the moral vacuum this has created.

One drives a car along a narrow, twisting mountain road. There are steep cliffs to the side, plunging down to the ocean hundreds of feet below. One hears reports of an oncoming vehicle up ahead—with a maniac at the wheel driving eighty miles an hour. Does one demand hard data to verify, beyond doubt, this oncoming vehicle really exists? Is not the serious possibility of catastrophe sufficient to urge caution? We now receive very serious warnings and yet we require still further proof to verify that disaster is certain, unless we change course. Yes, more proof is demanded, whilst some of us even stick fingers in our ears. As a simple first step, it behooves one to *listen*.

Thomas is a Cambridge-educated scientist in my cyber group. I have none of Thomas's decades of scientific discipline. I myself cannot verify what he says. But his sobriety has always impressed me. His voice is more alarmed than some, but I find it worth *listening* to:

I have been thinking about the future too, and that is what this post is mainly about. Prompted largely by the arrival of my son in my life two years ago, I have been trying to understand as best I can . . . the world in which my son is going to live his life. . . . Whatever happens, we are going to see very major changes. The big question is whether we

are going to deal effectively with climate change. If we don't, we are headed for catastrophe.

. . .

Recent work by Jim Hansen of NASA suggests that we must get the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere back below 350 parts per million as soon as we possibly can. We are currently at about 387, rising at 2 ppm per year, and the longer we stay above 350, the more chance that trends like the melting of polar ice and the release of methane from bogs in Siberia will accelerate and turn into unstoppable positive feedbacks. . . . If we keep raising CO<sub>2</sub> levels or fail to reduce them, the climate [could] suddenly flip into a state 6 degrees centigrade warmer than the present.

. . .

If such a big rise happens, we're done for, certainly as a civilization and perhaps even as a species—mass extinctions will then certainly take place, and in any such event, it tends to be the large creatures at the top of the food chain that are most vulnerable.

I don't think any of this is unduly alarmist. Events especially in the Polar Regions since 2007 have been right at the upper end of previous predictions. It suddenly looks much, much more serious and urgent than it did before.

Scientists warn of catastrophe up ahead. Am I obliged to become a scientist myself to verify their data—before altering course? If not everyone can be a scientist, one must listen to scientists—at least in

the realm of science. (When scientists start pontificating about faith—for example, Richard Dawkins—this is something else entirely.) But in the realm of natural science, is it too much to show a little humility and bow respectfully before those who have spent their lifetimes mastering a discipline different from my own?

It would seem not. The reason why lies in our “liberated” society’s need to consume more, more, more—and the economic liberalism that has yielded this society. The subject of liberalism cannot be escaped here. In this book, we have considered this liberalism historically, whether it is the Enlightenment drive to be liberated from traditional, revealed religion or the Sixties’ drive to be liberated from traditional sexual mores. All this involved throwing out the accumulated wisdom of tradition, but now we even see the same push to be liberated from science as well. Liberal economics reigns and will not be fettered—even at the cost of the biosphere.

And so our liberal consumerist society blocks what is really necessary here: a vast collective will and determination for change. As it happens, Benedict XVI said something that is very germane to this point. When asked about climate change, the former Pope noted that even widespread general recognition of the crisis seemed insufficient to inspire collective concrete action. Something else is needed. And he went so far as to suggest the only hope may lie with the Church:

In view of the *threatening catastrophe*, there is recognition everywhere that we must make moral decisions. . . . But the conversion of this into political will and political actions is rendered largely impossible by *the lack of willingness to do without*. . . . It becomes clear that the political will ultimately cannot become effective unless there is in all mankind—especially on the part of the chief supporters of development and progress—a *new deeper moral awareness*, a willingness to do

without. . . . Who therefore, can ensure that this general awareness also penetrates the personal sphere? This can only be done by an *authority that touches the conscience*, that is close to the individual and does not merely call for eye-catching events. In that respect, this is a challenge for the Church. She not only has a major responsibility; she is, I would say, often *the only hope*. [Italics mine]<sup>1</sup>

It is hard not to concur with Benedict XVI: *the Church may prove the only hope for the world*. Admittedly, that great pontiff qualified his statement with the word “often.” Possibly, his qualification allows for regions like the Middle East or the Orient. Clearly, the Church has little influence in Saudi Arabia. In such places, different traditions must grapple with the looming ecological catastrophe. But here in the West—the West formed in the cradle of Catholicism—the Church would seem to be the only hope to break the manifold addictions of Secular Materialism. At least, this is what we will continue to argue throughout these pages.

Of course, since the papacy of Benedict XVI, we have had Pope Francis and his groundbreaking environmental encyclical *Laudato Si*, wherein he vastly amplifies Benedict XVI’s words above regarding “threatening catastrophe.” Thus Francis writes:

A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this

warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. It is true that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. As these gases build up in the atmosphere, they hamper the escape of heat produced by sunlight at the earth's surface. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes.

...

If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us. A rise in the sea level, for example, can create extremely serious situations, if we consider that a quarter of the world's population lives on the coast or nearby, and that the majority of our megacities are situated in coastal areas.<sup>2</sup>

Much, much more might be said regarding *Laudato Si*. However, in this book, we have mostly resisted the temptation to discuss the Francis era. Largely this is due to the fact that my book was mainly written in the years prior to Pope Francis and, for all kinds of reasons, I am unwilling to latterly insert commentary on his papacy into an already lengthy volume.

However, I am happy to emphasize the great Benedict XVI for another reason. For there are many traditional Catholics of Faith who, for reasons that are understandable, cannot help but question certain aspects of *Laudato Si*. Yet the words of both Benedict XVI and Francis alike suggest that the quest to address climate change and the quest to restore traditional faith should be friends, not enemies. For traditional Catholics yearn for the simpler, pious ways of life that existed in a less materialistic age. And yet climate change demonstrates precisely *why that simpler life is now mandated*. Is not natural simplicity more in keeping with traditional Catholic Faith, than capitalist excess? May we who cherish tradition see clearly here: climate change points directly to the unsustainable nature of Secular Materialism. It amply demonstrates the sheer destructiveness of that libertarian, capitalist enterprise, which Péladan warned would finish the world, if the Church bells were reduced to silence.

Here is why I mused on collective human desire in the last chapter—and *how that desire is channeled*. We have considered how the Church conditions human desire and how secular capitalist society conditions desire. Now, secularists lament that, in previous ages, the Church conditioned people by controlling them through fear. Clearly, the Church has sometimes been far from innocent in this regard. One needs to recall, however, how often the Church guided people to far more holy ends than Secular Materialism, which most certainly controls people today and frequently through fear (usually economic in nature)! Have members of the Church manipulated and controlled people? This cannot be denied. Do Secular Materialists manipulate and control people? This cannot be denied. Fallen human beings everywhere control and manipulate other human beings. Being fallen, we all have a fallen drive to control and to manipulate. And the Church has ever been filled with the fallen.

*Fallen people everywhere*: Here is where facile accusations of Catholic “control” break down. They fail to account for how much

liberal, subtly materialistic ideology conditions and manipulates the human soul. And it is because of *this* conditioning and *this* manipulation, that the world now stands on the brink of unprecedented ecological catastrophe. Can anyone deny that the secularized, capitalist West has forged the mass consumerist culture that now threatens to destroy us?

For the Catholic of Faith, the tragic plight of modernity lies in its replacing Christianity with another religion—the belief system of Secular Materialism. And now this materialistic religion is leading to a world that auto-destructs.

I recall a seminal moment in my life. It was a warm, early spring—too warm for that time. My beloved sat next to me in the park, watching people frolic in their shirt sleeves. She turned to me and said: “We’re not going to make it, are we?” I found myself saying something that startled me. For only then, the dreadful realization hit me: “No, we’re not going to make it—if we stay in the same capitalist system.”

We lack scope to analyze the future of global capitalism. We cannot ponder what will happen, say, as China and India emulate the materialistic West ever more successfully. Still, I concur with my friend Thomas:

We will have to decide collectively how to apportion energy sources between growing food, keeping warm (or cool), building/making stuff and travelling around. If we simply let the market decide there will be mass famine and chaos on a scale far beyond anything the world has ever seen.

“If we simply let the market decide!”—this is precisely the prospect held out by our contemporary society. Yet this society has only arisen as the once-transcendent aspirations of the West were

replaced by liberal, secular, and capitalist processes. While Priests, nuns, monks, and laity alike once prayed to God above, one frequently prays today for little more than a comfortable middle-class lifestyle with all its instant gratifications. Only thus have we been reduced and exposed to that chilling prospect: simply letting the market decide.

It is necessary that a culture aspire to something higher than materialism. Surely this will be the terrible lesson of our age. Earlier, I spoke of Conor and Les, who enquired if notions of the Transcendent—the Holy—were truly necessary for moral effort. They ask me this, whilst all around them, a world is dying for want of something beyond the market.

What is this *something beyond the market*, which is so needed? For Catholics of Faith, the answer is clear. Yet waves of iconoclasm have swept away the Faith of the West, leaving no moral compass, amidst capitalist havoc. Today, many New Agers hope their “holistic” spirituality may provide this compass, guiding us toward a more ecologically sensitive populace. But, as we argue in our [next chapter](#), the New Age is only another wave of iconoclasm, which further reduces our options.

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, Michael J. Miller, and Adrian J. Walker. *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the times* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Laudato Si*, 24–25.

## VIII

### New Age Iconoclasm

*One of us believes that all the world's religions are but the opium of the people.*

*One of us believes two millennia of testimony by all the Saints and Doctors of the Church is nothing but deceiving or deceived.*

*One of us believes The Da Vinci Code has only now revealed the real truth about Christianity.*

*One of us fells a forest, that a new plantation can be laid.*

**W**AVES of iconoclasm have burst over the West. Mighty torrents have arrived—one after the other in succession—washing away before them so very much of what was once held sacred. How the last five centuries have been transformed by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French and Communist Revolutions. And from the 1960s onwards, we clearly witness another revolution. It is as-yet-inadequately named: a tsunami of destruction on manifold fronts at once. But whether it was the so-called “spirit of Vatican II” or the New Age movement, which emerged at same time, whether it was the Sexual Revolution, rock and roll, or the student riots of 1968, the same revolutionary fervor erupted. One sees, therein, the same hubris and the same passion—the fiery certainty that what our forebears cherished can now be thrown to the winds.

Now, to bracket all these phenomena together in a single, short

paragraph like this is to invite ridicule (from certain quarters at least). What I have just said—is it not too crude and simplistic? Still, overarching themes can be discerned here—themes including hoped-for liberation, ennui with the past, the surety one knows better now, etc. And if one wanted a single word to express these overarching themes, *iconoclasm* would be surely apt. Now, the original iconoclasts were the Eighth-Century Eastern Christians, who sought to destroy the icons—the heritage of Orthodoxy. In its most literal sense, iconoclasm recalls this early attempt to eradicate religious imagery. But we see the same destructive tendencies, century after century. For the Protestants smashed statues and demolished images. Carried on the waves of Enlightenment rationalism, the French Revolutionaries did likewise. Communism in turn, razed to the ground untold numbers of churches and monasteries.

Yet this *literally* destructive meaning of iconoclasm is undergirded by a broader, metaphorical sense. Entire societies become convinced that what they once held Sacred, no longer deserves reverence. In scant decades, Protestants overthrew fourteen centuries of Christian tradition. They held to *Sola Scriptura*—eliminating what was not explicit in the Bible. Here is to say, they posited a period of infallible inspiration for the scriptures, which extended a few decades after the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord. They recognized inspiration in the First Century; but how much of the following fourteen centuries of inspiration—until Luther's arrival—was thrown into the dustbin of history? Is it possible for the Catholic of Faith to regard the Reformation as anything other than despairing—even cynical—in terms of everything that happened after the Bible was completed?

Yet even *matters of scripture* long accepted by Catholics were doubted. Thus, the Sacrament of Confession was cast aside, even though one reads in the Bible:

He said therefore to them again: Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. (John 20: 21–23)

The Sacrament of Confession: for the Reformers, scripture provided insufficient evidence—and thus it was dismissed. And it makes no difference how many genuine saints have testified to its healing, restorative power. What of Mary, Mother of God, the *Theotokos*? This title was only established in the Fourth Century at the Council of Ephesus. Well, this, too, is the Fourth Century and the saints and geniuses of the Fourth Century are not reliable. Away with the *Theotokos*! And yet Our Lord's Presence in His Church—His Presence guiding, teaching, inspiring—did not die with the Apostles, who heard Him say: “I will not leave you orphans” (John 14:18) and “Lo, I am with you always, even until the End of the World” (Matthew 28:20).

To be a sincere Catholic is to maintain faith in the continued presence of Jesus Christ in His Church. It is to believe that the Holy Spirit works across the centuries, inspiring the saints and doctors of the Church. It is neither to abandon hope in God, nor in the inspired men and women who listened to God, as the Tradition of the Church was fashioned. It is to trust, likewise, in the Communion of Saints in Heaven “on whose constant intercession, we all rely for help.” For the sincere Catholic, what can the Protestant negation of fourteen centuries mean—except a *twofold despair* in both God and humanity?

Yet, if Protestantism discarded vast tracts of Tradition, Enlightenment rationalism proceeded even further. Now, the God of Revelation became entirely suspect. Now, even the First-Century scriptures were dismissed as irrelevant. “Enlightened” souls conceded

the possible existence of some Deist version of God, but this might be nothing more than an abstract, impersonal life-force. Certainly, this Deist God was not the personal Jesus Christ! The dialectical materialism of communist philosophy would proceed further—any kind of God whatsoever now had to be eliminated completely.

And the New Age? Here at any rate, is my conviction as a Catholic convert from the New Age. In the New Age movement we find *yet another mighty wave* of this same enormous cynicism and despair, and with the same enormous hubris. “We New Agers know better than millennia of saints and sages.”

Hubris is the danger of all revolutionaries. Luther assumed he knew better than century upon century of Christian tradition. Locke, Hume, and the other Enlightenment philosophers likewise assumed the same. “Enlightened” rationalism was sufficient to convince them that medieval faith meant nothing at all. And what is the conviction of Marx, Engels, and Lenin if not: “We know better now and this gives us the right to eradicate the old order.” And these days, much the same can be seen in the present New Age “*faith in the Sixties*” and the correspondent despair of two millennia.

### **“Holistic” Iconoclasm**

LOOKING back to the New Ager I once was, I recognize how much cynicism and hubris was present in my soul. I was confident I had something much more relevant to the modern world than the outmoded Church. I thought Christianity ought to wake up and take notice of the New Age!

Now, frequently New Agers are kind and unpretentious folk. Rarely do they become nakedly violent revolutionaries like Robespierre and Lenin. Still, they clearly support an iconoclastic agenda. *The Da Vinci Code* is, I think, a far more vicious book than many that New Agers read. Yet how many New Agers and New Age

bookshops have effectively endorsed the *Da Vinci Code*? But the phenomenon that has ensued—not simply the novel itself, but major Hollywood movie and endless reams of commentary—clearly draws sustenance from New Age approbation.

Does not the *Da Vinci Code* declaim there is nothing new in Christianity except falsehood? And by contrast, that whatever is true in Christianity is not new? Yes, according to the gospel of Dan Brown, Christianity possesses nothing of value, which did not already exist in pre-Christian traditions. And so the *Da Vinci Code* sings in harmony with a New Age choir that there is nothing unique to Christianity—at least nothing of genuine importance—which cannot be found elsewhere in the “holistic cafeteria.” For implicitly, at least, New Agers generally maintain pre-Christian paganism is every bit as valid as what happened after Calvary. In the New Age, one can be a pre-Christian pagan Goddess worshipper or follow Christ—the choice does not really matter. (Although for Dan Brown, it seems preferable to choose pagan Goddess worship—rather than the “system of oppression” begotten by St. Peter’s jealousy of St. Mary Magdalene’s relationship with her “lover.”)

Unlike Dan Brown, however, New Age literature generally appears less hostile to Christianity. One will even find “endorsements” like: “Well, of course, Christianity is a beautiful approach—just like every other spiritual approach.” Yes, New Age iconoclasm usually assumes a gentler hue. Christian icons are not smashed to pieces as they were by generations of reformers and revolutionaries. They are just gently thrown to one side, often with a condescending smile.

Here I would turn to a text, which exemplifies this “soft” New Age iconoclasm better than any book I know. The book is *Soulution* by William Bloom. Now, Bloom is a man—I need to say—with whom I once had lengthy personal connection. Long attached to Findhorn, William Bloom has inspired numerous New Age projects in Britain, including my own work in Cambridge.

Given that I know the author of *Soulution*, I write very personally here, particularly as what follows might seem like a personal attack on an old friend—one, who, moreover, greatly helped me in my youth. But I mean no attack on this sincere soul. Ideas must be separated from the individuals who hold them. It is the ideas in *Soulution* I critique here—not the man.

Bloom's book is subtitled: *the Holistic Manifesto*. But it could equally be "The New Age Manifesto"—because *Soulution* could scarcely be more New Age if it tried. In any event, the author used the term "NewAge" for many years, even if, more recently, he has eschewed it for "Holism." Bloom has long been a leading figure in the British New Age movement. (Indeed, the book's dust-jacket still describes him as such.) Moreover, like many with profound long-term connections to Findhorn, he has drawn heavily on the English Theosophical sources of the New Age—particularly Alice Bailey.

Thus, *Soulution* may be read as a New Age Manifesto—*par excellence*. For in *Soulution*, you will find elaborated the central New Age tenet of a universal spiritual path. Differences between religions are treated as little more than deviations or superficial expressions of culture. Moreover, you will repeatedly find these differences criticized—as irrelevant distractions at best, toxic and destructive at worst.

All the while, Bloom confidently proclaims something superior to every traditional religion that he calls "Holism." Holism, he explains, has to do with a vision of greater wholes, rather than isolated parts. He means to champion a holistic vision instead of a reductionistic one. Yet I find *Soulution* astonishingly reductionistic. For Bloom's "Holism" entails more—much more!—than being holistic in the true, legitimate sense of that word. What is meant by "Holism" is the New Age pretense to include all spiritual traditions, whilst subtly dismissing them and propounding its own superiority. As Bloom writes: "Holism recognizes and deepens the essence of all religious traditions, perceiving what is best and most useful."<sup>1</sup>

How exactly does “Holism” perceive what is best? It is difficult to know. As far as I can see, the author never plainly spells this out. Rather, the book is loaded with blanket assertions with little to back them up. Bloom writes:

Holism honors the unique cultural form of the different faiths, but is more interested in the underlying and universal skills and precepts. It looks for the core principals and commonalities. In studying the universality at the core of all faiths, we can find significant and useful insights. If, for example, we look at religious practices and skills, we can discern those which are held in common and which Holism develops and encourages.<sup>2</sup>

In asserting a common “core” to every religion, Bloom would seem to claim commonality provides a reliable base for deciding what is valuable. By contrast, what is *not* held in common becomes suspect. For if you read *Soulution*, you will be assured, Lector, that you have no need of any religion. All you need are certain “core” precepts, attitudes, and practices, which are mutually shared between different religions.

Now, these “core” things are beautiful. The author writes—often movingly—of the importance of cultivating attitudes of self-reflectiveness, generosity, honesty, and tolerance. There is nothing wrong with advocating honesty, generosity, and tolerance! But Bloom proceeds further. His message seems to be: “Prune everything back to the core practices—so-called. Prune it back to the common features.” Moreover, my heart starts to ache, reading Bloom’s assertions of superiority. For the reader is given to believe the pruned-tree of “Holism” is not simply sufficient, but indeed preferable, by far, to traditional religion.

Yet, amongst the world’s religions, who determines *what the*

*common features really are?* Which authority has the competence to solemnly pronounce this? The only answer I see is Bloom himself. Bloom's "Holism" perceives and knows "what is best." However, his list of core values hardly seems authoritative, but somewhat arbitrary. It is even provincial; like all New Age-ism, bound to the liberal Anglosphere of our day. Moreover, as we shall soon see, it is also provincial in time.

But just for a moment, let us suppose Bloom's core values were not so conditioned by the *Zeitgeist* as I claim. Let us imagine his list of common spiritual attitudes transcends his own culture. And so. . . ?

Who is to say one should *limit* one's aspirations to the common features of the world's spiritual traditions? Who is the authority here? And moreover—*why*? Is it not clear one could thereby limit oneself and one's possibilities? Might one not lose out by restricting oneself to simply what is common-or-garden? Is it not possible to overlook something important—even vital—that is *not held in common* by the world religions? What of the inspirations of geniuses, philosophers and saints with insight far beyond what is commonly agreed on? In other words: What if, in pruning everything back to a "spiritual garden" of common plants, you miss flowers of startling, unexpected beauty? Worse, what if you inadvertently mow down *vital new growth and development* in the religious and spiritual evolution of the world?

But herein lies the rub. For there *are* limited circumstances when Bloom *does* allow for new developments. He includes insight, for example, from Twentieth-Century psychotherapy and ecology. But this creates a special problem. For it cannot be claimed Western Twentieth-Century insights belong to the core of every religious tradition! Hence, an unacknowledged contradiction exists. Whilst *Soulution* repeatedly argues for the common core, Bloom very much wants to include *certain things*—things that he himself very much favors—which hardly feature in his common core. A choice is thereby made to allow *some* new elements, whilst rejecting others. And, as we shall see, this

is a key strategy to the New Age movement.

Yet there is *one new element* that Bloom would *never* allow for. It is precisely the element *that separates Christianity from all the pagan religions of old*. It is that which entered into and transformed the universe on Calvary—the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here is the *vital new growth*, which entered the world with Christianity and which does not belong to the common-or-garden features of global religion. This is because Christianity *added* something entirely new to the world two thousand years ago.

Here is a question that never seems to occur to people like Dan Brown or William Bloom: what if the Church offers something both new and unique—something utterly undreamt of in the *Da Vinci Code* or *Soulution*? In other words: *what if Christianity transcends pre-Christian paganism?*

Bloom never allows for this. He leads us to believe that virtually every form of spirituality must be equally valid, because, according to him, it expresses the same “core” spirituality. He then goes further, claiming that because neither Christianity, nor any other religion is necessary to this “core” spirituality, therefore atheists and agnostics also experience the same “core” spirituality. He even suggests raves and drugs provide spiritual experiences that could be as valid as any other. (The book includes a lyrical tribute to an all-night rave, where people high on ecstasy danced the night away until they watched the sun rise.)<sup>3</sup>

The desperation to convince people that religion does not matter is almost palpable in passages like this:

Love-making, leading a team, dancing, being with a beloved grandchild, celebrating a sacrament—the activity does not matter. What . . . gives meaning to the event is the quality of our awareness. . . . Using the strategies that work for us, we pause and engage in spiritual awareness.

And so almost anything or anyone can be praised as spiritual and sacred, from “sensational movies and the explosion of MTV” to “shamans, magicians, witches.”<sup>4</sup>

It hardly need be said Bloom neither includes nor praises Catholic Popes and prelates in the same glowing terms! Despite this omission, his genuine intention, like that of so many New Agers, is inclusiveness. Bloom writes much about being warmly open to all perspectives. He wants to honor rock stars, ravers, agnostics, and atheists, as much as anyone else. He seeks to embrace everyone in his “holistic” vision—*except* traditional Christians and traditional followers of other religions.

A terrible irony exists here. Bloom is manifestly sincere in his wish to be all-embracing, but he cannot embrace religion—at least any religion different from his own “holistic” directives. Religion that differs from Bloom’s own “Holism” is attacked, whether implicitly or explicitly, on page after page.

### **The Descent to the Lowest Common Denominator**

PUT simply, the author of *Soulution* is an iconoclast. For in *Soulution*, words such as “theology” and “tradition” are repeatedly used pejoratively. Bloom even goes so far as to say: “Traditional religions . . . exclude them[selves] from being morally useful in a modern world whose keynote is diversity.” Indeed, it looks to me that Bloom uses words like “tradition” almost interchangeably with “fundamentalism,” and then merges that term with things like “Nazi.”<sup>5</sup>

Bloom is hardly alone in professing “inclusiveness” whilst disparaging religion. There are New Agers like this everywhere—like the young Findhorn woman who derided my “naming” things of the spirit, never realizing she had casually jettisoned global theology with a single stroke! She was telling me what I had so often heard before: “There is no need for ‘Old Age head-stuff’ Just be kind. Be generous.

Be self-reflective.” Indeed, this is very much like what William Bloom calls the “core skills.”

Since my New Age days, I have come to regard such core skills as “lowest common denominator” skills. Reductionism is at work. Like secularism, the New Age *reduces our options*. Our horizons are restricted to simply that *which can be commonly agreed upon*. By seeking to establish a “holistic” spiritual authority, which posits tenets everyone can supposedly agree on—atheists, ravers, and religious people—Bloom eliminates (or at least marginalizes) everything they cannot agree on.

It is true humanity shares some common values, which, no doubt, existed thousands of years ago—in ancient Greece, for example. No doubt in old Greece, differing pagan philosophers found common points of agreement. The Fifth-Century BC Diagoras is sometimes considered the world’s first atheist. And if Plato or Aristotle were familiar with Diagoras, they could surely find common ground with him, as with every manner of pagan thinkers. And so. . . ? If we remember Plato and Aristotle today, it is because *they broke new ground*. The same is true—in an infinitely more profound way—of Christianity.

But there are people, it seems, that want to get back—back to a time before Christianity. Let us envisage the figure of Jesus Christ who would appear to haunt Bloom or Brown’s imagination: “I have come to bring you nothing new. I have only come to bring you what all the old pagan religions held in common.”

### **Back to Paganism**

HERE is why, if one follows *Soulution*, one inevitably ends up with some form of paganism. Paganism is the natural consequence of the claim that choosing between the world’s spiritual traditions does not matter. This is because one does not care whether those traditions

originated *prior to* Calvary or *after* Calvary. Affirming there is no significant difference between pre-Christian religion and Christianity misses the fact that the cosmos was transformed on Calvary! Therefore, a universe of difference exists between pre-Christian paganism and Christianity.

It is not surprising, then, that a distinctly pagan thread runs through *Soulution*. For instance, Bloom suggests “Holists” may feel no need for temples or religious ceremonies, because nature suffices for them. Indeed, Bloom candidly admits to real affection for pre-Christian paganism in marked distinction to his apparent views on traditional Christianity. But let us remain with this distinction between spiritual aspiration prior to the Sacrifice on Calvary and spiritual aspiration following Calvary. As a Christian, I affirm the universe changed on Calvary. Blood and water flowed into the planet from the wound of the lance to His Sacred Heart. Henceforth, Christianity brought something utterly new into this fallen world. Christianity begat a new universe of hope that none of the pre-Christian religions ever dared to hope for.

Years ago, when William Bloom was a loving mentor to me, I readily accepted his Theosophical mix of pre- and post-Christian spiritualities. Back then, I would never have blinked an eye had I been told there was no essential difference between pre-Christianity and Christianity. But now everything is changed. I have tasted the Sacraments of the Holy Catholic Church. And this experience of the Sacraments has convinced me Bloom’s “core” argument is wrong. “Love-making, leading a team, dancing, being with a beloved grandchild” and no doubt things like pagan rites and raves and MTV can never be equated to the Holy Sacraments. For later, as I shall tell, the discovery of Holy Sacraments yielded something utterly new in my life, never glimpsed in all my years of New Age neo-paganism.

But let us return to the occluded beliefs, doctrines, and dogmas at the heart of *Soulution*. For whilst Bloom rails against religious belief, tradition, and doctrines, his book features plentiful dogma of its own.

For what is a dogma, except a belief held to be inviolable—a doctrine so solemnly promulgated as to be beyond question? Reading *Soulution*, I, at any rate, sense numerous solemn beliefs behind the repeated assertions.

Bloom would seem to want us to accept many things on faith. These include his own certainty that every way is equal and religion is unnecessary. These are beliefs—articles of faith. It is likewise an article of faith that agnostics and atheists have the *same kinds of spiritual experience* as religious people do. One goes into nature, raves till dawn, or receives the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is all the same to him. Then, there is the unquestioned superiority of “Holism” over what Bloom calls “the prison of traditional faith.”<sup>6</sup> Here, too, are further things to accept on faith.

What is central here is *the solemn certainty the Holy Church possesses nothing unique*—at least nothing truly important—that cannot equally be found by holists, pagans, agnostics, atheists, and anyone else. This solemn certainty is *structurally necessary* to Bloom’s “Holism.” Without this article of faith, *Soulution*’s thesis starts to unravel. For if Bloom could even *admit the possibility* the Church offered something unique—something different from his “Holism”—the weight of his entire argument would collapse into dust.

Yes, *Soulution* stands or falls on doctrinal, even dogmatic certainty. And it is the same with the “holistic” or New Age movement everywhere. At least, this is what all my years in the movement tell me. Here is why I have critiqued *Soulution* in-depth here, not to attack a kind man I know from my past, but because his book illustrates the New Age contours very well indeed—with all its disdain for belief systems, theology, doctrines, and dogmas, whilst unconsciously asserting its own new dogmatic certainties.

Here is something that strikes me, with *Soulution* as with so many other New Age texts. All the while *Soulution* repeatedly

criticizes religious authorities, its author implicitly claims a similar authority himself. Bloom's "Holism" clearly encompasses a multitude of things—including the approbation of modern culture and MTV. Why do these belong to a holistic vision? I see no other answer than this: they belong there by Bloom's authority. He says they belong to his Holism and so they do.

For myself, it is clear. "Holism" is another highly-specific belief system competing with other highly-specific belief systems. As with other belief systems, it very much wants to evangelize. It proclaims its own superiority to other belief systems that it hopes to replace. (For Bloom repeatedly expresses the hope "Holism" will become the dominant form of spirituality in the world. It is, after all, the global "soulution" for him.)

Dear Lector, I wish to be frank with you. Plainly, I, too, wish to evangelize. I likewise believe I have found something better, never glimpsed in my twenty years of "holistic exploration." I also proclaim my beliefs of superiority—for example, that Christianity is superior to pre-Christianity. My difficulty is not that New Agers, like Bloom, are crusading evangelists, promoting articles of faith. All men and women should have the right to propose their beliefs. What *does* concerns me gravely, however, is their effective denial that they are actively promoting a new form of faith—as well as their claims to be universal and inclusive.

What happens if one openly questions whether anything of real importance exists outside "holistic universalism"? Long experience has taught me this: If one questions this New Age Dogma, one will be treated like an infidel. *This is how it should be.* For an infidel is merely someone who refuses to share a religion's beliefs. And New Age-ism has beliefs that one may either share or be an infidel to.

However, in my experience, New Agers are usually completely unaware of this. Their confidence in their universalism *lowers their consciousness of having beliefs.* "How can there be infidels, when I

am tolerant and all-embracing?" Thus, I am happy when New Agers actually recognize me as an infidel to their belief system. Precious awareness is thereby gained—the consciousness they *do* possess beliefs, even doctrines—which others do not share.

New Agers may be genuinely shocked to meet thoughtful, religious people who do not share their "universalism." At this point, they start to face an uncomfortable problem: "How can there be outsiders? For if I have really left religion behind, then how can infidels even exist?" A disquieting realization may slowly dawn—their New Age-ism is not universal. Their "holism" fails to embrace the greater whole.

I am troubled, Lector. I know too well that upbeat New Age world, born of the liberal Sixties, wherein we all could sing the Beatle's *All You Need is Love*. I know how easy it is agree to abstract propositions like: "All you need are the core skills." Beyond the "holistic cafeteria," however, things are not so easy. For example, we New Agers could never agree Original Sin exists or that, due to Original Sin, to *truly* love another human being is a daunting task!

Now I see this New Age world *robbed* me. For personally, I need more than abstract calls to love and kindness. I am very much in need of something very personal, not abstract, in this daunting work of real love. I need a Redeemer. I need His Sacraments. I need His Holy Church. Are New Agers one and all my superiors? Have they no need of the Grace that poured into the soil of Calvary two thousand years ago?

Dear New Age friends, what if anything I say is actually *true*? What if a *vital new way* opened up on Calvary two millennia ago? What if Calvary *transformed everything*—precisely because the old pagan ways, trumpeted by people like Brown and Bloom, were insufficient to God's work of Redemption? What if we are actually far less capable of *real love* than the feel-good New Age lead us to believe?

What do I say, when “holistic” authors write books, claiming to be inclusive, warm, and embracing—whilst appearing markedly hostile to whatever does not jive with their “Holism”? Perhaps you will tell me I am also hostile. But I do not claim this same “open” approach to all spiritual traditions!

“Holists”: I understand *my perspective excludes yours, whilst your perspective excludes mine!* My religion is different from your religion! Neither do I claim to be perennially warm and sunny. I am a fallen human being, all-too-capable of antagonism. Thus, I go to Confession regularly and regularly I confess my hostility. There I witness the hostility within my hardened heart. Being “open, tolerant, and inclusive” does not come cheap. Real tolerance—which is real love—is tough. Here is why I, at any rate, require the Holy Sacraments—just like I need something beyond the lowest common denominator.

### **The New Age Collusion with Secular Materialism**

IN everything above, the sympathetic reader will readily note the similarities between Secularism and New Age-ism. Because both Secularism and the New Age proclaim tolerance, whilst denying their own intolerance. Both call for commonly agreed values—whilst at the same time, stigmatizing values beyond those commonly agreed upon by liberal society.

These commonly agreed values are very much indebted to the materialistic epistemology of the Enlightenment. They are the result of Enlightenment Despair—the inability *to see beyond the lowest common denominators* of our experience. For everyone can agree the square root of twenty-five is five. Everyone can likewise agree (at least, these days) that tobacco smoke is toxic. We can all agree on the world of everyday, material things. But we can no longer agree on anything beyond the crudely obvious.

“Grievous bodily harm” is a term in English criminal law—but what of grievous spiritual harm? Legislation of the past took account of grievous spiritual harm. Sunday was once held sacrosanct for example—by law. There was a sense of spiritual harm in abandoning the Sabbath. What grievous spiritual harm has resulted from the Anglosphere commercialization of Sunday? Who can say? There is no *material* proof. We have no data.

There is secular pruning back to the lowest common denominator. There is “holistic” pruning back—or “secular reductionism” and “holistic reductionism” if you like. Alas, the two easily interlace, undergird, and reinforce each other!

Despite its best intentions, the New Age *colludes* with Secular Materialism. To be sure, New Agers mean to do no such thing. They genuinely aspire to something beyond materialism. Still, one can see that colluding here is understandable, even inevitable, when one realizes that both secularism and the New Age aspire—even if unconsciously—to reductionism. The young lady from Findhorn unconsciously aspires to reductionism—by eliminating everything in global religion that requires names, doctrines, and theology. William Bloom aspires to reductionism—by reducing our spiritual horizons to things we can commonly agree upon. And Dan Brown aspires to reductionism by reducing religious aspiration to the pre-Christian paganism, which existed prior to the Sacrifice on Calvary.

Here is how the New Age colludes with secularism. Here is why the New Age actually undergirds, fosters—even empowers—global materialism. Because it frequently demands *nothing more* of people than those values with which atheists, agnostics, or pre-Calvary pagans can readily agree on. For this reason “holists” like Bloom claim they are inclusive of atheists. Because, again, they demand *nothing more* than what any atheist of good will can agree to. Yet *nothing more* amounts to *nothing higher*; nothing that transcends the crudest form of (philosophical) materialism. Meanwhile, New Agers

marginalize Christianity and other religions that certainly demand something higher than the lowest common denominator!

Earlier, I invoked the notion of the *privatization of Spirituality*. Here, in effect, is what the New Age and secularism achieve: they privatize and even stigmatize—any *higher demands* beyond the consensus of lowest common denominators.

*But the moral problems of the world increase, whilst the moral consensus of the world decreases.* Because the world begins to wither and to burn (quite literally as deserts spread and forests catch light) whilst no one can promote moral solutions beyond a minimalist consensus.

In all manner of ways, both secularism and the New Age forbid moral proposals that exceed the lowest common denominator consensus. And whilst the Body of the World heats up, dries out, and starts to burn, the Soul of the World withers too. Creeping, sclerotic materialism hardens our hearts, whilst an ever more decadent, desensitized and “dumbed down” culture ensues.

This minimalist consensus makes it difficult for New Agers to mount a *collective* challenge. The New Age, for example, has shown nothing like the extensive critique of capitalism and consumerism the Catholic Church has mounted, since at least Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* from 1891. Although the New Age frequently fancies itself as “countercultural,” it is, in many respects, far less countercultural than Catholicism. Unlike the Church, it has little to say regarding the unfolding global tragedy of materialism.

Moreover, New Age-ism actively affirms much in the secular, materialistic culture. It is not mere coincidence New Age spirituality is *marketed* so heavily. Findhorn was an expensive place to visit; New Age workshops are likewise expensive; New Age books focus on how to achieve material prosperity. Whilst the Church feeds the world’s poor and hungry—both spiritually and materially—the “universal” New Age remains largely confined to liberal elites who can afford it.

How can it therefore confront the culture that undergirds it? Well may one be reminded of that old adage about “not biting the hand that feeds you.”

In other words, the New Age cannot challenge Secular Materialism because it is inextricably tied to the modern, liberal consensus. Not only do secularism and “Holism” team up in affirming the lowest common denominator—*they go further*. They proceed from affirmation to negation, because simply *affirming* the lowest common denominator is never enough.

To preserve the lowest common denominator, it becomes necessary to actively *negate* anything higher. For everyone can agree on lowest common denominators like a “holiday tree”—so speaks Secularism. But reference to Christmas must be negated. *Winterval* is fine, but anything that reminds us of the Christ Mass must be denied. Here is Secular negation of that which transcends the lowest common denominator. And it is the same in the New Age. Everyone can agree on the essential “skills” of kindness and generosity, but let us negate anything that confesses Christ and His Church. Here is New Age negation of that which transcends the lowest common denominator. Thus the iconoclastic New Age colludes with iconoclastic secularism. No wonder they proclaim the selfsame message regarding Christianity: “There is no need to look further.”

### **First Comes Subtraction—Then Addition**

ALL this is perilous enough. But the situation is not quite as simple as I have made out. Let me confess something to you, Lector. So far in this chapter—for the sake of simplicity—I have highlighted the putative “core spirituality” of the New Age. Likewise I have highlighted the “holistic” emphasis on stripping away “meaningless” human and cultural accretions to arrive at that so-called “core.”

However, here is my confession. In stressing this reduction to the

lowest common denominators, I have placed the emphasis on subtraction. But now I must speak of addition. Because after the New Age strips away—or subtracts—it then commences ADDING. What remains after “holistic” stripping down is not some plain, bare “essence”—for example, pre-Christian paganism.

No, other elements are then added into the mix.

Here one may credit William Bloom. For whilst *Soulution* evokes something that often looks very much like pre-Christian paganism, Bloom is clear and honest at this point. As we mentioned already, he explicitly includes very modern Western elements. Accordingly, his “Holism” entails not simply a purported universal, perennial spirituality, but the addition of modern insights from ecology and psychology.

Not every New Ager is as lucid as Bloom. Many blithely claim their quest represents nothing more than an ancient common spirituality, which was always known in every time and place. Let us be grateful, then, to Bloom and anyone else, who candidly admits their “holistic philosophy” is infused by modern elements.

Yes, waves of iconoclasm have repeatedly destroyed what our ancestors cherished. And something else was always added. Protestant iconoclasts called the Pope “the anti-Christ” and Rome “the whore of Babylon,” whilst they added grandiose dreams of freedom from the “constraints” of authority and tradition (e.g., the tradition of clerical celibacy). French Revolutionary iconoclasts went still further: They sought to eliminate Christianity entirely, whilst a new Deist religion was imposed. Marxist iconoclasts declared religion to be “the opium of the people” and tried to implement an atheistic workers’ paradise instead. Something always replaces what is destroyed. And now, once again, gentle “holistic” iconoclasts would replace Christianity with yet another grandiosity—a new Aquarian order of the ages.

The New Age takes away—and then it adds. William Bloom speaks of insights from modernity, citing ecology and psychology. But

how much more can be seen when one looks closely. For example, Eastern notions such as karma and reincarnation are not common to the world's religions, but clearly most New Agers seek to include them. In truth, the added ingredients stem not simply from modernity, but also the Eastern Theosophical ideology we began exploring earlier and to which we shall shortly return.

For now, let us state a major thesis in this book with a simple formula, that, although it runs the risk of being crudely simplistic, we hope may be useful.

New Age-ism equals: Western (primarily Anglophone) Synthesis of Pre-Christian world religion (absent Judaism).

Plus: Twentieth-Century Imports from Secularism, Liberalism, Psychotherapy, Ecology—and the Esoteric.

Minus: 20 centuries of Christian Theology and Tradition (particularly Catholic).

Is my thesis true? You may judge for yourself, good Lector, after you have finished my book. For now, I can only state my convictions, which are as follows.

Ancient forests of tradition are being ruthlessly felled, whilst, all the time, exotic new plants are being seeded. New Age pontiffs chop down the ancient woodlands of Christianity and introduce foreign crops in Western soil. Yet frequently they pretend to offer “nothing new under the sun.” And all the while this wholesale clearance of precious treasure is being carried out, people happily suppose that universal “Holism” provides them everything they need. There is no need to look further.

But in this “no need to look further” lurks grave peril. Materialism ascends; culture decays; mental illness spreads; capitalism

runs riot; rainforests fall; the climate changes and deserts grow. Whilst the gap between the rich and poor likewise grows, untold children die of starvation.

But still the woodchoppers chop, oblivious to the desperate need for a collective higher vision beyond the lowest common denominator. The privatization of spirituality slowly murders us. More than ever, we need His Grace, which every day flows through the Holy Sacraments of the Church. We need what is infinitely higher than anything a reductive Secular Materialism or a reductive “holistic” spirituality can offer us.

Yet what we desperately need is misrepresented, stigmatized and ruthlessly cut down in favor of new plantations, which offer only the poorest substitute. And before proceeding further, we must examine the nature of the exotic plantation now being seeded in the cleared fields of the West.

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<sup>1</sup> William Bloom, *Soulution: The Holistic Manifesto* (London: Hay House, 2004), 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> William Bloom, *Soulution*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 81, 110–11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, cf 37, also 43: “Six million Jews killed in the holocaust by Nazi fundamentalists.”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

## IX

### Enlightened, Eastern, Esoteric, and English

*One of wants to build a “City of Light” for a new  
“Planetary Civilization.”*

*One of us wants to hear new channelings from a Tibetan  
Master.*

**F**ROM WHENCE come all the waves of iconoclasm? Who is competent to judge where their ultimate origin lies? Yet certain things might be noted profitably at this point. From the course of history, it is clear that revolutionary ideas generally emerge within small circles of reformers first. Later, their ideas diffuse more widely—generalizing outwards to the wider population. Thus, the ideals of the Enlightenment were initially the preserve of a small contingent of elite philosophers—before they generalized out to Western society and much of the globe. In the Nineteenth Century, Communism was born amongst the likes of Marx, Engels, and their retinue. Within a hundred years, it covered Russia, Eastern Europe, and China. Likewise, the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s did not arise from nowhere. Earlier in the century, Freud and his followers warned of the “dangers” of sexual repression and the “hypocrisy” of conventional sexual mores. But with the Sixties, the need to throw off sexual “fetters” likewise generalized to the entire populace. Similarly, New Age thinking began decades ago in the parlors of Theosophists. But following the 1960s, the Theosophical agenda became popularized.

The New Age belongs part and parcel to Sixties iconoclasm. New

Agers are not conservatives. They are heirs to the Sixties and readily sympathize with those who continue the fight for liberal values. Almost automatically, they partake in the liberal dismissal of traditional values. What our forebears cherished is all-too-confidently denigrated—without a second thought. Hierarchy and authority are frequently treated as nothing but meaningless and oppressive. The intellectual work of the Academy is dismissed as “head-tripping.” The sexual mores of earlier generations are judged as repressive and unnatural. The list goes on. As Wouter J. Hanegraaff has well said, the New Age amounts to a “syncretism of esoteric and secular elements.”<sup>1</sup>

From whence this latest tsunami of iconoclasm? What convulsion in the depths of the Soul of the World generated the tidal wave? We have seen how the New Age is related to a vast esoteric panorama, which *publicly* emerged with Blavatsky in the late Nineteenth Century. Blavatsky claimed her books were inspired by an elite group of Eastern Masters operating from the hidden recesses of the Himalayas. In the Twentieth Century, Alice Bailey claimed the selfsame hidden masters for her inspiration. We have already mentioned the numerous “channeled” books in the New Age. Needless to say, the vast majority of these books are drivel. They are easily explained by processes of human imagination. But, dear Lector, in my thirty years of experience, I have to declare that a *few* of these books—and often the most influential ones—are *not* drivel. Rather, they betray an extremely elaborate intelligence that would sometimes seem to surpass the conscious capacities of the human author who scribed them.

Such immensely sophisticated books include those of Alice Bailey, as well as *A Course in Miracles*, claimed to be channeled from Jesus. These writings exert an extensive, compelling influence, precisely because they are *not* the shallow drivel that is here today, gone tomorrow. What am I saying?! Am I suggesting New Age ideology stems from a conspiratorial cabal of beings, some of whom

may not be incarnate? The Church does not refute the existence of disincarnate beings working in the world. The rite of exorcism bears testimony to this. No, the Church does not deny the active presence of spirits and Angels—some of which are *fallen* angels. But the Church warns against delving into these matters too deeply. And I would not attempt to excavate them here, even if I could.

But if you ask me, Lector, if I suspect the presence of hidden entities behind the emergence of New Age ideology, I will not deny that I do. If you ask me whether fallen angels might sometimes masquerade as Angels of Light, I will reply: Why not? But why stop there? If you ask me if the Communist ideology partook of demonic inspiration, I will not deny it. My answer will be similar in regard to the extreme capitalism, which ravages our planet today. And the earlier waves of iconoclasm that served to destroy Christendom? Could the inspiration of fallen angels be working there as well? Why not? What of the horrors of the Catholic inquisition, which betrayed all that Christianity is. Again. Why not?

And conversely, what if—amidst these tempests of cruelty—positive developments also emerge? Is it not self-evident the last centuries have borne witness to genuine progress, as well as the growth of genuine ideals? For example, recent times have marked real growth in the ideal of racial tolerance. We have seen a decisive challenge to the xenophobia of the past. Could it not be that *unfallen* Angels are involved as well? For Angels are not only present amongst us—but they respond to our prayers. Do Angels help struggling humanity to bring forth all that is good and true, amidst the wreckage—even whilst fallen angels work to bury those same things? Personally, I trust something like this to be very much the case. However, I am not competent to write a book about Angels and demons.

If I declare myself incompetent to uncover the ultimate sources of iconoclastic change, it remains possible to point toward certain salient

features—features, which if contemplated, can lead to understanding. Perhaps, at this juncture, we might recall what has been remarked earlier and is not irrelevant in this regard.

Just a little recap then: New Age iconoclasm is clearly related to Theosophy—an esoteric literary stream that is self-professedly Eastern. It is likewise plainly linked to secular values. We have seen how Theosophy arose precisely in those countries that most unambiguously embraced secular values. These are the same nations that earlier embraced Reformation and Enlightenment iconoclasm most unequivocally: the Protestant English-speaking nations.

France, of course, also had much to do with the triumph of Enlightenment secularization. But, as we have observed, already France never embraced the Enlightenment as unambiguously as England or America. For France also resisted the Enlightenment with a duration and ferocity, utterly unknown in the Anglosphere. The story of Nineteenth-Century France is one of Catholic resistance to the teeth. Thus in France, forcible suppression was deemed necessary. The Jesuits were expelled from the country; Catholic schools were closed; the churches were forcibly appropriated to the State; the French Revolution resorted to genocide. We return to this in depth in our nineteenth chapter. All we say now is that nothing even remotely like this occurred in the Anglosphere (Ireland excepted). Whilst the French saw persecution necessary to achieve reform, no such “need” existed there. Its Protestant heritage accommodated Enlightenment ideology far more easily.

By contrast, Catholic countries, even France, never succumbed to secularization in the same, easy way. And neither did France succumb to Theosophy like the countries of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage. For whilst the British lapped up the Eastern esotericism of Madame Blavatsky, in France it was different. When esotericism emerged in France, it drew on Western, Hermetic, Judeo-Christian roots. And it flourished amongst fervent Catholics—like the

aforementioned Josephin Péladan, who wanted nothing to do with Blavatsky's animosity to Christianity.

The Anglosphere has long provided fertile soil for an Eastern esotericism hostile to Christianity. And with the Sixties' revolution, it was from English-speaking nations that Theosophy was popularized. As a major *American* pop song had it: This was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. Thus, if one required a simple formula for the New Age phenomenon, one might be tempted to characterize it by *Four Es*—English, Enlightenment, Eastern, esoteric.

Within the New Age, one finds a distinctly anti-Christian bias—and particularly an anti-Catholic one. This bias is not surprising, if one recognizes whence the movement stems: the Protestant and Enlightenment trajectory of Anglo-American civilization. When this is plainly seen, it is likewise plain why Catholic Christianity, above all, is the natural target of liberal New Age-ism—even if New Agers frequently deny they target anything at all.

### Findhorn

NOW, TO DETAIL the manifold ways anti-Christian ideology emerged in the New Age—much less exhume its subterranean roots—is a herculean task beyond my capacities. Yet, as I say, every person's biography affords windows onto the world. And my own life-story offers a certain window onto an important New Age nexus point. It is a locus where many things converged: the Hippy movement, psychotherapy, secular and liberal ideals, Eastern esotericism, astrology, ecological concerns, and still more.

We return, then, to the Findhorn Community—a major root of the entire New Age movement. Indeed, as the Vatican document, *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life* tells us:

The two centers which were the initial power-houses of the

New Age, and to a certain extent still are, were the Garden community at Findhorn in North-East Scotland, and the Center for the development of human potential at Esalen in Big Sur, California, in the United States of America.<sup>2</sup>

California and Britain: Both are English-speaking and both are amongst the most liberal places of all in the Anglosphere.

In addition to what the Vatican writes, Findhorn has lately garnered significant recognition from the secular sphere. For the Findhorn Foundation is now a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in the United Nations. Moreover, Eileen Caddy, co-founder of the community, was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE), an honor in the order of chivalry in Britain—below a knighthood, but still filled with prestige.

Yes, Findhorn is a place that has wielded astonishing influence out of all proportion to immediate appearances. For it is a small community of a few hundred folk (at best) located in a remote part of the British Isles further north than Juneau, Alaska. Yet Findhorn exerted a strange, attractive power. People from the far reaches of the world have expended significant time, energy, and money to wend their way up to its lonely, windswept peninsula in the far north of Scotland. For them, Findhorn became a contemporary center of pilgrimage. Some spoke of it as a modern “Mystery School,” where one underwent processes of spiritual initiation—which in ages past, took place in hidden enclaves, sheltered from the world. For others, Findhorn represented a nascent “City of Light”—an outpost for a new “Planetary Civilization.”

Now, not only did untold numbers stream into Findhorn but—just as importantly—they *also* streamed out again. Findhorn remains a transitory place. Many only come for a few weeks or months. Others, like myself, spend two to three years there. Relatively few truly settle in the community. Rather, most move on—carrying Findhorn with

them as they go. Certainly, I left the community for Cambridge, with the specific intent of taking Findhorn with me. In like manner, other community members moved outwards—ambassadors for a “new spirituality for a New Age.”

Then, there are the New Age “stars” drawn to Findhorn. Just as secular culture has celebrated figures, icons, and idols, so, too, does the “holistic” scene. Sometimes these even overlap: Shirley MacLaine visited the community not long after I first went there. But mostly it was a “stellar array” of lesser-known charismatic figures who came to provide talks, presentations, experiential workshops, visualizations, psychotherapeutic exercises, full-moon meditations, and more.

From all this, a potent cultural matrix and spiritual *weltanschauung* emerged. Ambassadors then went forth from that matrix carrying New Age ideology with them—without the least consciousness it *was* ideology. At least, I myself was such an ambassador—with *no idea that was what I was doing*. Only with thirty years of hindsight, do I see how I became the messenger of a syncretic creed mixing Eastern esotericism and the post-Sixties liberal revolution.

By the 1980s, when I arrived, most Findhorn folk were clearly not pursuing esoteric studies. Whilst in former times, community members avidly devoured Theosophical literature, things had changed. Generally speaking, people were more engaged—sincerely and movingly—with each other’s emotional experience than abstruse esoteric books. But, for myself, at least, *another* Findhorn existed. And during my years there, my orientation was different from that of many of my fellows. For more than most, I felt drawn to old archives regarding the Findhorn’s origins. And so I “dusted off” old lectures once held at the community, but now little read. From these, it was clear Findhorn’s pioneers had been heavily influenced by earlier streams of Anglophone esotericism. And for long years after leaving the community, I continued pondering Findhorn’s roots as an

enthusiastic devotee.

Let us look to these roots. According to the tale, as it is popularly told, the Findhorn Community was founded by three middle-aged adults in 1962. Outside the little coastal Scottish village of Findhorn, there was a site for mobile homes—normally used only in the brief, warm summer. But in the gloomy November of that year, English ex-hoteliere Peter and Eileen Caddy, their three children, and a Canadian colleague Dorothy MacLean settled there in circumstances that seemed dire—particularly as all three were accustomed to much better standards. The hotel they previously managed had been four star.

However, they did not consider this a blow of ill fate. Instead, they trusted that a higher, spiritual purpose summoned them to this otherwise cold and bleak situation. All three possessed very different spiritual backgrounds, though none could call be called Christian in a traditional sense. Eileen Caddy heard a distinct voice in prayer, which she identified with God. This voice gave precise directions from which the Findhorn Community started taking form. It instructed the Caddys what to do, even down to minute details—such as which vegetables to eat. Meanwhile, Peter Caddy was different. From adolescence, he had diligently pursued an esoteric formation according to Theosophical and Rosicrucian principles. Dorothy MacLean was different again. She claimed a contact with *devas*. These were said to be angelic beings, which “over-lighted” the plants and forces of nature. For individual species—cabbage, pea, or broccoli, for example—were said to be guided by a *deva*, which offered messages to MacLean, who recorded them word for word. From the start, Findhorn emphasized organic gardening, in accordance to MacLean’s messages.

The results were striking! Here was sandy soil, close to a windswept beach. Yet in barren conditions and a poor climate, extraordinary vegetables started appearing. Soon fame spread of a miraculous garden, with forty-pound cabbages grown in near-sand. It was obvious, with such results, that the Caddys and MacLean had a

particular affinity with the forces of nature, or even the “cabbage *deva*.”

It is hardly surprising that the Findhorn gardens caught the attention of the Sixties’ Flower Children. Amidst the general revolt against the “Establishment,” many dreamt of returning to nature. Here were the ecological concerns that later manifested in the Green movement. Although neither the Caddys, nor MacLean were remotely like the Hippies, they nevertheless welcomed them. Thus, the small community expanded, as young rebels and drop-outs arrived.

But substantial growth—as well as substantive change—only arrived in 1970 with the advent of a young, twenty-four year old American from California, David Spangler. Obedient to the inner voice that Eileen heard, Peter Caddy appointed Spangler, almost immediately, as the community’s co-director! Alongside Spangler, a cohort of his friends and followers arrived from America and still more followed in their wake.

The influx transformed the community and, after 1970, a rather different culture emerged at Findhorn. Numerous new elements became added to the mix—ranging from psychotherapy to Spangler’s theosophical lecturing. Indeed, it has longed seemed to me that David Spangler is the true founder of the Findhorn people know today. Spangler, I believe, would shrug this accolade off. He plainly eschewed traditional leadership roles. But even when I was a Findhorn devotee, I told people to look to Spangler as the *uncredited author* of the place, as it is today. This may not be fair. He was there. I was not. But I report it as my honest assessment of the situation from a time when I was passionately devoted to Findhorn. Whether I am mistaken or not, what I say emerges from decades of honest love for the community—a community where I was literally an insider for nearly three years and one to which I remained loyal, as well as current with its developments, for years after I left.

Now, Spangler’s cohort imported numerous things from the American West Coast to Findhorn. We have mentioned the “therapy

culture,” which emerged in California during that time. But something else also arrived with Spangler’s lecturing: the esoteric vision of Alice A. Bailey. At least, I studied his lectures avidly and the Bailey heritage was more than obvious to me. And along with Spangler, many other Findhorn pioneers of the early Seventies studied Bailey.

### Regarding Alice Bailey

WITH Alice Bailey, we return, of course, to Theosophy. More precisely, one might say *Neo-theosophy*. For Bailey’s oeuvre represents a potent Twentieth-Century extension of Blavatsky. It takes Blavatsky’s foundation, but builds on it considerably.

What to say of these books? They cover some ten thousand pages in dense prose, which is by no means stupid or naïve. Here, they differ from many New Age writings. They possess immense—if dangerous—sophistication. How to possibly render justice to their arcane immensity in a few brief paragraphs? Justice is not possible in these constraints and I offer nothing more than a crude, simplistic précis. Given that *caveat*, the Bailey books present their readers with a prodigious esoteric vision. A staggering panorama of purported phenomena is asserted, which feature everything from numerous non-physical planes of existence; reincarnation and karma; the evolutionary development of humanity from pre-historic civilizations with names like Lemuria and Atlantis to vast entities such as the Solar and Planetary Logoi—cosmic intelligences incarnated in the bodies of the Solar System. Much is also made of a hidden Hierarchy of initiated masters, who—it is said—will shortly guide the human race into the coming New Age of Aquarius. Indeed, we are indebted to the Bailey writings for the popular emergence of the term “New Age,” which features prominently in her books and even their titles (e.g., *Discipleship in the New Age*, *Education in the New Age*).

These books furthermore offer a highly detailed esoteric anatomy

—with diagrams!—of the human being. Herein the human entity is divided into a higher “monad,” a soul and “lower vehicles” that, in descending order, are termed the mental, astral, etheric, and physical bodies. All these are then said to be conditioned by seven rays, twelve Zodiac signs and still further related forces.

This vast, intricate complexity need not detain us here. However, a few things must be highlighted. For important New Age themes are prefigured in Bailey books. There is, for example, the New Age polarity of a “higher self” and “lower self”—rather than relationship between God and the soul. In New Age discourse, one often hears of the “higher self” being resisted by the “lower self” (sometimes called the ego). However, one almost *never hears of praying humbly to God for help!* Instead, the New Age way involves transforming the “lower self” (or ego) so that the power of the “higher self”—one’s own transcendent nature—can manifest. This common New Age meme is indebted to Bailey. Indeed, she calls for the higher self to *control* the “lower personality.” Bailey even suggests that if one prays to God, one actually addresses one’s own higher self—not God.

Bailey anticipates another key New Age notion: that a new “planetary civilization” is rapidly evolving toward a grand synthesis. This great synthesis will unite religion, science, and philosophy. Bailey has none of the Christian concerns about syncretism. All religions will be fused into a “New World Religion.” Science and religion will likewise be merged, because that which presently divides these realms will be recognized as illusory. Humanity will also achieve a staggering “higher consciousness” in which its present divisions will likewise stand revealed as nothing but illusory separation.

Clearly, Eastern syncretic Theosophy throws down the gauntlet before Christianity here! It hardly needs saying that Christian faith is rendered obsolete by these claims. Indeed, Bailey predicts the age of Christianity is more or less finished. For her, “illusory separation” and Christianity belong to the outgoing “Age of Pisces.” However,

the “New World Religion” can now be glimpsed in the haze of a new Aquarius dawn. Indeed, Bailey is quite explicit as to this new synthesized religion. Easter, for example, will still be celebrated, though its greatest festival will be *Wesak*—the Buddha’s birthday. A “New Group of World Servers” will give birth to the new religion, amongst whom will appear the initiated Masters of old, reincarnating amidst the youth of today. Many students of Alice Bailey assume they belong to this new wave of reincarnating initiates.

The colossal optimism of Bailey’s Aquarian New Age should be apparent by now. Moreover, the notion of Masters ushering in an astonishing new era of expanded consciousness allows little sympathy for today’s heartbreaking problems. Human tragedy generally receives short shrift in the Bailey books. Thus, as we shall see, the author celebrates the atomic holocaust in Japan. Other nightmares of our time are dismissed as merely ephemeral. Thus the problems posed by capitalism or scientific materialism are acknowledged, but treated as temporary. They will be shortly remedied. Science, for example, will soon overcome its materialistic prejudices when the esoteric nature of reality is discovered. And so forth...

Having studied thousands of pages of Bailey’s writings, I offer you my opinion, Lector, that none of this is charlatanism, pure and simple. Rather, something far more tragic, far more disturbing is on offer here. For it was said—and not without a certain foundation, I believe—that these writings were not simply the work of the Englishwoman, Alice Bailey. Rather, they were telepathically dictated by one of the same eastern masters Blavatsky identified during the Nineteenth Century. This was the Tibetan master Djwahl Khul—often abbreviated to “D.K.” This same D. K. was further cited as a principal source for Blavatsky’s 1888 *Secret Doctrine*. Now, that Blavatsky had died, the Tibetan D. K. carried on the same esoteric work through his latter-day amanuensis, Alice Bailey. At any rate, today’s students of Alice Bailey certainly regard her as Blavatsky’s true heir.

Still, there are differences between *The Secret Doctrine* and the Bailey corpus. For our purposes, a certain shift can be seen regarding Christianity. With Blavatsky, Christianity is excoriated. With Bailey, the approach is more subtle. Christianity is allowed for, *but only as it is redefined by Alice Bailey*. Thus, the Jesus who died on the Cross is recast as an imperfect initiate of the third degree.

Although active study of Bailey's Theosophy had receded at Findhorn by 1980, when I first visited, her enduring legacy pervaded the place. The dawning Age of Aquarius, for example, was taken for granted. People spoke of THE Christ—not Jesus! And they thought more in terms of the “higher self” than God. Virtually everyone believed in karma and reincarnation and few would have had any problem with notions of hidden initiates and masters. The idea of a transcendent, universal, spiritual path reigned, which—like Bailey's “New World Religion”—was expressed by New Age spirituality, liberated, as it was, from “Old Age” divisive religious differences. Indeed, had anyone ventured the opinion that Findhorn's approach represented a forerunner to Bailey's “New World Religion,” few, if any members would have blinked an eye.

My singling out Theosophy as the primary source for Findhorn ideology may well be objected to. Some might point, for example, to Peter Caddy's Rosicrucian background and say I emphasize Eastern Theosophy too strongly and Western esotericism not enough. In matter of fact, closer examination of Caddy's so-called Rosicrucianism clearly reveals a strong Theosophical background. For Caddy's self-styled Rosicrucian magus, George Sullivan, was deeply indebted to Theosophy and Caddy absorbed Theosophical ideas throughout his youth. This is transparent from Caddy's own autobiography.<sup>3</sup> However, I see no need for nitpicking. Whilst Theosophy clearly shaped Caddy, Spangler, and other Findhorn pioneers, I do not deny other esoteric influences were present. In any event, Western Freemasonry was mixed up with Eastern Theosophy from the

beginning. H. P. Blavatsky belonged to a Masonic lodge.<sup>4</sup>

Still others may object that I pay too little attention to more modern channeled texts. For example, *A Course in Miracles* is a very significant channeled book for the New Age. And it has no obvious links to Theosophy. We will later consider, however, how *A Course in Miracles* is remarkably in synch with Theosophy. And we shall likewise see how the *Course* has fostered the notion of a “New Age Jesus.” Here is to say, a non-suffering, detached “Jesus,” who once happened to be temporarily inhabited by “the Christ consciousness.” In fact, *A Course in Miracles* presents itself as channeled from Jesus—a “Jesus” who tells us the Church got his message wrong. He never really suffered and the Apostles corrupted his true meaning.

The *Course* and other *apparently diverse* New Age texts coalesce around a common core—one harboring considerable animosity to traditional Christianity. Are the manifold correspondences between these different English channeled texts simply coincidence? I believe not. Something that has singularly impressed me over the years is the high respect students of Alice Bailey regularly pay *A Course in Miracles*. A man I met at Findhorn gave me his frank opinion as to what characterized the truly serious New Age disciple. Either one was a serious student of Alice Bailey or, failing that, one was a serious student of *A Course in Miracles*. Nothing else conferred the same consummate credentials as these. Other students of Alice Bailey render similar homage to the *Course*. However, I know of no study that rigorously examines the many correspondences between these two New Age juggernauts. And we have no scope for this here. Nevertheless, here is a task the world could profit greatly from—a close, studied, reflection on the interrelationship between English Theosophy and English channeled texts like *A Course in Miracles*.

In the absence of such a study, the reader can either heed my opinion—or not. However, personal experiences—not all of which I feel free to share—convince me of a profound, unfathomable web that

unites Findhorn, Theosophy, and apparently unrelated matters like the *Course*, Masonry, and more besides. Yes, I have many memories, which personally convince me of what I say, even if they offer only circumstantial evidence.

Still, there are a few memories I do feel free to share. Here is just one. Peter Caddy finds me, age twenty-three perhaps, working alone one afternoon. We talk and somehow the subject of “DK” comes up—the Theosophical Master Alice Bailey was said to channel. And Peter gets *excited*. Because somehow, he latches onto the idea that I too, am channeling this Tibetan. I have said nothing of the sort, but perhaps the prospect is so intoxicating that Peter gets carried away. Here at Findhorn, another person, like Alice Bailey, is in direct contact with the Master Djhwahl Khul! Perhaps I will be the source of a new revelation! But no, I tell Peter; he has got it wrong. I am only *reading* Alice Bailey. Caddy then appears to lose all interest in me and moves on.

Here is another Findhorn souvenir. I am sitting at a large gathering, in what is called the *Universal Hall*. A respected Findhorn elder has risen to speak. His background is evidently both ecological and antinuclear. But the elder explains, he has had *need to rethink*. For recently he has been forced to consider the immensely high praise that Bailey gave to the advent of nuclear fission. Indeed, Bailey went so far as to extol the dropping of the bomb on Japan as an event of the greatest magnitude and wonder. I do not recall the elder’s exact words—but in my memory, his message is clear. *Alice Bailey has spoken. The case is closed.* This elder must now revise his anti-nuclear stance. Even the bomb must be good—Alice Bailey said so. Looking back on this and more, Alice Bailey would appear to possess the highest dogmatic authority—even whilst her followers dismiss religion. Indeed, Bailey becomes more infallible than the Pope (whose infallibility is, of course, very limited—restricted to the rarest of instances amongst the thousands of papal pronouncements).

Further memories haunt my soul. I am speaking to a leading American New Age author, who frequently visits Findhorn. We are standing, chatting in a hallway, where she enthusiastically professes her love of Alice Bailey. However, one does not find Bailey's name mentioned much in her popular books. The Bailey imprint is hidden. Yes, personal memories point me to that strange, unfathomable web that links not only Findhorn and Theosophy, but also Masonry, secular approval from organizations like the United Nation, and other seemingly unlikely things. For I knew many souls connected to Findhorn's origins, including Eileen Caddy, in the time before she was honored as an MBE and Findhorn became an NGO. Most of these people I did not know well. Still, I heard things that now weigh on my heart. Given that I cannot substantiate everything I see, I simply point. And you must be free, Lector, to take these pointers from me—or not, as you see fitting.

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<sup>1</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esoterism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1996), 521.

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus Christ the Bearer of Life*, 2.3.2.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Caddy, *In Perfect Timing: Memoirs of a Man for the New Millennium* (Findhorn, Forres, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> It might be further noted Alice Bailey's husband Foster was a 32nd degree Mason and wrote *The Spirit of Masonry*. A valuable work could be done exploring the links between the Bailey corpus and Freemasonry.

## X

### Stumbling on the Road to Aquarius

*One of us wants to drive his astral vehicle.*

**I**N THIS BOOK, I have been weaving a tapestry of research and recollections, drawn from my long years of total New Age immersion. From this, emerges my conviction: both Findhorn and the New Age are profoundly indebted to the Theosophical ideology exemplified in Alice Bailey. Central to that ideology is the notion of a fundamental, universal spiritual path. It is so central that New Agers find it virtually impossible to imagine anything else. For you will shock New Agers if you say there is *not* one simple, undivided road, but at least TWO roads with *very different ends*.

My life-story turns on this. What happened to me when I finally realized my options were not limited to that single, New Age path. For my life-story entails the experience of treading *two distinct paths*. First, came the New Age way of Alice Bailey. But then a second way emerged, uniting myself with His Body and Blood, which led to inexpressible treasures I could never have found in the New Age.

But in New Age ideology, my life-experience is impossible! For according to that ideology, there cannot be two spiritual paths, which are *truly and fundamentally different*. As a rule, it is incomprehensible to New Agers that anything else exists that cannot be found beneath their “all-embracing” New Age umbrella. But if one has personally experienced these radically different spiritualities—New Age-ism and Catholicism—one may be gravely concerned by the New Age dogma

of all-inclusiveness. For one appreciates the real jeopardy here—to both individuals and Western civilization as a whole. Yet this jeopardy is often subtle, not easily articulated. Still, what cannot be readily expressed in concepts, can sometimes be illustrated in a story. To this end, dear Lector, I invite you to listen to *a major slice of autobiography* in this chapter and the next.

Here then, is my story. I was twenty-two years old and living at Findhorn, when I first dived into the world of Alice A. Bailey. The plunge was taken with my recognition of how important Bailey had been to the early Findhorn pioneers. It was also recommended by a man who commanded considerable respect at Findhorn. He, along with others, considered the Bailey texts as the crowning pinnacle of esoteric writings. Nothing else, it was said, approached their lucid sophistication. And so I started consuming thousands of pages of titles like *Letters on Occult Meditation*, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, and *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle*. All this was abstruse, complex, and demanding. But if I could immerse myself in this demanding world more easily than some, it was because *something else* began happening to me.

How to describe this something else? It had to do with several factors. For there was a particular atmosphere one respired at Findhorn. Some of this was *tangible*—that far northern Scottish air is good. One boarded the train from London; one emerged in Inverness twelve hours later and felt the difference! Findhorn was healthy in other ways too. One ate fine, organic food, every day.

Less tangibly, one absorbed Findhorn's "energies," as we New Agers liked to say. Here were the "energies" of the people building the community for over twenty years—with all their dreams, aspirations, dedicated effort, and indeed esoteric meditations. People actually talked of "changing the energy" of the place via such meditations. Of course, the Church is not entirely dissimilar in this regard. Whilst different in many respects, a Christian monastery affords a place to breathe in the

atmosphere of piety and prayer that has been present, for a thousand years perhaps. In that hallowed atmosphere, one is reinforced in one's faith. A very different atmosphere could be found at Findhorn, generated in simply twenty years. And it, too, served to reinforce faith—the faith of the New Age movement.

In this unusual climate, I developed a spiritual discipline drawing from Theosophy. Every morning, I rose for perhaps an hour of meditation, where I practiced mantric forms and visualizations recommended by Alice Bailey. Then, I endeavored to uphold this meditative discipline throughout my day. Thus, an hour in the morning was reinforced by forty minutes at lunch, followed by a further session in the evening. During the intervals between these sessions, I tried, as I worked, to keep my mind very still.

There were other disciplines, too. For I sought to conquer my sexuality and became a celibate in every sense of the word. Even whilst dreaming at night, there was a decisive repudiation of sexuality. None of this involved Christian renunciation. I was not motivated, for example, by avoiding the sin of unchaste love. Rather, it was a renunciation based on *the search for power*. This was not clear in my young mind, however. Still, as we proceed, Lector, you may see how much this had to do with the unconscious drive for power. In like manner, I renounced meat, caffeine, alcohol, and sugar. My body had tended to obesity since an American childhood, filled with junk food. Now, I became so lean that anxiety was expressed for my health. I had become a theosophical ascetic.

From all this, my experience of the world began to change. For one thing, I brimmed with unusual vitality. This included mental vitality. I devoured thousands of pages of Alice Bailey, which years afterwards, when I no longer felt so “energized,” I could hardly read. For something like two years, my interior life became very unusual—at least compared to other periods of my life. In my morning meditations, particularly, I entered into utter stillness that felt

profound, vast, and blissful. Tranquility carried over into my “normal” life. I became, in fact, quite silent. A day might pass where I hardly uttered a word. Great peace reigned. I felt free, not only from desire for sex and foodstuffs, I was also far less reactive, irritable, or angry than I am today. There was less fear, too. I felt freer from worry than I have ever been, before or since.

Peace, vast peace—every morning was to re-enter this expanse of peace. Was this the Peace of Christ? Many New Agers might tell me so. For them, it is only logical, because for them, there is fundamentally only one spiritual path. *Ergo*, if my remarkable peace were the fruit of genuine spiritual development, it follows—*ipso facto*—that it was also fruit of that same essential spirituality, which lies at the core of Christianity. It could be nothing other than progress toward the Peace of Christ.

Today, I say this vast, deep stillness has less to do with the Peace of Christ than many New Agers might suppose. For today, I suffer far more than I did in that temporary period of immense quiet. I suffer anxiety, indeed neurosis—all kinds of things I never felt in that deep peace. Yes, they were remarkable years, free from very human kinds of limitation. But contrary to what many a New Ager supposes, *Christianity is not about such freedom from human suffering.*

What is more, it seemed to me I was achieving some sort of control—even mastery. With this, certain people appeared to look “up to me.” They honored my spiritual “progress.” By the mercy of God, I have learned not to honor it as such. How I prefer my life today, though it is less peaceful and less expansive in many ways. That being said, my body has certainly expanded! It is no longer lean and ascetic! It has returned to the fat of my adolescence and much worse! In my body, I am nowhere near as physically healthy as I was. Will you bear with me, Lector, if I frankly confess to you. Here I am—fat, anxious, neurotic even, filled with all-too-human desire and yet I cannot help but feel closer to Christ than any New Age path could ever take me?

In a word, I feel far more *human*. My meditative, esoteric Eastern discipline amidst the Findhorn “energies,” was leading me in a direction that was ever less human. A danger here is of lack of compassion. For if one no longer identifies with ordinary human suffering, how can one feel others’ suffering? Had I not found the Church, my heart would have remained hard. At least, here is what I have found. One’s heart begins *to feel* ever more—including pain—the more one partakes of His Body and Blood.

What happened to me at Findhorn was different to this. I was becoming inhuman—and arrogant. Secret smugness pervaded my spiritual “progress”: the conceit of accomplishment. For the path laid out in these esoteric writings was one of conquest. A series of initiations was posited that amount to the *domination* of human nature. The first initiation: this was gaining *control* of the physical body or *vehicle*, as it was called. The second initiation: this was control, preliminary at least, of the astral body, the so-called vehicle of the emotions. The third initiation—this was control of the mental vehicle.

The term *vehicle* is telling. One’s personality was like a car to be driven. Bailey’s writings actively encouraged dis-identification from *what makes us human*. Our bodies, our hearts, our minds are regarded separate from one’s true self. They are to be dis-identified with. Here is a clear path of de-personalization. Christianity, by contrast, is all to do with personalization. Rather than dis-identification, Christianity concerns the *ultimate identification with humanness*. God goes to the ultimate—by incarnating as a frail human being, who refuses the temptations to power in the desert of a fallen world.

Then there were the chakras. Alice Bailey assumed Eastern doctrines of seven chakras in a subtle, etheric body, running up the spine. Some chakras were therefore *literally* higher than others. The head chakras were above the abdominal ones, whose “energies” needed to be transcended. Thus, the second chakra corresponded to genital

sexuality, which needed to be “risen above.” The third chakra corresponded to solar plexus emotion, including human warmth and affection. This, too, was to be “risen above.” Thus, one “lifted the energy” from the lower chakras into the higher ones. Sexuality, even personal affection was to be controlled and dominated.

Such things naturally invite psychological inflation. I was a young man, indiscriminately devouring thousands of pages about “conquering the lower vehicles,” whilst practicing their meditative disciplines. And, for a time, I did appear to conquer physical appetites. Temporarily, at least, I did feel liberated from certain very human concerns. With this, came quiet, secret satisfaction that certain souls were looking up to me. I was becoming more inflated, but less human. Today, I still aspire to morning meditation and studying spiritual writings—of a Christian nature. And I no longer experience the *type* of contentment I did then—this unperturbed peace, which even ascended into bliss. Yet never would I return to that *type* of peace. My existence today may be much less tranquil, but it is far richer than my experiences as an Alice Bailey ascetic. Today, a capacity for human joy exists, which is inextricably mixed with the capacity for human suffering. I doubt whether Alice Bailey would have understood much of anything about this very human mixture.

### **Diluted, but Still De-Personalized**

FOR something like two years, my interior experience of my Theosophical discipline remained intense. Later on, I lost this “peak experience,” as New Agers like to say. The freedom from ordinary cares receded; I became more “normal” again. Yet my Theosophical aspirations did not disappear. They continued working within my soul, albeit in a *diluted* form. I was no longer quite so inhuman, but I still aspired toward depersonalization.

A similar pattern can be seen in many New Agers, although it

may not be immediately obvious. For example, those enamored of Eckhart Tolle seek a spirituality of peace, detachment, and joy without suffering. Although most New Agers never lead the concentrated, inhuman life I did for a little while, they may yet retain a subtly similar spiritual focus, whether it be inspired by Alice Bailey, Eckhart Tolle, *A Course in Miracles*, or so on.

However, an unusual opportunity had been granted me. Findhorn offered a peculiar, conducive atmosphere wherein I could intensively practice Bailey's Theosophy, free from many ordinary responsibilities. At Findhorn, I could truly "go for it." By contrast, most New Agers, living in the world, lack the same possibilities. They cannot spend long hours studying, living, and breathing Theosophy in this concentrated manner. Still, something of the same remote spirituality often remains subtly present in their souls: "Be detached, be optimistic, be in control, be aloof"

Now, many New Agers will object to this characterization. Amongst other things, it fails to acknowledge the remarkable psychological sensitivity many of these people possess. For often New Agers hardly seem aloof, but deeply caring! In fact, I do not think I appeared aloof either. I refer to something quite subtle here. The impersonal quality may be so elusive that it is only plainly recognized by stepping back from the "holistic" cafeteria. That is how it was for me—I needed distance to see it clearly. Only today, standing within the Church, warmed by His Body and Blood, can I see what I did not recognize before—this aloof, inhuman quality, which is so very different from Christianity.

As I say, the radical Bailey orientation became diluted in my soul. After two years of intensive aspiration, the vast peace ended. I fell deeply in love with a fellow student of Alice Bailey and my practice became less rigorous. No longer was I the silent, still ascetic. The physical and mental vitality I previously experienced now receded. We left Findhorn together, my fellow student and I, and, after Findhorn, I

could no longer read the Bailey books with anything like my former intensity. I lacked the concentrated mental energy their sheer density demanded.

Yes, I fell in love and certain students of Theosophy would no doubt say I fell, once more, into my lower chakras. I had failed to control my “astral vehicle.” Certainly, I myself feared constantly I had failed and fallen.

Today, I am very glad to have fallen from such “heights.” It was only in falling I became a little more human. But, despite my “downfall,” my loyalty to Alice Bailey, Findhorn, and the New Age remained profound. Theosophical ideology was my bedrock. I remained upbeat and optimistic, fully confident of glimmering Aquarian dawn. I did not think much to the misery and evil of the world and was distinctly surprised when I later encountered Christians who obviously did. Such Christians saw the world in tragic terms, which completely escaped me. Thus, I dismissed them. Were they not dour and overwrought? Could they not see how everything was evolving onwards and upwards?

When Alice Bailey became too taxing to study, I found other authors—less demanding advocates of the same remote, de-personalized spirituality. It was, for example, easier to read the Psychosynthesis books, which—with their clear roots in Bailey—also stressed “dis-identification” from one’s mind and emotions. I was also drawn to Krishnamurti: a figure who (albeit in a most paradoxical life-trajectory) was much indebted to Blavatsky’s Theosophy. Significantly, I became fascinated—as many New Agers do—by the Gnostics. Their de-personalized, aloof variant of Christianity was considerably more interesting to me than the real thing. For, alongside most of my New Age cohort, I was persuaded that it was, in fact, the Gnostics who represented true Christianity. The early Church had evidently taken the wrong turn by rejecting Gnosticism.

Was my opinion formed by carefully comparing Gnostic texts

with Christian Theology? No. It was simply obvious the Church was wrong. We New Agers “knew” this in a reflexive, unexamined and—it should be said—altogether biased fashion. We never deemed it necessary to study both sides of the issue. At least, I have come across many Gnostic enthusiasts in the “holistic” movement over the years and I cannot recall meeting a single one who studiously compared traditional Christianity and Gnosticism side by side.<sup>1</sup>

Once, I even made a New Age pilgrimage to the French Pyrenees. For in the Thirteenth Century, the Pyrenees had been home to the Gnostic Cathars. This dualistic sect believed in the innate evil of matter and hence the human body. It was resolutely opposed to the Church and saw no need for Her Sacraments. This body-hating, anti-ecclesiastical spirituality of the Cathars neatly harmonized with my anti-ecclesiastical Theosophy and its “control of the lower vehicles.” And it easily reinforces the depersonalized, anti-traditional spirituality at the heart of the New Age.

In the Pyrenees, I even visited the little Catholic Church of Rennes-le-Chateau, once served by the Abbé Berenger Saunière. Of course, my only reason for entering *this* particular Catholic Church was its strange associations (whether genuine or not is another matter) with that bizarre anti-Christian complex of ideas that gave birth to *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Like so many of my fellow travelers, this book distinctly fascinated me. Like them, I became absorbed by the implausible theory that the Catholic Priest Saunière had been linked to a conspiracy by the Church to cover up “the real Jesus.”

Today, *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail* has begotten *The Da Vinci Code*. Like myself back then, many New Agers today lap that book up without bothering an instant with the Catholic perspective. For them, Catholicism is self-evidently suspect. It is obviously corroded by ecclesiastical “control freaks” who are all-too-capable of burying the “fact” that St. Mary Magdalene had been the lover—of Jesus Christ. For in the vicinity of Rennes-le-Chateau, people

whispered that not only the remains of St. Mary Magdalene might someday be found, but also the (non-resurrected) body of Jesus. Hence, the title of another volume about Rennes-le-Chateau I perused in my youth: *The Tomb of God*, a number one bestseller in its day.<sup>2</sup> Today, such titles take on new meaning for me. They are indeed about *burying* God.

With such dubious inspirations, I made my pilgrimage to the little Catholic church of Rennes-le-Chateau, without the slightest interest in Catholicism. I was twenty-eight years old. Rennes-le-Chateau was “cool,” I might have said. The Gnostics and Cathars were definitely “cool.” But ordinary Christianity was distinctly “uncool.”

Many years later, as a Catholic convert, I would return several times to Rennes-le-Chateau, the final resting place of the Abbé Berenger Saunière. Now, in the mysterious web of truth and lies surrounding Rennes-le-Chateau, one thing, at least, is indisputable. The Abbé Saunière mysteriously amassed a fortune, with which he expensively refurbished his church. And it is said one can probe his redecorated church for clues to a mystery. (Indeed, I attempted as much myself during my New Age pilgrimage.)

It was only much later that I saw what was not obvious before, but that is plain to any Catholic with eyes to see. For Saunière redecoration abounded with traditional Catholic motifs! Only then could I appreciate everything Saunière had done. Only then, did I see the statue in stone, the stained glass window, and a small earthen commemoration Saunière clearly commissioned, all honoring His Most Sacred Heart. Only then, was it clear Saunière had been a traditional Catholic monarchist in a similar mold to Josephin Péladan.

Nonsense everywhere obscures vision. And the traditional Catholic elements of Rennes-le-Chateau were as invisible to my blinkered New Age eyes as they are to most contemporary “pilgrims” to the site. For whenever I visited Rennes-le-Chateau as a Catholic,

there were streams of New Age visitors, just like I had once been myself. They also appeared in search of the obscure—clues to a conspiracy—whilst utterly oblivious to the obvious. For Rennes-le-Chateau ringingly proclaims traditional Catholic piety everywhere you look. The Abbé's statue to Our Lady of Lourdes stands just outside the church crying, "Penitence! Penitence!"—words that Saunière lovingly inscribed at the statue's base.

My digression here is not without purpose. I mean to suggest how apparently incongruous streams merge within the New Age. "Holistic" favorites such as Alice Bailey, the Cathars, *A Course in Miracles*, *The Da Vinci Code*, or gurus like Krishnamurti are united in their opposition to ecclesiastical Christianity. They grant little room for the Jesus of the Church—the Word become flesh. This is to say personal and human. And, although not always obvious, these "holistic" favorites likewise tend toward a spirituality that is less personal and less human. At least, my own New Age journey fostered not only de-personalized images of "Christ-consciousness," but also a de-personalized life in general.

The years of vast peace had ended. But what would have happened had they persisted, I wonder? What if, year after year, I remained unperturbed by normal human dilemmas? What would I have made of others' suffering? Not enough, I think. But I would certainly have become more arrogant and aloof.

All this speaks to an orientation of the soul, which is very, very foreign to Catholic Christianity. Catholicism has nothing to do with remote detachment like this. Likewise, it refuses the relentless upbeat nature of the New Age. Instead, the Catholic Mystery pierces the human heart, just as His Heart was pierced. Communion with the Sacred Heart renders our stone-like hearts ever more human and tender. In other words: Catholic Christian faith means carrying the Cross of the world, rather than seeking out a refuge of sunlit optimism.

All this stands in profound contrast to the world of Alice Bailey

—something never more transparent than in her attitudes to nuclear holocaust. For in *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, dropping the bomb is described as a glorious, spiritual event, unparalleled for eons of time:

I would like at this time to touch upon the *greatest spiritual event which has taken place since the fourth kingdom of nature, the human kingdom, appeared*. I refer to the release of atomic energy, as related in the newspapers this week, August 6, 1945, in connection with the bombing of Japan.

Some years ago I told you that the new era would be ushered in by the scientists of the world and that the inauguration of the kingdom of God on Earth would be heralded by means of successful scientific investigation. By this first step in the releasing of the energy of the atom this has been accomplished. . . .

The first use of this energy has been material destruction; this was inevitable and *desirable*; old forms (obstructing the good) have had to be destroyed; *the wrecking and disappearance of what is bad and undesirable must ever precede the building of the good and desirable*. [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

Here are brief extracts from an abstruse, lengthy passage, which indicates neither the unspeakable horror of atomic holocaust, nor the magnitude of Calvary. Indeed, it would seem the Bomb surpasses Calvary for Alice Bailey. Yet all this was lost on me at Findhorn, plunged in remote, unfeeling meditation and thousands of esoteric pages.

Now, my book is not an autobiography and there is much I must

pass over. Suffice it to say, I later headed for Cambridge to found a New Age center with the woman I fell in love with. There, we had a daughter and later we separated. No need to speak more of this tragedy. I met Kim and, together, we continued this Cambridge New Age center. There, we advocated spirituality Findhorn-style. We encouraged folk in New Age rituals of psychological awareness. Thus, we guided them to listen to each other more attentively, express their emotions more authentically and so forth.

Now, this personal approach *is* different from Alice Bailey. The therapy culture has softened and humanized the Theosophical origins of the New Age—a paradox we consider later. Looking back at my work in Cambridge, I tried, I think, to be a kind and sympathetic figure. My highest ideal, I would have said, was love. And like many genuine New Age people, I hope I understood something of the Mystery of Love.

Yet, in subtle ways, I remained distant, detached. The de-personalized theosophy of Alice Bailey continued working in my soul. And in my relationship to Kim, an aloof, tentative quality prevailed. I was faithful in a sense. Certainly, I never pursued other relationships. But in the truly Christian sense of chastity, fidelity, and commitment, I was none of these things. I was not fully engaged with her. And my hesitant engagement was not limited to Kim. It affected every area of my life. Tentative engagement—this is not love. Love means more than psychological attentiveness or personal authenticity. It means commitment—not New Age rituals. My orientation was likewise humanistic. Did I *pray* for people in Cambridge? No. My understanding of love was too limited. The Mystery of Christ's love remained invisible to me. I was not happy in all this. Indeed, like the Gnostics I adored, I longed for the spiritual liberation of death. In time, something happened that transformed me forever. The tentative New Age Gnostic encountered the Catholic Mystery. To this, we shall come. For now, I simply testify how Eastern Theosophy paradoxically

persisted in my soul, despite my immersion in the New Age therapy culture.

### **New Age Synthesis**

ONCE upon in time—in the autumn of 1988—two young students of Alice Bailey moved to Cambridge, England. We arrived with specific intent: to found a registered charity for New Age spirituality. Significantly, we never dreamt of naming our new center an Alice Bailey center. Nor did we call it a Findhorn center. No. We named it something as bland and inoffensive as possible. We called it “The Cambridge Center” and let it go at that. We wanted something neutral and indistinct that would alienate no one. It never mattered that our name was so meaningless as to say nothing whatsoever.

A decade of activity ensued in Cambridge, wherein hundreds of thousands of advertising sheets made their way through the city—leaflets, programs, posters, and the like—all of which testified to our youthful certainties. Here are 106 words from my own pen, which appeared on our flyers:

The Cambridge Center is a registered charity for education in spiritual traditions, psychology, ecology and other areas, which address humanity’s deepest needs. We believe these needs are inner, spiritual ones and only by attending to them can a sane and compassionate society be born. *Change begins in hearts and minds.*

Moreover people must be free to explore their spirituality in a way hitherto rare: free of imposed beliefs, dogma and sectarianism. This is the heart of the New Age idea.

Hence we belong to no greater organization and are committed to the freedom of each individual to choose her

or his own path of spiritual growth.

Some twenty-five years ago, I wrote these 106 words, dear Lector, trying to encapsulate our New Age philosophy, as succinctly as possible. And now I should like to offer you a little commentary on our good intentions here. For my words are earnest. My young self wanted “a sane and compassionate society.” He wanted to change the world for the better! And how confident he was that he knew how to “address humanity’s deepest needs.”

How arrogant this young man’s thinking was! How automatically he assumes “Old Age spirituality” (like the Catholic Church) knows less about “humanity’s deepest needs” than he does! The implicit assumption is he knows better than the Pope, the Bishops, and all the Priests! Of course, he assumes the Church is simply riddled with narrow thinking. This is why he protests “people must be free to explore their spirituality in a way hitherto rare: free of imposed beliefs, dogma and sectarianism. This is the heart of the New Age idea.”

Here is what he implicitly tells people: “Forget about two thousand years of tradition in the West! We New Agers have come from Findhorn to show you something better!”

He dismisses Western tradition and yet it never occurs to him that, really, he actually *knows very little* indeed about Western tradition. He may have studied thousands of pages of Alice Bailey—but has he ever given Christian theology a second thought? No. He simply declares his New Age better, because it is free of “imposed beliefs, dogma and sectarianism.”

Yet this young man’s mindset is filled with *de facto* dogmas. It is hardly free from imposed beliefs and indeed now looks highly sectarian to me. Not long ago, in fact, I spoke to a friend from Cambridge, who still moves in “holistic” circles. She told me she did not feel free to speak of evil in these circles (a point we shall return to). Yet all kinds of concepts—not simply that of evil—remain taboo in

the New Age. The “inclusive” New Age excludes them.

What of my final lines above: “Hence we belong to no greater organization and are committed to the freedom of each individual to choose her or his own path of spiritual growth”? It was true we belonged to no official institution—only a loose network. However, the *implication* here is not true. I imply we were somehow free of agendas, because we were independent. Yet we were hardly independent. All this strikes me as drivel today—though I believed it at the time. I trusted in our commitment to freedom. Only with time, did I see how New Age spirituality robs freedom.

One way “holistic” approaches destroy freedom is through the kind of muddled thinking above. Because people, good people, believe this muddy thinking. They readily fall for the idea that freedom reigns in the New Age, simply because it is not formally institutionalized like the Church.

How different everything looks to me today. For when people convert to Catholicism (or Judaism or Islam for that matter) they are more likely to be clearly conscious of what they affirm. But in the nebulous, non-institutionalized terms of the New Age, people may be far less conscious of what they “signed up for.” Certainly, the young man who wrote the 106 words above was unconscious of what he signed up for.

Of course, most religious people are not converts—they are born into a religion whose doctrines they may be hardly aware of. Still, formal religious thought, with its clearly defined doctrines and catechisms, provides a *clarity* that muddy New Age-isms seldom offer. At any rate, the Catholic I am today—who has studied the clear *Catechism of the Catholic Church*—is far more conscious of what I affirm than I was of my hazy Aquarian ideology.

In the past, I could not see the cage I inhabited. Another memory may illustrate my unwitting bias. In The Cambridge Center, we amassed a lending library of some 2000 books. The collected works of

Alice Bailey held pride of place, of course, but there was a diversity of titles beyond Bailey—or so I thought. For we had many other channeled tomes, as well as books on quantum physics, ecology, holistic healing, Eastern religions, Transpersonal Psychology, and more.

But here is a hidden unifying factor, dear Lector. In Cambridge, I met another student of Alice Bailey. Not surprisingly, he support our project. He, too, realized there was no point to an official “Alice Bailey center.” He was, moreover, a man of real decency and sincerity, who selflessly volunteered long hours creating our library. Yet, by and large, he gathered and solicited books compatible with Bailey’s Theosophical worldview. I do not think he was necessarily even conscious of what he did. And if I had managed the library, I would have done the same thing. I would not have chosen writings by Catholic saints. But I would have gladly accepted channeled books about “the Christ consciousness and the Master Jesus”—even if they were not by Alice Bailey.

Over years, thousands of Cambridge students and townspeople visited our library. Many of them assumed—as we did—that an “inclusive” wide-ranging selection of books was on offer. But if, today, Lector, I could walk you through that library, you might see how our selection revolved in a tight orbit around Alice Bailey. You would find, for example, *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra. Capra asserts quantum theory demonstrates Eastern spiritual teachings. Now, this easily harmonizes with the Eastern Theosophy of Alice Bailey. It likewise harmonizes with her claim materialism will shortly evaporate, when science discovers esoteric dimensions. And with “scientific proofs” of Eastern religion, what need is there for Western faith? Fritjof Capra might not be a theosophist, but his views clearly complemented the hidden orientation of our library.

So it went with our other books. From channeled teachings announcing a glorious, sunlit future to books about the power of

positive thinking (all of which easily fits Theosophical notions of mind over matter). But what of books that did not easily correspond to Theosophical contours? What of, say, *The Life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque* by the Bishop Emile Bougaud? This jewel of French Catholicism tells the story of how the Saint of Paray-le-Monial encountered the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It also speaks of obedience, dogma, hierarchy, and Catholic tradition. This book would *not* have readily found its way into our library! In our “universal” library, the entirety of Catholic tradition was excluded! For amongst other things, *The Life of St. Margaret Mary* tells the story of a blazingly personal Jesus Christ, who weeps that He is not honored in His Sacrament of Love. The weeping Jesus Christ who actively cares about His Church on earth—this would not please many folk who once frequented a little New Age center in Cambridge, England.

Indeed, the only book I recall regarding Catholicism *per se* was one about Catholics and sex. I recall a co-worker telling me it helped him understand how his Catholic upbringing had damaged his sexuality. Here is the extent to which our supposedly “universal, holistic, and inclusive” library addressed the Church, a Church that, moreover, represents one-sixth of humanity.

Yet it never occurred to me our library was narrow and skewed. The same blinkeredness marks others who, like myself back then, cannot comprehend the Blazing Heart of Infinite Personal Love. For when New Age folk speak of Christ, they often use the same depersonalized tone as Alice Bailey. Usually, talk of the personal *Jesus Christ* is distinctly unpopular.

From years later—after my baptism—a memory emerges. I have become a Christian, but remain attached to my old subculture. For the benefit of a “holistic” audience, I write an article explaining my conversion. I consult an old friend whose editing skills I esteem. Indeed, I profit from several editorial remarks she makes. But one recommendation I categorically refuse. It is so objectionable that I may

recall it till my dying days—because I speak of Jesus Christ in personal terms.

“Uh-uh,” she says, “can’t do that. It will be too much of a turn-off. *But* if you say ‘Christ energy’ or ‘Christ consciousness,’ then you’ll have them flocking.” Of course, I no longer recall her precise words. But, however it was conjugated, I distinctly recall this specific verb: *to flock*—with all its connotations of blind, instinctive behavior. I will have New Agers flocking like the birds, but only IF I will first—*please!*—de-personalize Jesus Christ! Only if I substitute abstract terms like “Christ consciousness” can New Agers relate to what I say. Flatly, I refuse—because Christianity is destroyed when we make an abstraction of the One of Us who is a Person, with a particular, personal name: *Jesus*. It is a name that New Agers often do not like very much.

Here is yet another personal recollection. A New Age lecturer once spoke at Cambridge like this: “Christianity was fine, before Paul. But Paul corrupted the original purity of the message. *All the great spiritual teachers agree on this*—it was Paul who twisted Christianity.”

But, just who were all these “great spiritual teachers”? He did not say. However, I know of only one “great spiritual teacher” who clearly states St. Paul corrupted original Christianity. It is Alice Bailey:

There is a growing and developing belief that Christ *is* in us, as He was in the Master Jesus. . . . The wonder of that life, lived two thousand years ago, is still with us. . . . The words He spoke were few and simple and all men can understand them, but their significance has been largely lost in the intricate legalities and discussions of St. Paul, and in the lengthy disputation of theological commentators since Christ lived.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, Bailey asserts:

Little emphasis has been laid nevertheless upon the influence of Mars upon Christianity, making it a definitely militant religion, off cruel and sadistic (as witness the murders and tortures carried out in the name of Christ, who was the outstanding Representative of God's love). Throughout the teaching of Christian theology, the theme of blood runs ceaselessly and the source of salvation is laid upon the blood relationship and not upon the life aspect which the blood veils and symbolizes. It is the creed of a crucified and dead Christ which rules Christianity and not that of the risen Master. One of the reasons for this travesty of the truth has been that St. Paul . . . was potently under Martian influence and was born in Scorpio. . . . It was he who gave the Scorpio-Mars slant to the interpretation and exposition of the Christian teaching and deflected its energy into channels of teaching which its Founder had never intended.<sup>5</sup>

Yes, dear Lector, the neo-theosophist Alice Bailey blames St. Paul for warping Christianity. Outside Theosophy, you will search in vain for "great universal accord" in this matter. And if you do hear other "holistic" voices condemning St. Paul, they are undoubtedly indebted to Bailey's Theosophy (or, just possibly, one step back to Blavatsky or her immediate heirs). Now, the lecturer was a sincere soul and I think he actually believed what he said. He never intended to mislead. Still, his thinking remained thoroughly permeated by Alice Bailey's.

Here is how Theosophical notions are unconsciously perpetuated. First, they are powerfully asserted in esoteric literature. They are then received by a small, but influential, elite readership, who become, in

turn, New Age teachers, lecturers, and authors. Usually, these people claim to reject spiritual authority. Yet this lecturer tried to *create an authority*. He cited a pseudo-tradition, which automatically precluded all those who actually affirm St. Paul—e.g., two millennia of Christian saints and geniuses. Thus, a *bogus consensus* is invoked to supply a bogus authority: “All the great spiritual teachers.”

The authority of Christian tradition is repudiated, whilst a *self-referential counter-authority* is offered in its place. All the while, authority is denied. Here is how New Age ideology propagates—via sincere people, with frequently little idea what they are saying.

Nobody challenged the speaker. But if I could challenge his statement today, I wonder if he might retract it, just a little. At least, I can imagine him conceding it is not “all the great *spiritual* teachers.” Maybe he would say: “Well, I meant to say *esoteric* teachers.”

Clearly, such a claim would derive, once again, from Anglosphere Theosophy. Esotericism also emerged on the European continent, as we have noted already. But it was far less favorable to Blavatsky’s attack on Christianity! Often, it aspired to an esoteric Christianity, even whilst tragically opposing the Church. Still, this continental esoteric Christianity does not tolerate the Theosophical-New Age contempt of Christianity.

For example, the esoteric Austrian thinker Rudolf Steiner was no friend to the Church. Yet, in contrast to Alice Bailey, Steiner revered St. Paul. According to Rudolf Steiner, Christianity will always depend on St. Paul, because St. Paul was the first to express the essential truths of Christianity. Reading Steiner’s lectures on the Pauline epistles, it is clear he saw something so great in St. Paul that it would be thousands of years before it was properly understood.<sup>6</sup> I suspect the New Age lecturer would be surprised to know this. He might well subsume the esoteric Steiner together with “all the other great esoteric teachers.” But, however contrary Steiner’s thinking is to the Church, he cannot be lumped in with Anglosphere New Age-ism.

He deserves this justice, at least.

At this point, dear Lector, I invite you to pause and, if you need to, weep. Let us now reflect on *The Da Vinci Code*. It is apparent, is it not, that here is a book with a clear, calculated agenda to discredit Christianity. According to Dan Brown, St. Peter was not inspired by Our Lord—but jealousy of St. Mary Magdalene. Thus the Church founded on the Rock of Peter is discredited. Here is a variant on Alice Bailey—it is not St. Paul who corrupted Christianity from the onset—it is St. Peter. *A Course in Miracles* likewise blames the Apostles for distorting the original purity of Jesus’s message.

Now, books like *The Da Vinci Code* are far from innocent. But there *are* many relatively innocent New Agers, who confidently proclaim anti-Christian messages. These folk may well sincerely believe “all the great spiritual teachers” decisively reject St. Paul, St. Peter, and the entire foundations of Christian theology. Yet they still maintain that the original, core Christian message possessed a purity—before it was sullied. And what would this “original core of purity” be? Why, it would be *the one that agrees with the fundamental New Age tenets*.

Thus, many souls today cheerfully affirm Christianity is fine in essence—it is just that all the Apostles, Saints, and Doctors of the Church corrupted it. Nothing is wrong with Christianity—save the mess the Church made of it.

It goes without saying this is a bleak view of twenty centuries of Christian theology. But is there not more here, as well—i.e., profound pessimism about *the human condition itself*? Is it not the height of cynicism to claim the geniuses of Western Tradition staked so much on so very, very little? Two millennia of painstaking effort, aspiration, and frequent brilliance: all wasted on a little Petrine jealousy. And all these centuries, no one suspected anything different, till Dan Brown told us so. No one suspected the entire Pauline foundation of Christianity was wrong till Alice Bailey told us so.

Is it not colossal hubris to think we “know better” than two millennia of Christianity? Yet New Age teachers “reveal” the Saints and geniuses of the tradition (including Augustine, Francis, and Aquinas) were little but dupes of St. Peter or St. Paul—and are taken seriously!

If this makes you angry, dear Lector, I encourage you to weep instead of rage. Because usually the people holding such views are *not* angry haters of Christian revelation; they are the unconscious victims of a *calculated ideological attempt to subvert the Faith of the West*.

Here are scattered fragments of memory, dear Lector, pointing to deception on grand scale. Here was a supposedly all-embracing holistic library, yet one subtly *geared* to Alice Bailey. This library was designed for Cambridge students and, we hoped, future leaders of British culture. And here in Cambridge, a lecturer condemned St. Paul. The lecturer, as well as the man who created the library, the woman I fell in love with, and myself, all four of us were students of Bailey’s Theosophy and whether we realized it or not, we worked to disseminate an esoteric ideology.

And yet we would have told you we were open and friendly toward Christianity. We even believed it! None of us knew much about Christianity at all. But we were cocksure the “core essence” to Christianity was just the same as our “holistic, universal spirituality.” How can you be opposed to Christianity, when you think it amounts to nothing more than your own philosophy?

Thus, it must be admitted our New Age library featured books that apparently respected Christianity. Christianity was honored—as long as it agreed with the New Age! Yet these ostensibly respectful books existed alongside others mocking Christianity. Something is happening behind such mockery. For some “holistic” authors *do* realize Catholic Christianity IS saying something different to their philosophy. If pressed, such authors might admit that a religion about the Fall, sin, evil, and the need for Jesus Christ in a hierarchical

Church hardly fits into their supposed universalism. Consciously or not, they know Catholicism, as it stands, cannot be included in their “holistic” vision. The only way Catholicism might be integrated is if it were *stripped* of so-called “secondary” elements—stripped down, until some hypothetical common “core” is reached.

All this amounts to a sophisticated strategy to render Catholicism—the world’s dominant Christian tradition—invisible and ineffectual. *The strategy works.* The dominant Christian tradition was invisible to me for years—as it is to millions of others. But, in the [next chapter](#), I will tell how, by the mercy of God, I finally found the Catholic Mystery. By grace, I discovered there was not just a “single, universal path.” *Another path* existed—different from the remote, sunlit spirituality of Theosophy that I would now leave behind forever.

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<sup>1</sup> I speak of meetings in the flesh. I did encounter New Age authors such as Kenneth Wapnick, who admittedly *have* undertaken such studies. But having studied Wapnick, it appears to me far from likely he approached these things openly.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Andrews, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2000-year-old Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Alice Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Pub., 1957), 491, 498.

<sup>4</sup> Alice Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ* (New York: Lucis Pub., 1948), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis Pub., 1971), 103–04.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *The Bhagavad Gita and the West: The Esoteric Significance of the Bhagavad Gita and Its Relation to the Epistles of Paul* (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner-Books, 2009); see Lecture 4 particularly.

## The Hem of His Garment?

*One of us is seeking Spiritual Transformation.*

**I**N THE autumn of 1997 my life changed forever. For then I glimpsed something never seen in all my years of New Age exploration. What happened to me was, I believe, some form of encounter, with the Lord. My language here is deliberately vague. This is as it should be, because I do not really know what I experienced. God knows. I do not. But I like to think that through His Grace, perhaps I touched the Hem of His Garment.

Whatever I encountered, I know, has all to do with a *distinctively Christian Grace*. Clearly, it had nothing to do with the vague, remote, and impersonal “Christ consciousness” I had glibly talked about for years. Here was something utterly different—the beginning of a spiritual transformation that would lead me to the intensely personal Heart of Christ in His Church.

“Spiritual transformation” is a catchphrase much-loved in New Age circles. Some even speak of “radical transformation,” which they consider crucial to the “spiritual path.” But radical transformation involves cost. In my own case, it meant turning my back on decades of effort, friendship, and shared aspirations. Few New Agers will be interested in *this kind* of radical change, which destroyed my former identity. Radical. The word comes from the Latin *radix* for root. And it means to say, “from the roots up.”

Before telling my tale, let me stress how thoroughly submerged I was in everything New Age. I had participated in all manner of New

Age therapies and oracles: Reiki, acupuncture, iridology, Alexander technique, homeopathy, herbalism, kinesiology, astrology, palmistry . . . the list goes on. I went to New Age festivals, workshops, and lectures. I listened to New Age music, tapes, and talks. I read countless New Age books, magazines, and articles. In both Findhorn and Cambridge, I had had thousands of encounters with all manner of folk devoted to Theosophy, transpersonal psychotherapy, and innumerable gurus and teachers.

At some level, I thought I had seen it all. Certainly, it would have staggered my mind to think Christianity offered essential truths outside this New Age smorgasbord. All this I stress. For the New Age mindset protests: What could the Church possibly offer that we do not have already? Why do we need this “Old Age” stuff? Surely, we have it all. Surely, there is nothing—at least nothing of significant value—which cannot be found by alternative means. Surely, the Church has no *monopoly* on anything! All this expresses my own attitude until one fateful autumn night in Cambridge.

### **In the Eleventh Hour**

IN September 1997, I was a month from my thirty-fourth birthday—and something felt different in my interior life—indescribably different. For perhaps three weeks, a strange new ambience was present in my day-today experience. I did not know what this persistent, continuous feeling was—but it felt *good*.

Still, it never prepared me for what happened next. I was caught completely unaware by the late evening of September 18th. But, looking back, I see what happened that night was a culmination. The unusual inner experience of the last weeks reached a crescendo that night—a moment of special intensity—after which nothing would ever be the same again. For I experienced an interior event unlike anything encountered in my long years of New Age meditation. In an intimate

moment with Kim (the woman who is now my wife) I glimpsed the Christian Mystery. From this moment, my conversion began.

How to explain what really happened? It is much easier to say what did *not* happen. I did not have a vision. Nor did I sense a personality. Something, however, burst upon me. Something life-changing. Perhaps, I can put it no better than this. Abruptly, I became conscious of *a quality of being or living* that seemed unlike anything else I had ever known. I had been speaking to Kim and felt a need to be uncommonly frank. We were interacting with an unusual intensity. And something came to me. I cannot tell you exactly what it was. But I recall standing up in astonishment and saying: “I feel like I am in a new world.”

Whatever it was, dazed me. Still in a daze—maybe half an hour later—I tried to capture my bewildering experience in my journal. I even took the unusual step of recording the exact time—such was the sense of immediacy that I felt:

18th September 1997 10:57 pm

Tonight with Kim I felt something I have never felt before. . . . I felt something that, if I were really to feel it, would give me—so I felt—all I want . . . so that by being filled by this, I would thirst no more. It felt as though the lack of this [very special quality] has been the source of all the longing and all the difficulties, and that the fulfillment of this—this that I didn’t even know existed—would be the end of all neurosis.

. . .

It was light, so subtle. . . . I don’t know what it means, but it feels if I am in touch with it, I will have what I need and I will need no more, no other. If I am not in touch

with it, I will seek and seek . . . for all manner of things. I need to be in touch with this, and for this I need to give, commit myself

More.

Mystery.

I feel like I am in a new world.

The next day I was still struggling to find words:

I feel like I am still in the aftermath of something very, very special. . . . I am entering something else with Kim, with earth, with life—something other than I have ever known.

Unexpectedly, that same day I asked Kim to marry me. Until then, there had been hesitancy in committing to her, as I have said. Now, *everything was changed*. All at once, I knew I would entrust myself to her.

But our engagement, sudden as it was, belonged to something greater still that I was experiencing. What was this greater thing? What was this literally Eleventh Hour experience I have indicated to you, Lector, in cryptic notes ripped from a private journal? And what did I mean that I would “thirst no more”?

I believe it was the seed of my awakening to the Mystery of Jesus Christ. Although I did not see that immediately. My journal notes do not mention Christ at that point. But for reasons that will become clearer, it did not take me long to connect my experience to Him. Certainly, when I look back at my journal from a few weeks later, I find that I have written something that was very odd and unexpected at that time: “I am a Christian.”

Now, in my opinion, I was given the grace of a mystical

experience that September evening and the fruit of this Grace has been working in my life ever since. If I am right to regard this as mystical grace, there really is no precise way to articulate the fullness of what happened. However, perhaps a little can be *suggested* by expressing certain aspects of the experience.

One such aspect involved the nascent moral sense that something was wrong in the way I had been living. For a start, the tentative quality in my relationship with Kim was wrong. But there was more. I saw my lack of commitment to Kim involved something greater still. It reflected a *lack of commitment to the whole world*. (Even though, I considered myself sincerely engaged in my New Age work for a better world.)

But now, I saw that committing to Kim in marriage was not only to marry her, but also to marry the world. It meant marrying the world that previously *I had always subtly refused*. I glimpsed the opposite of my former spiritual aspiration. Here was the *inverse* of my cherished goal—the goal of those Cathars who refused the earth. I saw what it meant to love the earth, the ground.

The Latin for soil is *humus*—from which we derive our word humility. This suggests what healthiness there is in acknowledging we are not transcendent, detached beings of the spirit, controlling the physical (or even astral) bodies like Theosophical “vehicles.” We are part of God’s Creation. We belong to His earth.

My years of involvement with Alice Bailey and the New Age meant saying “no” to earthly things. Certainly, it involved a “no” to the traditional structures of society, including religious structures. And it involved aloofness, rather than humility. But in the “Eleventh Hour” of a Thursday night in September, something showed me the way out. As I say, it came to me soon after—I no longer recall quite how soon—that this new thing I experienced had everything to do with Jesus Christ. I saw how this new quality of living—of engagement, commitment, and marriage to the world—entailed *the*

*gift of accepting the limited and particular.* I had fancied myself something of a Gnostic. And Gnostics do not like the limited, particular things of this world. They do not like institutions; they do not like worldly things; perhaps, they do not like human personality itself. For being personal means being particular and specific. It means to be one's own self and not another.

God honored human particularity through His Incarnation. The infinite God restricted Himself to a finite human nature: particular, limited, personal. Through Jesus Christ, God became *completely personal*.

Here was the *exact inverse* of the Gnostic horror for the world of the flesh. Frequently, the Gnostics and Cathars wanted to vacate this life, abandoning this world of "evil matter." Through much of my life, I also longed for the liberation of death. But what the Gnostics spurned, Jesus Christ assumed and raised up.

Now I perceived something still greater in this new sense of marrying the world. For I realized that really committing to the world possessed a degree of analogy—albeit in the most minuscule, fallen and broken way—to the deed of Christ. This commitment was the *Imitatio Christi*.

However humble we may be, in this way, we follow Christ. Unlike the Buddha, Christ had not come to preach liberation from the world. Rather, the Son incarnated into and committed Himself *to* the earth. With His incarnation, God brought forth a new way of relating to the world. Yes, in September 1997, I beheld something I had never seen before. Today, I look at those words, which I wrote that night:

I felt something that, if I were really to feel it, would give me—so I felt—all I want . . . so that by being filled by this, I would thirst no more.

And years later, the correspondence with the Gospel according to

John leaps out:

Then that Samaritan woman saith to him: How dost thou, being a Jew; ask of me to drink, who am a Samaritan woman? For the Jews do not communicate with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her: If thou didst know the gift of God and who He is that saith to thee: Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and He would have given thee living water. The woman saith to him: Sir, thou hast nothing wherein to draw, and the well is deep. From whence then hast thou living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank thereof, himself and his children and his cattle? Jesus answered and said to her: Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst for ever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting. The woman said to him: Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst. (John 4:16)

However, at the time, I honestly do not think I knew this passage from John. What I wrote of thirsting no more was hardly a literary or gospel allusion. It was simply scribbled in a private journal to capture an interior experience. Certainly, I had not the slightest idea my jottings would ever be published. I was not thinking of “living waters.” Again, my journal notes say nothing of Christianity. The connection was made only later.

### **The Missing Factor: or the Connection I Failed to Realize**

BUT now, dear Lector, I need to tell you something. There is one factor that I have not mentioned with regard to this mysterious autumn of

1997. Whilst my Eleventh Hour experience came as a crescendo to an unusual period of three weeks or so, there was another factor in this timeframe—an all-important factor I now believe—which I have not mentioned in my account, because, *at the time*, I did not appreciate its relevance. At first, I failed to connect the dots. I did not link this unmentioned factor to the crescendo that would re-orient the rest of my life. Only years later, did I realize its relevance.

Now, the fact I never made this link at the time may seem scarcely credible to you, dear Lector. Because the as-yet unmentioned factor involves the following. I had found myself with a strange, atypical curiosity—a peculiar interest in the Church for the first time in my life. I can still recall being upstairs in a Cambridge bookshop. There was a sale and I noticed a thick tome about Catholicism at a reduced price. I felt a mysterious urge to buy the book—something I cannot imagine at any prior point in my life.

Thus, the decisive spiritual event in my life occurred within this context: a context wherein I felt drawn, tenuously and oddly, to reading about Catholicism. Yet what seemed perhaps little more than a curious distraction proved to yield undreamt-of significance. But only later did I see how the decisive spiritual event of my life was linked directly to the Holy Church. Because *something else was happening to me* as I pursued my peculiar new interest, albeit something invisible to me at the time.

To explain this “invisible something else,” I must introduce a matter that may seem bizarre to those who have forgotten what was once central to all of Christendom. For it is necessary to speak of the *Mystici Corporis Christi*—the Mystical Body of Christ! But what I say may seem peculiar for everyone who sees the Church simply as a human organization—and nothing more. This, of course, is to miss the point completely. Clearly, the Catholic Church possesses a certain needed infrastructure. Yet its organization is animated by a *living spiritual organism*—the Mystical Body of Christ. For what I never

realized that autumn of 1997 was that this *living spiritual organism had reached out and touched me.*

Again, my journal notes say nothing of Christianity. Although I failed to make the connection at the time, it seems to me, now, that my Eleventh Hour experience was contingent upon the Church—His Mystical Body. It seems to me I would have experienced *nothing*, had it not been for this.

How can this be so—given I was not baptized? And I had never participated in any Sacrament of the Church? Here it should be said the Master of Love extends Himself to us through His Church, not only via the Seven Sacraments of the Church but other channels, as well. There are the sacramentals, such as Holy Water or the Rosary, for example. What I will now relate seems to me sacramental in this latter sense, at least.

The exact order of events is no longer clear in my mind. But, finding myself strangely interested by Catholicism, I attended a Mass. Curiously, I ventured into the chapel, with little idea as to what to expect. I wonder, now, if I took the sacramental of Holy Water, whilst passing through the doors. I cannot recall. My lack of recollection is a pity, for it may have a bearing on the story I now tell (even if only a small bearing).

In any event, being almost entirely ignorant in regard to the Church, I enquired whether I could receive the transformed bread and wine. I was told “no.” Still, it was suggested I might go forward during Holy Communion to receive a blessing. I had little idea what this meant. Upon approaching the Priest, I was distinctly startled. Laying his hand on my head, with a loud voice for all to hear, he blessed me “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

With this Mass and blessing, came a very subtle, yet distinct interior experience. How to capture this in words? I cannot. All I can say is that, within myself, I felt subtly, yet palpably, different

afterwards.

This feeling lasted for hours, perhaps for the rest of the day. I had the clear impression that something good had happened to me. And as a result, I felt different for the remainder of the day. Or even the remainder of my life... I am not sure. Because odd as it may seem, at the time, I never thought much about it.

As I mentioned before, I can no longer recall the exact sequence of events of that 1997 autumn. But looking back I feel virtually certain this blessing took place sometime *prior* to my Eleventh Hour experience. Thus, it seems to me that *first*, there came this very subtle interior experience with the blessing at Holy Communion. *Then*, perhaps two weeks later, my Eleventh Hour miracle *followed* the blessing in that chapel. And so the Eleventh Hour crescendo was the culmination of a process that involved being sacramentally blessed earlier in that chapel.

Even though I failed to make the connection at the time, years later this hypothesis dawned on me and I gasped in recognition: *This is how it must have happened*. (The fact I cannot recall the order of events for certain—whether my experience followed this Mass or not—only goes to show how initially I made no connection between the interior event and Christianity.)

Yes, I believe this Sacramental blessing preceded the miracle of that September night. Yet, even if am wrong, it changes nothing I am saying about the *Mystici Corporis Christi*. For I see now that the power of His Mystical Body had already begun to reach me. For the Catholic textbook I had strangely purchased was written by a Priest who has been *ordained*—which is to say, incorporated into His Mystical Body, in a specific, powerful manner. Now, like the Holy Water, could not a book from a member of the ordained—not only ordained but plunged daily in the Sacraments—also function as a Sacramental channel for His Mystical Body?

In any event, I recall feeling shocked by the book. I had grown up

knowing nothing but a caricature of Protestant Christianity. This was different! Here were concepts I had no idea belonged to the Church! Indeed, I was amazed by how “esoteric” Catholicism was. To my New Age mind, this was a high compliment!

Allow me to elaborate, dear Lector. I read Alice Bailey, because I was enamored of the esoteric. By contrast, the word “exoteric” was pejorative for me. It spoke of boring, dusty old things. In the argot of my culture, esoteric was “cool”; exoteric “uncool.” Christianity was just another tiresome “exoteric” religion. But now, I read of matters such as the Communion of Saints and Hierarchies of Angels—which were far removed from what I knew of Protestantism. I was stunned. I recall talking to my friends, saying something like this: “I’m reading this standard ‘exoteric’ Catholic textbook—and you know what? It’s esoteric! I can’t believe it—it’s actually esoteric!”

Such was my New Age idiom. I reproduce it to illustrate my discovery—one that other New Agers might make given half a chance: the startling realization that Catholic Christianity concerns something *very* different from the dry, literalist connotations they have (largely) inherited from Protestantism.

Still today, I ask how did it really begin—the process that culminated in that life-transforming September evening? However it happened, this remains clear to me. I came into contact with His Mystical Body for the first time in my life. And this happened only *after* I had been touched and blessed by a Priest.

I believe this was the Priest who blessed me at the Mass. But even if my memory is faulty, an ordained Priest had still reached me, via the book, I found in a Cambridge bookshop. My Eleventh Hour miracle was intimately connected to the living mystical organism of the Church. It *would not have happened* without the *Mystici Corporis Christi* intervening in my life. And given the extraordinary Grace of what happened to me, I cannot help but wish more non-Catholics would go into a church, take some Holy Water and approach the altar

for a blessing.

## On Valentin Tomberg, Christian Love and Catholic Tradition

NOW, AFTER discovering the Catholic textbook by the Priest, I found another work that would prove essential to my ongoing conversion. That book is *Meditations on the Tarot*, written anonymously in the 1960s by the Catholic convert Valentin Tomberg (1900–1973).

Here, I believe, is a work of moral genius—the lifetime’s fruit of an elderly man who demonstrably achieved the most lucid of thinking combined with the warmest of hearts. A 600-page *tour de force*, it features an astonishing Catholic synthesis of theology, philosophy, history, politics, psychology, science—and indeed matters of a more esoteric nature.

For readers who may feel troubled by a work on the Tarot, I must emphasize the book contains not one word about telling fortunes with Tarot cards. Likewise, I stress the extraordinary way this work guided me to the Church. In like manner, I believe it can help others find their way out of a New Age wasteland. Why do I say this? Let me begin by citing the book’s foreword by Hans Urs von Balthasar—one of St. John Paul II’s most beloved modern theologians, and nominated by him as a Cardinal. (Although, as it happened, Balthasar died just before receiving the red hat.) In his foreword, Balthasar writes of this book:

A thinking, praying Christian of unmistakable purity reveals to us the symbols of Christian Hermeticism in its various levels of mysticism, gnosis and magic, taking in also . . . certain elements of astrology and alchemy [seeking] to lead meditatively into the deeper, all-embracing wisdom of the Catholic Mystery.<sup>1</sup>

Even though these words come from a Cardinal-elect theologian revered by St. John Paul II (and indeed his successor, Benedict XVI) many Catholics may remain perturbed.<sup>2</sup> Let me say, then, emphatically: nothing else but *Meditations on the Tarot* could have broken the New Age hold on me. Its sheer *grip* would have proved too strong. Deeply-ingrained Eastern esoteric concepts had to be deconstructed and I have never encountered any other author who could do that even remotely as well as Tomberg. Without him, I would have been *lost*. Yes, my life had been changed by what I found that September evening. But more was necessary to lead me out of the wasteland. The abyss between the New Age and Catholicism is gaping—and I needed a bridge. *Meditations on the Tarot* provided that bridge. And there are many souls lost in the New Age wilderness, who likewise desperately need the bridge Valentin Tomberg constructed for them.

But it goes still further than this. For Tomberg's Catholic writings (which include some further shorter works besides the *Meditations*<sup>3</sup>) guided me, not only to the Church, but, with every passing year, ever more deeply to traditional Catholicism. For as we shall see later, Tomberg was plainly alarmed by the so-called progressive spirit operating through much of Vatican II. For him, that spirit could only bring degeneration and death.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as we shall also see, Tomberg recognized much the same degenerative spirit at work in the Reformation and the French Revolution, all of which made him acutely concerned to preserve tradition in the face of the liberal, ecumenical euphoria which swept through the Church during the 1960s.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Back in the late Nineties, I could not stomach these deeply conservative aspects of Tomberg's thought, liberal New Ager that I was. However, what *did* speak to me was a magnificent discourse on Christian LOVE that runs throughout *Meditations on the Tarot*. For Tomberg profoundly helped me to

understand my Eleventh Hour experience. He enabled me to see that my Eastern, depersonalized spirituality was less than truly loving. Indeed, much that I say here regarding subtle New Age depersonalization, as well as spiritual inflation, is deeply indebted to Tomberg. Now, a whole treatise might be written on Tomberg's sustained, startling discourse on Christian love. Lacking scope for that, I would simply interject a passage that was so striking for me that, later on, Kim and I chose to have it read at our wedding. Hopefully, Lector, you will not only catch a glimpse of Tomberg's vision of love, but also see how delicately he deconstructs the Eastern foundations of today's New Age movement:

We are surrounded by innumerable living and conscious beings—visible and invisible. But rather than knowing that they really exist and that they are as much alive as we ourselves, it nevertheless appears to us that they have a *less real existence* and that they are *less living* than we ourselves, for us it is WE who experience the full measure of the intensity of reality, whilst other beings seem, in comparison with ourselves, to be less real; their existence seems to be more of the nature of a shadow than full reality. Our thoughts tell us that this is an illusion, that beings around us are as real as we ourselves are, and that they live just as intensely as we do. Yet fine as it is to say these things, all the same we feel ourselves at the centre of reality, and we feel other beings to be removed from this centre. That one qualifies this illusion as “egocentricity”, or “egoism”, or “*ahamkara*” (the illusion of self), or the “effect of the primordial Fall”, does not matter; it does not alter the fact that we feel ourselves to be more real than others.

To feel something as real in the measure of its full

reality is to love. It is love which awakens us to the reality of ourselves, to the reality of others, to the reality of the world and to the reality of God. In so far as we love ourselves, we feel real. And we do not love—or we do not love as much as ourselves—other beings, who seem to us to be less real.

Now, two ways, two quite different methods exist which can free us from the illusion “me, living—you, shadow”, and we have a choice. The one is to *extinguish* love of oneself and to become a “shadow amongst shadows”. This is the equality of indifference. India offers us this method of liberation from *ahamkara*, the illusion of self. This illusion is destroyed by *extending the indifference that one has for other beings to oneself*. Here one reduces oneself to the state of a shadow equal to the other surrounding shadows. *Maya*, the great illusion, is to believe that individual beings, me and you, should be something more than shadows—appearances without reality. The formula for realizing this is therefore: “me, shadow—you, shadow”.

The other way or method is that of *extending the love that one has for oneself to other beings*, in order to arrive at the realization of the formula: “me, living—you, living”. Here it is a matter of rendering other beings as real as oneself i.e., of loving them as oneself. To be able to attain this, one has first to love one’s *neighbour as oneself*. For love is not an abstract programme but, rather, it is *substance and intensity*.<sup>5</sup>

*Love is not an abstract programme*—how much this single line serves to illustrate the insufficiency of my entire Eastern, pre-Christian life! For throughout *Meditations on the Tarot*, Tomberg repeatedly

demonstrates that the second way of Personal Christian Love (loving one's neighbor as oneself) is superior to Eastern impersonal detachment. Moreover, he shows how this has *everything* to do with Christ and His Church.

Now, above, I described Tomberg as “delicately deconstructing” Eastern religious concepts. It is important to stress this. The book's approach is very, very gentle. It never accuses other religions, for example, of being diabolical or devoid of worth. Tomberg refuses a polemical approach, one which would, incidentally, alienate much of his intended audience. (It would certainly have alienated me!) Indeed, Tomberg's gentleness goes further. He profoundly honors all that possesses moral and spiritual value in every religion and philosophy. This is so much so that less than fully attentive readers may even conclude that Tomberg aspires to a universalism akin to the New Age movement.

Nothing could be further from the truth! Just as the above passage gently points to the superiority of Christian Love over Eastern spirituality, the author makes perfectly clear that equating any Eastern religion (including Islam) with the Catholic tradition is a serious error:

Continuity—or tradition and life—implies faithfulness to the cause that is espoused, to the direction taken, to the ideal that one has as a guide . . . for the sake of the continuity of life. This is what is stated by the seventh commandment: *Thou shalt not commit adultery*. There is carnal adultery, psychic adultery and spiritual adultery. The Biblical prophets spoke of this in relation to the unfaithfulness to the alliance of Sinai on the part of the kings and people of Israel, who on many occasions gave themselves up to cults of Canaanite divinities. This is today also the case when one embraces, for example, the Vedanta or Buddhism, whilst having been baptized and

sufficiently instructed in order to have access—given good will—to experience of the sublime Christian mysteries. I am speaking neither about the *study* nor the adoption of the *technical methods* of yoga, Vedanta or Buddhism, but only about the case where one changes *faith*, i.e., where one substitutes the ideal of liberation for that of love, an impersonal God for the personal God, return to the state of potentiality (or *nirvana*) for the *kingdom of God*, a wise instructor for the Saviour, and so on. . . .

All the fruits of human experience merit being studied and examined—and, according to their merit, accepted or rejected. But experience is one thing and faith, or metaphysical ideal, is another. With the latter what is at stake are the *moral values* that one cannot change without either essential ruin or gain in the life of soul and spirit. One cannot change faith without gaining or losing. A Negro fetishist who embraces Islam gains; a Christian who is converted to Islam loses. The former gains new moral values for his soul; the latter loses moral values from his soul. Regrettable or not, it is a fact that religions constitute a scale of moral and spiritual values. They are not equal—being stages of mankind's evolution over millennia, on the one hand, and successive revelations from above, on the other hand. There is therefore no religion without value, or that is even intrinsically false or “diabolical”; but, on the other hand, there is no religion of higher value than that of love.

Spiritual adultery is therefore the exchange of a higher moral and spiritual value for a lower moral and spiritual value. It is, for example, the exchange of the living God for an impersonal divinity; Christ crucified and resurrected for a sage deep in meditation; the Holy Virgin-Mother for

Nature in evolution; the community of saints, apostles, martyrs, monks, confessors, church doctors and virgins for a “community of geniuses” of philosophy, art, science, etc.<sup>6</sup>

“A Christian who is converted to Islam loses.” How incredibly difficult that sentence once was for my former “universalist” New Age self! For clearly Tomberg felt exactly the same regarding Buddhism, Hinduism, or New Age-ism. Conversion to any of these from Christianity represents a spiritual adultery, which substitutes the God of Personal Love for something lesser, something invariably more abstract, impersonal, and less human. Such adultery, however, is exactly what we witness everywhere in the Anglosphere today—whether it takes the form of the New Age movement or Secular Materialism. For when Tomberg speaks above of a “community of geniuses” he certainly means the pioneers of secularism we have already invoked in these pages: Descartes, Hume, Kant, Marx, Darwin, and all the rest. (My point here will be amplified later on, when we turn to the Rousseauian and Voltairean adultery of the French Revolution which Tomberg abhorred.)

While Tomberg gently challenged non-Christian religions, his approach to Protestantism was sharper. He did not shy away from strong language like “the Lutheran heresy”<sup>7</sup> or comparing the Reformation to the Communist revolution in Russia.<sup>8</sup> And in his private notes he wrote: “The impoverishment of humanity caused by Protestantism . . . consequently humanity is deprived of the effect of the *Universal Remedy*.”<sup>9</sup>

We will return to Tomberg’s views of the Reformation later on in this book. What I would emphasize now is that Tomberg plainly saw this *Universal Remedy* within traditional Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. Tomberg even goes so far as to describe the Sacraments within these Churches as: “*universal* operations, destined to serve the

whole of mankind” [Italics mine].<sup>10</sup> This would seem to suggest that, in the fullness of time, Tomberg believed Sacramental Catholic and Orthodox Christianity would extend to all humanity, offering the way of Divine-Personal Love rather than the ideal of liberation, nirvana, an impersonal God, etc.

However, contra Protestantism, Tomberg’s regard for Eastern Orthodoxy was far-reaching. He esteemed not only the ancient tradition of the East, but much that was more recent, such as the Jesus prayer and the Sophiology of Russian thinkers like Soloviev.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, though, Tomberg regretted that the Eastern Churches had been severed from Rome by the schism and thereby deprived of many later Western developments, including Scholasticism and the Jesuit spirituality of St. Ignatius. Thus, Tomberg clearly distinguished Catholicism from any other expression of Christianity: “The Catholic Church, being catholic or universal, cannot consider itself as a particular church among other particular churches, nor consider its dogmas as religious opinions among other religious opinions or confessions.”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Tomberg proceeds even further along such uncompromising “Roman” lines. He argues not only for Papal Infallibility, but also the restoration of Divine Law to Western legal systems, the need for the State to protect the Church and thus a return to the essential spirit of the Holy Roman Empire!<sup>13</sup>

From all the above, Lector, it should be evident how very difficult it was for the liberal, “pluralist” New Ager I once was to cope with Tomberg! Indeed, for long years, I dismissed the more traditional elements of his thought. However, *Meditations on the Tarot* possesses irresistible spiritual and moral power. Like many others do, I found myself reading and re-reading it, year after year. And the more I read it, the less I was able to resist Tomberg’s *thorough* defence of Catholic tradition. Indeed, Tomberg’s masterpiece led me to many concepts that

you will find in this book. What I write throughout these pages, Lector, is far more indebted to Valentin Tomberg than I can ever hope to express.

Be that as it may, we cannot ignore the esoteric elements of *Meditations on the Tarot* which, moreover, occasionally stray from orthodoxy. The most grievously problematic issue here is Tomberg's apparent endorsement of reincarnation. I say "apparent," however, because this is far from straightforward. For Tomberg makes the curious suggestion that while reincarnation possesses a certain reality, it is an unnecessary reality that in fact does not mirror the truth of God. However, teasing out what Tomberg means as "real, but neither necessary, nor true" would require detailed exposition which is far, far beyond our scope. We will only add that Tomberg defends the Church as being absolutely right to deny reincarnation and *implores* his readers to re-think promoting any notion of reincarnation.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the time, however, Tomberg's invocation of the esoteric is hardly unorthodox, even if it might superficially appear that way. For example, Tomberg occasionally employs astrological symbols in addition to the Tarot. Now, the Holy Church condemns using astrology to predict and control the future, either one's own future or that of others. For, certainly, astrology can be used to invade, manipulate, and entrap people. However, the Church does not condemn every exploration of astrological or Tarot symbolism. Nor does the Church forbid healthy enquiry into other Mysteries beyond this world—the Mystery of Angels, for example.

All of this, moreover, remains relevant to the question as to how *Meditations on the Tarot* can "bridge" New Agers into the Church. For I am hardly alone! The New Age is filled with souls, like myself attracted to the hidden Mystery behind the world. And, over the years, I have witnessed countless souls fascinated by the Eastern New Age ineluctably drawn by Tomberg, as I was drawn, to the Holy Church. Indeed, Tomberg's repeated invocation of esoteric matters appears

frequently designed to warn New Age types of the considerable dangers of esotericism!

Here I should also speak regarding another set of folk somewhat similar to New Agers. They reject New Age-ism, but call themselves “esoteric Christians.” Unlike New Agers, they revere the Heart of the Gospel—yet feel themselves unable to accept the Church. Many of these souls have drunk deeply from the esoteric thought of Rudolf Steiner (whom we noted already for his break with Theosophy). In Nineteenth-Century Germany, Steiner had been a philosopher in the idealist stream of Fichte and Hegel and initially rejected Christianity. But toward his fortieth year, he passed through interior experiences that convinced him that the Mystery of Golgotha—as he would later call it—was the central Mystery of the world. Whatever may be said regarding Steiner’s highly unorthodox views, his veneration of Calvary was profound. As Christopher Bamford has written:

For Steiner . . . the incarnation of [Christ’s] Being (His birth, death, descent into the Earth, resurrection and ascension) is more than the redemptive turning point in humanity’s relationship to God. Enormous though that is and hardly to be conceived of, the meaning of Christ’s passage through our human Earth is greater still, and marks a watershed not just in the life of human beings and the earth, but also in the life of the [Angels] and—dare one say it?—even in the Divine Life itself . . . Christ’s deed continues to transform human nature and the cosmos, as it were, turning these inside-out—so that for human beings today the once transcendent God is no longer beyond, but within a non-exteriorized divine-human interaction, more intimate than our jugular vein.<sup>15</sup>

It would be tempting to explore this further. For it relates to the

spirituality of the Sacred Heart that we explore later on. For, since the Incarnation, God now has a human heart. . . .

However, what is necessary to stress here is that Steiner would remain opposed to the Church for the rest of his days. Next to his towering vision of Calvary, his thinking embraced much that the Church has long rejected as unorthodox or heretical. Steiner's philosophy would be forged into Anthroposophy—a system of so-called “esoteric Christianity,” divorced from Catholic faith.

Anthroposophy has drawn untold thousands of souls into its bosom over the last century. Indeed, Valentin Tomberg had initially been an Anthroposophist. As a young man, he rejected the Catholic Church, drawing on sources like Steiner and Soloviev. In fact, he wrote a number of Anthroposophical works. Shortly after his fortieth year, he renounced Anthroposophy and converted to Catholicism. Tomberg clearly came to regret Steiner's efforts to foster a so-called “esoteric Christianity” separated from the Church. For many years later in *Meditations on the Tarot*, he would write:

Christianity . . . is one and indivisible. One should not—one cannot!—separate from so-called “exoteric” Christianity its gnosis and mysticism, or so-called “esoteric” Christianity. Esoteric Christianity is entirely within exoteric Christianity; it does not exist—and cannot exist—separately from it.<sup>16</sup>

When Tomberg left the Anthroposophical field, he requested the books of his youth never be re-published. That request has not been heeded. His early works are in print today and find favor among certain Anthroposophists, with the result that many confuse the mature Catholic Tomberg with the Anthroposophical Tomberg of his youth. However, with regard to these books Tomberg wrote to an Anthroposophical admirer in 1970:

Nothing lies further from me today or would be more tiring than to see the ashes of the Anthroposophical past raised up. . . . Shield me from discussions about [my Anthroposophical work] and similar things, which are now *totally alien* to me. [Italics mine]<sup>17</sup>

As Michael Martin has beautifully said: “[Tomberg’s] Catholic works were written by a different man, one transformed in the Blood of the Lamb.”<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, Tomberg believed there was a legitimate Christian esotericism *within* the Holy Church. He recognized the spiritual hunger for the Mysteries beyond this world that has manifested so powerfully in Theosophy and the New Age movement. But, contrary to the hostility to Christianity within those movements, he saw that esotericism need not be opposed to the Church. And he recognized others who felt the same and called them Christian Hermeticists. With this name, he invoked Christians who could not ignore an esoteric Hermetic tradition, with its roots in pre-Christian ages. Just as the Church could not ignore Plato, Aristotle, and the wisdom of ancient Greece, Hermeticists could not ignore ancient Egypt. And so Tomberg maintained that just as the Saints—such as Augustine and Aquinas—*baptized* the Greek Plato and Aristotle, so ancient Hermeticism must be likewise baptized. The Hermetic tradition originating with Hermes Trismegistus must be *Christianized*—not repudiated. Thus Tomberg worked diligently with Western traditions of Hermeticism (including medieval and modern exploration of Tarot and astrological symbolism) to overcome whatever anti-Christian tendencies persisted within them. Indeed, he insisted that a genuine Western Hermeticism (contra Eastern Theosophy) eventually led to the Holy Church:

The way of Hermeticism, solitary and intimate as it is, comprises authentic experiences from which it follows that

the Roman Catholic Church is, in fact, a depository of Christian spiritual truth, and the more one advances on the way of free research for this truth, the more one approaches the Church. Sooner or later one inevitably experiences that spiritual reality corresponds—with an astonishing exactitude—to what the Church teaches: that there are guardian Angels; that there are saints who participate actively in our lives; that the Blessed Virgin *is* real, and that she is almost precisely such as she is understood, worshipped and portrayed by the Church; that the Sacraments *are* effective, and that there are seven of them—and not two, or three, or even eight; that the three sacred vows—of obedience, chastity and poverty—constitute in fact the very essence of all authentic spirituality; that prayer is a powerful means of charity, for beyond as well as here below; that the ecclesiastical hierarchy reflects the celestial hierarchical order; that the Holy See and the Papacy represent a mystery of divine magic; that hell, purgatory and heaven *are* realities; that, lastly, the Master himself—although he loves everyone, Christians of all confession as well as all non-Christians—abides with his Church, since he is always present there, since he visits the faithful there and instructs his disciples there.<sup>19</sup>

Lector, allow me to interject something at this point. I have written extensively about the New Age in this book, precisely because I know how much the Church is *endangered* by it. Millions upon millions of “spiritual seekers” now seek out an Eastern esoteric charade of “universalism” in preference to the Catholic Mystery. Tomberg’s Catholic writings have the power, *like nothing else I know*, to deconstruct this charade. Indeed, having extensively studied

Tomberg's works for almost twenty years now, I believe this was Tomberg's intent. Writing as an elderly man in England in the 1960s, he undoubtedly recognized the New Age wave that already started to swell in Britain. Indeed, he warned in the gravest terms about Eastern Occultism without Christ. As Martin Kriele—a confidant of Tomberg, whom he entrusted with his literary estate—reports:

He took the occultism without Christ which based itself on the Theosophy of Blavatsky and worked out of the Indian-Tibetan region very seriously. It was very influential from the background. It was, for example, partly instrumental in the spread of Bolshevism, in the benevolent neutrality toward it, in the threatening east-west polarization, but also in the “esoteric” *youth* movement of the “New Age” which began to flourish at the time. [Italics mine]<sup>20</sup>

Here it is useful to recall that the Theosophical inspiration of both Blavatsky and Alice Bailey was said to be the Tibetan D.K. Indeed, Bailey asserted that D. K. works from *the region of the Himalayas*, along with other members of the hidden hierarchy of “masters and initiates,” who would guide humanity into the Aquarian Age. Plainly, Tomberg was gravely concerned by the “Indian-Tibetan” New Age movement that today has swept across the Anglosphere. He recognized its potential, even back then, to divert the *young* from Christ and His Church, as, indeed, it diverted me for thirty-four years. At least, this is the conviction I have come to these last two decades, ably supported by Kriele's testimony, as well as my own extensive study of Tomberg's thought and life. Tomberg hoped, then, to open a new way for those who hunger for the esoteric, as I hungered for so many years. His Catholic works demonstrate that people like myself need not abandon (or even oppose) the Church. Instead, he actively encourages

obedience to the Church: “May the Holy Scriptures be holy for us; may the Sacraments be Sacraments for us; may the hierarchy of spiritual authority be the hierarchy of authority for us.”<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, one can even hear Tomberg *pleading* with “esoteric seekers” to abandon prejudices toward the Church for the sake of a world increasingly “drowned” in materialistic decadence:

Has not the time finally arrived when we Hermeticists shall take account of the incontestable fact that it is thanks to the Church that we have air to breathe and that we have a place of shelter and refuge in this world of materialism, imperialism, nationalism, technologism, biologism and psychologism? It is in so far that the Church lives that we live. The church bells once reduced to silence, all human voices desiring to serve the glory of God will also be reduced to silence. We live and we die with the Church. Because in order to live, we need air to breathe; we need the atmosphere of piety, sacrifice, and appreciation of the invisible as a higher reality. This air, this atmosphere in the world, exists in the world only by grace of the Church. Without it Hermeticism—indeed, every idealistic philosophy and all metaphysical idealism—would be drowned in utilitarianism, materialism, industrialism, technologism, biologism and psychologism. Dear Unknown Friend, imagine to yourself a world without the Church. Imagine a world of factories, clubs, sports, political meetings, utilitarian universities, utilitarian arts or recreations—in which you would hear not a single word of praise for the Holy Trinity or of benediction in its name. Imagine to yourself a world in which you would never hear a human voice say: “*Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto, sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper,*

*et in saecula saeculorum,*” or “*Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus.*” A world without worship and without benediction . . . how deprived of ozone the psychic and spiritual atmosphere would then be, and how empty and cold it would be! Do you think that Hermeticism could exist and live for a single day?

Therefore make use of the balance of Justice and judge impartially. When you have done so, you will no doubt say: Never will I throw stones—in thought, or through word or deed—against the Church, since it is she who makes possible, and stimulates and protects, human endeavor for the glory of God. And as Hermeticism is such an endeavor, it could not exist without the Church. We Hermeticists have only one choice: either to live as parasites (for it is thanks to the Church that we are able to live), if we are strangers to, or are hostile to, the Church; or to live as her faithful friends and servants, if we understand what we owe to her and so begin to love her.

22

Thus it is that Tomberg both encouraged and himself expressed a beautiful spirit of submission to the Holy Church—one that breathes throughout *Meditations on the Tarot*:

Monsieur Priest, pardon me concerning what you think to be human pride which wants to penetrate into the mysteries of God, instead of bowing before divine wisdom and goodness and accepting with humility, as befits a Christian, the revealed truths of salvation—which, in so far as they are practised, suffice absolutely for the well-being, happiness and salvation of the soul. I say this to you now as if at confession: I am unable not to aspire to

the depth, the height and the breadth of comprehensive truth, to comprehension of the totality of things. I have made the sacrifice of the intellect (*sacrificium intellectus*) in all sincerity and without reserve, but what an intensification of the life of thought, what increased ardor in the aspiration to spiritual knowledge, that has followed! I know that the truths of salvation revealed and transmitted by the Council of the Holy Church are both necessary and sufficient for salvation, and I have no doubt whatever that they are true, and I strive to do my best to practice them; but I am unable to arrest the current of the river of thought which bears me toward mysteries that perhaps are meant only for saints—perhaps only for Angels—in any case, that I know without doubt are reserved for beings more worthy than me. Father, will you grant me absolution?<sup>23</sup>

Now, thus far, we have featured a few extracts from *Meditations on the Tarot* that relate mainly to the issues we have been exploring in the first half of the present volume, devoted, as it is, to the Eastern and esoteric nature of the New Age, but also the Protestant roots of the secular Anglosphere. Herein lie profound threats to the Catholic Mystery that are *exterior* to the Church. In the second half, we will focus on the Church and the post-Vatican II crisis that is *interior* to the Church. As we will see, the latter was something that Tomberg was gravely and prophetically concerned with. But, for now, let us consider a last word from Tomberg, written just after the Second Vatican Council in the late 1960s. For this not only foreshadows much that we address later, it also further reveals how much this erstwhile Anthroposophist now cried out for Catholic orthodoxy, seeing, as he did, that the Church was headed towards the *abyss*. . . .

The Christianity of the hermits . . . was no passing

phenomenon limited to a few centuries only. Today it still lives with all the intensity of its youth. Though it may not be deserts and thick forests into which one can retire into an undisturbed solitude nowadays, there are still people who have found or created in the deserts of the great cities and among the thickets of the crowds a solitude and stillness of life for the spirit. And as before, their striving is devoted toward becoming a witness for the truth of Christianity. The way into the depths has not led them to an individualistic brand of belief, but has given them unshakable security in the truth of the Christian revelation as transmitted and taught by the Church. They know the truth of the following: *Extra Ecclesiam non est salus* (“there is no salvation outside the Church”); the Holy Father is not and cannot be the mouthpiece of an ecumenical council; the Holy See alone can make decisions in questions of faith and of morals—a majority of the bishops cannot do so, and even less can a majority of priests or congregations do so; the Church is hierarchic-theocratic not democratic, aristocratic, or monarchic—and will be so in all future times; the Church is the *Civitas Dei* (“the City of God”) and not a superstructure of the will of people belonging to the Church; as little as the shepherd follows the will of the herd does the Holy Father of the Church merely carry out the collective will of his flock; the Shepherd of the Church is St. Peter, representing Christ—his pronouncements *ex cathedra* are infallible, and the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven belongs to him, and him alone. In other words, those who become solitary in order to seek profundity may reach on their path of spiritual experience to the unshakable insight that the dogmas of the Church are absolutely true. And so it can

happen that, as they did at the time of the Arian darkening of the Church, the “hermits” of today may again come to the assistance of the Holy See, leaving their solitude to appear as witnesses to the truth of Peter’s Throne and its infallible teaching. In those times it happened that St. Anthony of Thebes left the desert and hurried to Alexandria to support St. Athanasius with the weight of his moral authority—St. Athanasius who became the standard bearer for the divinity of Christ. The darkening which today is described as “the present crisis of the Catholic Church” can lead to the necessity for the solitary sons of the Church to hurry to the aid of the Holy Father, the most solitary of solitaries, in order to save the Church from the abyss toward which she is moving. . . .<sup>24</sup>

We will return to the immense tragedy of shepherds following their sheep later on. For now, let us note one last salient feature to *Meditations on the Tarot*. It was written in French. Yet Valentin Tomberg was a Russian who lived in numerous European countries, though never France nor any Francophone country. His early writings were in German. From 1948 till his death in 1973, he lived in England. And yet when he began *Meditations on the Tarot* in 1962, he chose to write in French. This deliberate choice has much to do with a history of Catholics in France, who were Hermeticists and yet professed genuine fidelity to the Church. (We have already met Péladan in an earlier chapter and we will return to his Counter-Revolutionary Catholic monarchism in a later one.) Then there was Eliphas Lévi who had been ordained a Deacon in the Catholic Church, but who later wrote books of magic. Yet in his old age, Lévi returned to the magic of Catholicism:

The ancient rites have lost their effectiveness since

Christianity appeared in the world. The Christian and Catholic religion, in fact, is the legitimate daughter of Jesus, king of the Mages. A simple scapular worn by a truly Christian person is a more invincible talisman than the ring and pentacle of Solomon. The Mass is the most prodigious of evocations. Necromancers evoke the dead, the sorcerer evokes the devil and he shakes, but the Catholic Priest does not tremble in evoking the living God.

*Catholics alone* have Priests because they alone have the altar and the offering, i.e., the whole of religion. To practice high Magic is to compete with the Catholic Priesthood; it is to be a dissident priest. Rome is the great Thebes of the new initiation. . . . It has crypts for its catacombs; for talismans, its rosaries and medallions; for a magic chain, its congregations; for magnetic fires, its convents; for centers of attraction, its confessionals; for means of expansion, its pulpits and the addresses of its Bishops; it has, lastly, *its Pope, the Man-God rendered visible*. [Italics mine]<sup>25</sup>

Is there any doubt these are the words of a man who has repented? For he rejects ritual magic as the way of the “dissident priest” and now honors the Pope as Christ made visible! At any rate, during his final days on earth, Lévi summoned a Priest who listened to the dying man for the length of an afternoon. It would appear to be his last confession and that he died a penitent Catholic.<sup>26</sup>

But there is no call to justify everything these French Hermeticists wrote or did! No doubt they said much of an unhealthy nature. Nor does Tomberg absolve them, either. In fact, he frequently critiques their pretensions as absurd, inflated, and dangerous!

Nonetheless, it is hardly irrelevant to our theme, that while the esotericists from Protestant England and Germany repudiated the Church and became at last New Agers or Anthroposophists—in *Catholic France, it was different*. With this in mind, Tomberg wrote in French. But let me now return to some further slices of autobiography.

### **Another Conversion**

DESPITE my Eleventh Hour miracle and Tomberg's profound Catholicity, I remained, as I have said, suspicious of Catholicism for some time. Nonetheless, I was baptized by an Anglican vicar, who had studied Anthroposophy intensively. Few others would have understood my confused pleas for baptism and I remain eternally indebted to him.

New Age resistance to the Church is tenacious. Kim was no different to myself in this regard. Indeed, her ignorance was greater than my own. I was shocked she knew nothing about even the most elementary aspects of Christianity (such as the difference between the Old and New Testaments). Her secular background rendered her even more clueless about Christianity than myself. Yet even whilst she knew nothing about it, Kim remained deeply suspicious of Christianity—and my conversion.

A few months after my baptism, a family crisis compelled us to visit Zürich in Switzerland for several weeks. We also ventured into central Switzerland, where we discovered a little town called Brunnen. Unlike Protestant Zürich (once home to Zwingli) Brunnen belonged to a region that never succumbed to the Reformation. Rich Catholic culture persisted unbroken there for centuries. Uninterrupted by either Zwingli, Luther, or Calvin, this small Swiss town had never ceased being bathed in the Catholic Sacraments.

At the time, I still understood little of such things, but I was

becoming interested in Catholic culture. For the first time in my life, I wanted to visit Catholic churches—dragging Kim reluctantly in tow. Of course, before this, she had scarcely even entered a Catholic church. So it was we ventured into the local chapel in Brunnen. Our visit affected Kim in a mysterious, unexpected way. She spied a massive painting depicting a woman holding a building of a church. The painting evoked something unwonted in Kim—a strange sense of comfort, peace, and welcome. Later, she would feel this image of Holy Mother Church served to welcome her into the Faith.

Soon afterwards, Kim went hiking alone in the Alpine countryside around Brunnen. Something happened then, which Kim once shared in our cyber group. And, as with other friends quoted in these pages, I can do no better than let her speak for herself

I got part way up the mountain and discovered a tiny chapel, with just a kneeler. I hadn't yet meditated (as was the norm in my pre-Christian life) and I felt drawn to do so in the chapel. I sat on the floor with my back resting against the wall and closed my eyes. After doing my usual stilling [exercises] something happened.

...

What happened on that particular morning, on that Swiss mountainside has completely changed my life. I experienced Christ and Mary in that chapel. . . . I felt as though I had come home. I had come home. I wept and wept and wept. I wept with joy and I wept with relief. I wept because of the beauty of the moment and I wept for all the pain I had felt of not being accepted as who I am by the Church.

I had never been barred or expelled from any church, but I

felt so ugly and dirty and unworthy that I wouldn't be accepted to go into, or participate within a church. The Church was only for clean pure people and I was not. In this Brunnen chapel, I knew that I was totally and completely welcome in the Church, whoever or whatever I was, however dirty or ugly. It was such relief, a relief I cannot express.

I then knelt in front of a humble little altar and gazed at a picture of Jesus, exposing and pointing to His Sacred Heart. I went deeper and deeper into the image and then saw His finger move and take my gaze right into the center of His heart.

I felt He was asking me to come into His heart, that it is the true dwelling place for me. . . . I visited the chapel daily and spent that special time, much in a state of bliss.

O Kim! What happened as you journeyed “deeper and deeper into the image” and saw His finger move to His Heart? I have never had an experience remotely like this, dear Lector. I hesitate to speak of it. But the choice has been made to do so—because it goes to the very core of this book. For all those years ago, neither Kim, nor I, had the least idea what this picture meant. Neither of us knew anything at all about the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But all these years later, how strange it is to reflect on this pivotal moment of Kim's life. For whilst this image was meaningless to us then, the Sacred Heart tradition later became central to our lives. But it was only many years later that we encountered the unsettling power of Paray-le-Monial, where the Sacred Heart was revealed to the world. Was our future *prefigured* on that mountainside? Was it providential Kim should arrive in *that* humble, alpine chapel, adorned with the image of His Heart and that, only there, was her life transformed? Personally, I cannot help but see it

otherwise than a potent sign of our future.

Of course, none of this was evident then. I had simply been baptized as an Anglican. Kim was not even baptized. We were not married. But a providential journey now began for us. Again, my book is not an autobiography. Suffice it to say that Kim was now baptized by the same Anglican vicar who baptized me. To our everlasting gratitude, he then married us in Cambridge, just before we went to live on the Swiss border.

### **Confirmed in Joy**

WHILST I pass over much of my life, I cannot ignore the Sacrament of our Confirmation. For, some time later in Switzerland, during Easter night of the year 2000, Kim and I would be confirmed into the Catholic Church. A strange and mysterious joy would descend that night.

This strange joyfulness went on deepening, year after year. Looking back over the years, it is clearly one of the greatest joys of my life. Yet, it would seem to be a joy only Catholics can understand. At least, so my life-experience tells me. I felt nothing like this as a baptized Anglican. Nor did I see this same felicity in the Anglican college I later attended. However, later in a Catholic college in Ireland, there was ample evidence of that joy. There is a peculiar joy that can be noticed in Catholics everywhere. Even alienated Catholics bear testimony to it. For although Protestants frequently change denominations if they are dissatisfied, it is striking how often alienated Catholics tenaciously cling to the Church they resent—fighting it, instead of leaving it. However angry they are, Catholicism remains too precious to them to easily abandon.

It is a strange thing. The world may envy other forms of felicity. We may be blessed with the gift of children and all the world can see our happiness. The childless may look at us in longing. We may be

afforded the grace of true marriage. And those who have not had this particular grace from God may look at us and yearn. But, if we have *this* joy—the joy of being initiated into the Catholic Mystery—few non-Catholics will ever envy us. They will really have no idea of what we experience. It remains our *secret* joy—this joy of being confirmed in the Church. Try as we might to *break* our secret and tell others what we have found, it will likely fall on deaf ears.

In all probability, what has happened to us will be judged superficially. The joy of being incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ will be equated, perhaps, to the satisfaction certain souls find in joining a tribe. Our world is full of such tribes: We Beatles fans; We followers of Manchester United; We Tories; We Republicans; We Democrats. What Catholic initiation signifies is likely to be interpreted in such shallow terms as these—yet another casualty of the materialistic world-conception! Now, this is not to deny gratification in supporting a political cause or even a football club. But such satisfaction—even meaningful satisfaction—has nothing whatsoever to do with the One who said: “I am the vine: you the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Indeed, I was utterly unprepared for the joy of my confirmation. My baptism had been meaningful indeed. But this went deeper—much deeper. Perhaps it stood out in relief, precisely because it was so unexpected. Oddly, unlike many Catholic converts, my conversion was not born of deep thirst. Rather, I found myself in an irregular situation. I was a baptized Anglican, living in rural Switzerland. There were no Anglican congregations there and the liberal Catholic Priests welcomed me to communion. Liberal myself at the time, I saw no reason not to receive. Likewise, I felt no great need to become Catholic. (At this point, I was still oblivious to Tomberg’s critique of Protestantism.) However, one morning, I woke from a powerful dream, which I interpreted as calling me to be confirmed Catholic. Hence, I

lacked a burning desire for confirmation as a Catholic and I did not attach great meaning to it.

But when the confirmation descended that Easter night, I was startled by my sheer intensity of joy. I went home that night in joy. I woke the next morning in joy, with an unexpected longing to return to a second Easter Sunday Mass. Nothing really prepared me for this. Yet the ongoing joy of having entered the Catholic Church is amongst the most profound I have ever felt. But few indeed will ever envy me. Catholics of Faith know what I mean. Others will not have a clue.

Here I would interpolate a personal tribute. For Kim and I were confirmed by a remarkable Swiss Priest (authorized by his Bishop). He was the most traditional Priest I had yet met—his Mass was filled with reverence. And like many traditional Priests in liberal Switzerland, he was mocked. He was *Zu fromm* as modern Catholics in Switzerland like to say: too pious. He had also studied Valentin Tomberg's work. Dear Swiss Priest, in *this world*, you will never fully realize everything you did by initiating Kim and me into the Catholic Mystery. But, in *the next world*, you shall fully see. You will see the fullness of the Grace you made possible for the whole of our lives. Thus, I say to you and to Priests everywhere: I am humbled beyond words by what you do. The Sacrament of Ordination has transformed your soul forever, in order that you may transform our laymen's souls forever.

In relating this, I would frankly raise an issue with my old New Age friends. Many maintain the Church is unnecessary. For they say people can and do meet Christ outside the Church. Now, it is not easy to know exactly what New Agers mean by "Christ energy" or "Christ consciousness" or why they remain so averse to the name of Jesus. But leaving aside this difficulty, Catholicism does not deny that people can and do meet Jesus Christ outside the institution of the Church. The Church clearly affirms this is possible. But this is hardly to say it follows—*ipso facto*—that the Church is there *for nothing*.

My own coming to Jesus Christ—and Kim’s—had *everything* to do with the Church. My Eleventh Hour experience cannot be disentangled from the sacramental Catholic Mystery. Eighteen years of New Age-ism never yielded anything like this. Only after these eighteen years did I experience my life-transforming moment of thirsting no more. And only after that, I discovered the startling, mysterious joy of being confirmed Catholic. Across two thousand years, countless souls have experienced the same. A pernicious notion, subtly and insidiously destructive, is afoot in today’s world. It maintains the Church can easily be dispensed with: “Everyone can achieve the Christ consciousness, we need neither the institution, nor the Sacraments of the Church.”

My life story tells me the precise opposite. For I gained unfathomable riches I found nowhere else except through meeting Jesus Christ in His Church. Yet William Bloom assures us in *Soulution* this Church is unnecessary now, because something better has arrived: “Holism recognizes and deepens the essence of all religious traditions, perceiving what is best and most useful.”<sup>27</sup> But I could never have found the essence of Christianity by adhering to Bloom’s reductionism. Had I followed Bloom’s advice, the greatest treasures of my life would have been denied me.

And so I left the New Age behind. Once upon a time, Findhorn and all it represented had been the center of my existence. But now, I found I never missed that which I once poured my life’s blood into. I did not miss it, because I had found something far more precious.

Dear New Age friends of old, should you ever read these pages, I wonder what you will think? For my conversion appears not only unfathomable to you, it also irritates you. How dare I suggest there might be something more precious than anything the New Age affords—even if my entire life-experience points to this? How dare I be so elitist as to proclaim the superiority of Christianity?

But if I am guilty of the “New Age sin” of elitism, you must be

too. I know your literature, old friends. Not only *Soulution* but untold New Age books proclaim the superiority of “Holism” over traditional religion. In a thousand different guises, the claim is made: Esoteric is better than exoteric; Aquarius has superseded Pisces; “Holism” will take you to a fuller, deeper spirituality than organized religion. Implicitly or explicitly, innumerable New Age authors send the same message: The New Age surpasses “Old Age” Christianity.

If I am guilty of the “sin” in proclaiming the superiority of Christianity, please accuse yourselves of the same in reverse! Allow me, however, to add one thing. There is at least one difference between you “holists” and myself. Most of you have never aspired, heart and soul, to any religious discipline—certainly not Christian discipline. I have. I know *two* worlds then, whereas you know *one*. Most of you have only tasted one path—that of “holistic” non-religious spirituality. You have not rejected religion, because you sincerely tried it and found it wanting. Rather, you have repudiated Christian faith, whilst knowing almost nothing substantive about it.

Here is the difference between us. It is not an insignificant one. Will you forgive me, then, dear New Age friends, if I close my reflections with these words from the Gospel?

He spoke to them many things in parables, saying. . . .  
The kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.  
(Matthew 13:1, 45–46)

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Afterword” [was introduction in original French edition], *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*, by Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg) (New York, NY: Tarcher), 659.

<sup>2</sup> For any Catholic traditionalists reading this book, I would also

draw attention to the fact that an additional foreword—alas not in English!—by the German philosopher Robert Spaemann appears in the French and German editions. Spaemann, as readers of important traditionalist sites like *Rorate Caeli* may know, is not only a prominent European defender of the Latin Mass but also a close friend of Benedict XVI. Indeed, as Joseph Ratzinger, the latter dedicated his 1987 book *Church, Ecumenism, Politics* to him I frankly include this footnote as a plea to traditionalists, whom I see as fellows, to think carefully about things like Spaemann's evident esteem for this book before dismissing it too hastily.

<sup>3</sup> Most notably: Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2006). The others are all referred to in the footnotes to this section.

<sup>4</sup> See pp 269–71 of this book.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism* (Amity [i.e., Warwick], NY: Amity House, 1985), 125–26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 298–99.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 292–94.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *The Wandering Fool: Love and Its Symbols: Early Studies on the Tarot* (San Rafael, CA: LogoSophia Press, 2009), 90.

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Recently, a profound book on Sophiology by Michael Martin has appeared, with an invaluable section on Tomberg in this regard. See Michael Martin, *The Submerged Reality: Sophiology and the Turn to a Poetic Metaphysics* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015), 189–202.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Alas, these arguments mainly appear in three German works, hardly known in English. The first two have been made available in some very limited editions from Grail Guides, however, as *Degeneration and Regeneration of Jurisprudence* and *Foundations of International Law*. The third (and by far the most extensive German work), however, remains completely unavailable in English at the time of this writing (2016).

- <sup>14</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 362.
- <sup>15</sup> Christopher Bamford, "Introduction," *The Christian Mystery: Lectures*, by Rudolf Steiner (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998), 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 590.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in Sergei O. Prokofieff, *Valentin Tomberg and Anthroposophy: A Problematic Relationship* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2005), 3–4.
- <sup>18</sup> Martin, *The Submerged Reality*, 193.
- <sup>19</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 281–82.
- <sup>20</sup> Martin Kriele, *Anthroposophie Und Kirche: Erfahrungen Eines Grenzgängers* (Freiburg Im Breisgau; Basel; Wien: Herder, 1996), 156.
- <sup>21</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 410.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 189–90.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.
- <sup>24</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus Come Forth*, 139–40.
- <sup>25</sup> Quoted in Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 107.
- <sup>26</sup> Paul Chacornac, *Eliphas Levi* (Paris: Chacornac Freres, 1926), 284–85.
- <sup>27</sup> William Bloom, *Soulution*, 19.

## The New Age Denial of the Fall

*One of us believes there is “no such thing as victims.”*

*One of us goes for joy.*

*One of us went to sleep at Gethsemane.*

**T**HIS BOOK is, amongst other things, about *enfoldment*. We have pondered how people become enfolded in cultural contexts with little idea of what lies outside them. One example is the “holistic cafeteria” where New Agers seem assured that every spiritual option remains open and available. They cannot conceive the Church offers anything truly significant, which is not provided by their “universalist menu.” Here is enfoldment from my own life—I was so submerged in this subculture as to be certain that little or nothing of worth existed beyond it.

Another example is our present culture’s certainty in post-Sixties liberal values. It matters not that generations of our ancestors believed different things before the 1960s—for example, regarding pornography or freedom of speech. We who live since that time cannot easily acknowledge any values different from our own *Zeitgeist*. (Try telling people *Playboy* should be banned. Your call for censorship may well earn you the epithet “fascist.” But such “fascism” was simply common decency not so long ago.)

Enfoldment in the *Zeitgeist* is likewise evident in the predicament of global capitalism. Despite obvious, terrible costs, society appears increasingly convinced that no alternative exists. No other future is imaginable, except being further enfolded in the embrace of giant

corporations and the media myths they themselves generate.

Being enfolded like this can be a comfortable thing. It is uncomfortable to stand out from the crowd—to say things like I just did about *Playboy*. Leaving behind the comfort of the New Age or the secular-capitalist Zeitgeist is not easy. It was certainly very difficult for me to completely abandon the New Age, even years after I became a Christian. For although I was baptized in 1998, I could hardly shake off my New Ageism all at once. I did not wake up one morning and suddenly think to myself “Everything I believed these last twenty years, everything I worked for, must be wrong.”

For years, I wondered if the New Age might be reconciled with Christianity. Whilst this appears ludicrous to Catholics of Faith, I had held New Age thinkers in high regard all my adult life. Respected, dear friends of mine did likewise. And, despite Tomberg’s growing influence on me, it was far from easy to simply conclude: *All of this is false*. Indeed, I was regularly reminded of the old metaphor of the elephant for God. One seeker feels God and calls Him trunk; another calls Him ears. Cataphatic and apophatic theology—positive and negative—appear to say different things, but the Church believes they can be reconciled. Could David Spangler and the Church be seeing Christ from different perspectives? Could all this be just *semantics*?

I cite such notions as evidence of the iron grip of New Age ideology. This ideology will not pass away overnight. If it dies, it will *die hard*. The death-shriek lasted years, in my case. My mind protested, day-in, day-out. And without the Sacraments of the Holy Church, without Valentin Tomberg, I might never have managed to extricate myself. Here, again, is why I advocate Tomberg’s unusual writings. New Agers will find it tough to overcome their conditioning. Here is one author who can help them.

With such things in mind, I continue a little longer in my autobiographical vein. For my slow, difficult exit from the New Age, offers, I think, another window onto the world that is hardly

commonplace—because my story with the New Age does not end with my conversion. Rather, I became a Catholic who repeatedly confronted New Age culture. There were, of course, many links to my past. Twenty years of personal bonds do not evaporate easily—at least if one has a heart. Dear friends were convinced I simply saw the same elephant from a different angle to themselves. Repeatedly, they challenged me to do the same. It might be added my Catholicism remained very liberal at this point. My New Age-ism, like all New Age-ism, had been liberal and that liberalism persisted. These were the days of St. John Paul II and I was definitely not happy with his “intransigent conservatism”!

Moving to Ireland—as I later tell—started to change me. In that rich Catholic culture, I became ever more disturbed by liberal Catholicism and the New Age. But the twists and turns of fate kept leading me back to the “holistic” movement. Because, in the end, I even ended up living in a loose New Age community again—nearly twenty years after leaving Findhorn!

This time the setting was southern Spain and it meant uprooting from Ireland. The Irish looked at me wistfully: all that sun, instead of rain, rain, rain! But, in all honesty, I preferred your rain, dear Ireland. I preferred the remnants of your sacred Catholic culture too. By then, I felt not the least attraction for New Age life. Leaving Catholic Ireland was excruciating. But responsibility dictated otherwise. I had a family I loved in Spain, including an aged father, soon to die.

For the moment, then, I skip past my precious time in Ireland. We shall return to my life-changing experience of that blessed isle at the end of this book. Now, the loose New Age network I found in Spain was not Spanish. Like my family who lived there, it was largely British. For English souls had left their drizzled isle, searching for the sun. Gathering around an old Spanish town called Orgiva, they sought alternative means of living amidst its rustic environs. Like much of the alternative subculture, this network of ex-patriates was not without a

certain idealism. Here were people who had rejected the idols of materialism, in search of something better. And, in many ways, they had found it. These people grew organic vegetables, employed solar technology and aspired to live more simply and ecologically.

Most of these folk, of course, would never call themselves New Agers. But here was the same New Age culture I knew so well. Here was the old, familiar rejection of Western tradition, the upbeat vision of the future, the syncretic aspirations, the Eastern doctrines concerning karma, chakras, and plenty more. The ex-patriates in Spain did not read Theosophy any more than the Findhorn folk, but the same ideology was passed on. In short, here was the New Age religion. Here, too, was the same prejudice against Christianity. Kim and I displayed two or three *postcard-sized* Christian images on the front of our abode. The local reaction? “Whoa! That’s a bit much and hard to handle!” Hostility to Christianity was pronounced indeed in the Orgiva plantation. (For plantation it was, and the Catholic Spanish tended to regard it with mistrust).

I was caught in the middle, but given precious opportunity to view Spanish Catholic and English New Age cultures side-by-side. I went to Mass in Spain and I listened to New Agers chant the OM together—even if I no longer chanted with them. I spoke to Catholic Priests and I listened politely to New Age priestesses. I imbibed Catholic theology, whilst family and friends preached New Age-isms in my ear. This situation was often difficult. But God gave me the disquieting grace of further comparing New Age mysteries with the Catholic Mystery.

### **Positive Thinking and the Denial of Suffering**

YES, Orgiva yielded painful, priceless opportunity. It was only then that many New Age memes stood out in relief. In the past, I never really noticed them before. They blended in comfortably with the New

Age furniture of my mind. One thing, which now unsettled me was the emphasis on positive thinking. We have seen how the New Age absorbed the post-Sixties wave of psychological selfhelp books, which stress a positive approach. Whilst this, in itself, is a good thing, it was taken to absurd levels in Orgiva. A positive attitude was raised to the status of magical power. One heard claims like: "You create your own reality!" and "You deserve the abundance of the Universe!" People read *manuals* of affirmations to achieve health and success. One heard of things such as "prosperity consciousness"—creating a better bank balance, if one could only achieve the right attitude. Spiritual focus for selfgain.

The selfgain, however, did not restrict itself to monetary matters. It also entailed more power, more self-esteem, more joy. Perturbed, I not only listened to the Orgiva New Agers, I also perused their literature. Now, I felt troubled by things I had little noticed, in the past. Crude egoism was often mixed with a sorry capitalist marketing spin: *Buy this book and you will find happiness!*

These motifs were not entirely unknown to me in Findhorn and Cambridge. But they became more obvious in Orgiva. Perhaps degeneration has occurred over the decades. For the New Age-ism I first encountered in 1980 at Findhorn seemed less crude than what I found in Orgiva nearly thirty years later. Still, the theme of magically conjuring success and prosperity was not invisible in my old life. Yet, by and large, the New Age books I read in my youth possessed a sophistication compared to which the Orgiva literature was often crass. Findhorn had not been crass like this either.

An Englishwoman living near Orgiva handed me an American channeled book she was enthusiastically devouring. It claimed the origins of the Catholic liturgy could be traced to evil influences stemming from a sinister race of *extraterrestrial reptiles*. Will the sheer battiness of this provoke your laughter, Lector? Personally, I would rather evoke a shudder in your soul. How many people in this

world are soaking up notions like this: “The Catholic liturgy comes from evil; listen to our channeled ‘revelations’ instead.” Christ and everything He came to bring us is under attack. Souls are being deliberately, actively *diverted* from His Graces.

Yes, all this stood out in marked relief, *after* I had experienced pious, living Catholicism in Ireland. There, I beheld a rich Catholic culture, unlike anything I had ever seen. In Ireland, one never heard of evil galactic lizards or “prosperity consciousness.” Now they seemed far more exotic—actually *crazy*—than they would have done in my former life.

Because, when one is submerged in a weird culture, *the weird tends to look normal*. It was only by stepping back from the “holistic cafeteria” that I could really see the place and know it for the first time.

Standing outside the “holistic cafeteria,” the dark side to positive thinking became clear. For the New Age doctrine that everyone is magically “responsible for their own reality” leads to disquieting thoughts. For if everybody “creates their own reality,” what happens when people suffer calamity? Perhaps a friend develops cancer—this scourge of all humanity. What can the New Ager say, except that, somehow, his friend created his own reality? Or his cancer is only the result of his own negative attitudes? Compassion is easily lost when one is enchanted by notions of being magically all-powerful.

The heartlessness of such “holistic” notions was vividly pronounced in Spain. Once I heard of a man who had been brutally assaulted and *anally violated with a pickaxe*. But the incident was reported in words like this: “The victim of the assault—well, I shouldn’t say victim really, because *there are no such things as victims*.” Perhaps the man who said this had not registered the full brutality of the assault. Or perhaps he had. Whatever the case, his words echoed a disquieting New Age train of thought. Positive thinking means all-powerful magic to create the life you want. *Ergo*, not having the life you want means you are failing to think positively.

Another time, I recall a heartrending article in the New Age press from a man whose partner fell victim to disease. Only now, he questioned the New Age doctrines he had imbibed. Perhaps his beloved's condition was not so readily explained by what he had been given to believe.

It was clear in Spain that New Age culture, which frequently denies religious doctrines, had plentiful doctrines indeed. "There are no such things as victims"—here was a New Age dogma, repeated often enough to become axiomatic. How often the New Age abhors Christian doctrine. Yet in the Church's case, it is possible to trace the *origins* of Her doctrines. (For example, one can easily discover the theological roots of the *Hypostatic Union*—the dogma that Jesus Christ is both true man and true God, which we will consider later on.) With New Age doctrines, things are trickier. *Whence* this doctrine there are no such things as victims? *Why* are those who suffer rape or cancer not really victims? *Why* do we *deserve* to have it all? In my experience, New Agers seldom possess clear answers to these questions. For the New Age mind rarely realizes how much it subscribes to doctrines—let alone know where they come from.

Indeed, finding an exact derivation for these beliefs is not easy. However, "the non-existence of victims" doctrine is plainly indebted to *A Course in Miracles*, which suggests Jesus did not suffer, because he knew the Crucifixion (and every other cause of suffering) to be unreal. Thus, according to *A Course in Miracles*, cancer and anal rape are unreal too. Yet there is more to this than simply the *Course*. For whether one aspires to "control the astral vehicle," magically "create one's own reality," or find joy without suffering—the final result is a certain heartlessness.

Now, the man who denied the victim of the pickaxe assault was not without heart. Still, I think he found suffering hard to bear, whether his own or that of others. Of course, suffering *is* hard to bear. What we do with that fact is another matter. Either we can

acknowledge the suffering, feeling it pierce the heart and pray for God's grace to bear the load. Or we can deny suffering as "illusion" and attempt to transcend it. The first response is authentically Christian. The second, alas, is all-too-common in the New Age.

### **"Holistic" Denial of the Judeo-Christian Tradition**

HERE is what I heard continuously in Spain: "We need more joy, more empowerment, more abundance!" And why do we need? Because we are weak and broken, perhaps? Because we are not the magical supermen and women of New Age dreams? Because—dare one say it?—we are *fallen*? And being fallen creatures, we cannot easily bear suffering?

At any rate, a distinct Christian alternative exists to New Age "empowerment." But it is not particularly palatable to the "holistic" mind. And you are unlikely, Lector, to find "holistic" manuals that recommend it. For it involves *pleading*: "I am weak, Lord. I confess my weakness—I cannot easily bear this suffering. But I would like to offer it up. Grant me the grace to bear that which I cannot bear myself. Even though, Lord, I am not worthy."

*Domine non sum dignus*. Is this not the precise opposite of the New Age creed: You deserve to have abundance?! Yes, this simple statement from the heart of Christianity runs entirely counter to the notion of magically creating any life one wishes! It is not surprising *Domine non sum dignus* does not play well to New Age audiences. Nor does the idea of kneeling in a wooden box, trusting one's sins will be absolved by Sanctifying Grace, transmitted directly from Christ via His Hierarchy of Priests.

Let me return to the woman in tears. Her tears, I say, are neither self-pitying, nor morose. This woman is courageous enough to openly suffer. But the profound distinction between self-pitying depression and genuine grieving has become effaced in many New Age circles. The

latter is confused with “negativity,” angst, or morbidity.

Here lies the vast difference between the “holistic” culture and Christianity. New Age-ism, by and large, evades the tragic side to human existence. It avoids the fact we remain forever broken weak, needy—filled with sin. Too often, the New Age neither allows for the tragic nature of the Fall, nor the fact that in a fallen universe, many of us *do* fall victim to rape, cancer, and other terrible realities.

Experiencing all this in Spain, it was not surprising to read it in *Cygnus Review*, an English New Age magazine, popular amongst the expatriates there. One issue featured an extract from a book called *The Laughing Jesus* by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy. Subtitled *Religious Lies and Gnostic Wisdom*, the authors apparently thought the Church was lying and the “real Jesus” was an upbeat New Age type, who laughed rather than suffered on the Cross.

How all my decades of New Age memories coalesce into an evermore unified picture: hearing I “deserve to have it all”; hearing I “create my own reality”; hearing the bomb is a glorious spiritual event; hearing Jesus laughed; hearing how neither Jesus, nor anyone else is a victim; hearing, in short, numerous sorts of New Age proselytizing.

But in Orgiva, it was Christianity that was accused of proselytizing. The reigning attitude—as in secularism—was that religion should be kept private. Here was irony indeed. For in Orgiva, one heard endless New Age proselytizing that (unconsciously) expected assent, if not submission and compliance. One day in Southern Spain, a woman with a pyramid on her head walked in. The small metal pyramid—so she said—was good for channeling energy. But when no one heeded her call to wear the pyramid (examples of which she provided free of charge), she appeared visibly perturbed. For the pyramid, she claimed, brought healing powers. It was all right to proselytize about pyramid power. However, had I suggested we call upon Our Lady to “pray for us sinners,” I could well have been

accused of imposing my religion. It never occurred that “pyramid power” could be a New Age doctrine imposed on me! No, I should simply take up my pyramid and walk.

Here is yet another recollection. A New Age lecturer stands before a small group in Cambridge. He encourages us to drink in the beauty and wonder of the universe. We must savor the glories of nature, he says. Then, he takes a pen and sketches a little picture of our planet. Around this globe, he draws a *little jagged line*. This jaggedness is intended to acknowledge that not everything is rosy. He means to say that, of course, there is also pain and darkness in this beautiful world. This is what the jaggedness symbolizes. But, he adds, we must never forget that out beyond the jagged line exists a vast magnificent cosmos, filled with angelic beings radiating light and love. His implication is clear: It is only our little Earth, which is surrounded by a little bit of chaos. But next to the vast wonder of the universe, the chaos pales into insignificance.

What can one say? Because as Catholics, we can only affirm the splendor of God. And as Catholics, we venerate hierarchies of Angels, too, up to the Cherubim and Seraphim. But as Catholics of Faith we believe in *fallen angels* also. We believe in demons and we believe in hell. Who can say how vast or how restricted hell truly is? Can one really demarcate anguish and evil by a little jagged line, encircling our globe? Is it necessary to *relativize darkness*, in order to recall the love of God? New Age teacher of fond memory, this is what I would tell you now: Your intention to remind us of beauty is a noble thing. You mean to genuinely help people, I know. But in recalling the miracles of God, there is no need to *minimize* suffering and evil. The world is filled with the beauty of God and the agony of the Fall. One may weep and rejoice—at one and the same time. One may remember there is heaven. One may remember there is hell and the countless souls who suffer in-between.

Now, the Alice Bailey books spoke in similar terms to this.

There you will find the Fall relativized in an analogous fashion. The books say, yes, indeed, what Christianity calls the Fall is *not untrue*. But they add, in the *vast cosmic scale* of things, this Fall is really not that significant. It is something that happened on a relatively unimportant planet long ago.

How much begins to gel, looking back on all my New Age years. A thousand “holistic” texts and talks and casual conversations coalesce. A complex—a cluster of clearly interrelated notions—can be seen. This complex *speaks*: “Yes, the bomb is real and in fact *good*. Yes, the Fall is real, but relatively unimportant in the cosmic scale of things. It happened in a tiny corner of the cosmos long ago. Yes, the astral vehicle is real—but it can be controlled. It is not good to get all astral and emotional. These things are real, but let’s not get *hung up* on them, okay? Be empowered, detached, serene instead. After all, the ‘Master Jesus’ did not suffer on the Cross. Perhaps he even laughed.”

This complex speaks in contradiction—and frequently outright hostility—to Catholicism. Clearly, it poses real danger to Christian faith. Moreover, its voice is powerful, precisely because it is not without certain, limited truths. It represents a deceptive mixture of truth and falsehood. For example, it *is* wise to not become violently agitated by emotion. Now, heresy is only dangerous, it is said, precisely because heresy always contains truth. Thus if I claim “God is nothing but a piece of purple cheese” I commit blasphemy. Yet it is not a heresy the Church is ever likely to condemn. For utter lunacy is unlikely to ensnare anyone. But again, there *can be* danger in passionate emotion. There *is* wisdom in seeking positive, constructive attitudes. It *is* right to be sober and contemplative. It *is* a great thing to continuously recollect the Glory of God. But none of this means one must refrain from weeping for the Bomb. Nor should anyone renounce praying the *Salve Regina*: “To Thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.”

For in the Judeo-Christian Tradition, the Fall is unavoidable.

And the Fall tells a story of cosmic tragedy—and evil. Without the Fall, Christianity makes no sense. Christ came to *redeem* us from the Fall. What happens when the Fall is denied or dismissed as relatively unimportant? What happens when the realities of rape, cancer, and crucifixion are considered things that “Jesus” realized were mere illusion? What happens, then, to the Mystery of Redemption? *If there is no Fall, there is no need of Redemption.* And so Jesus is reduced to a “great spiritual teacher” or yet another self-styled channeled master like Alice Bailey’s D. K. This is not the God-Man who came to remake a fallen universe.

### Secular Denial of the Fall

THE Fall. It is not simply the New Age that has effaced the understanding of Original Sin. It is likewise buried by secular culture. Have we not heard it endlessly repeated that nothing is *essentially* wrong with human nature? Is it not endlessly regurgitated that the fault lies in our conditioning? “Society screws you up”; “school screws you up”; “parents screw you up”; “the Establishment screws you up.” But never: “You were *born* screwed up.” People would seem to assume we were somehow born immaculate—before being messed up by our parents, school, and culture.

All this is common today and rooted in Enlightenment thinking—perhaps most particularly that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Now, we shall return to the “enlightened” secular supposition of Original Innocence. For now, we simply remark that the notion that people *are born fallen* startles many folk today. The understanding of human nature as corrupted from the outset is a complete *novelty* to them. It can be even more jolting to realize a time existed when the idea was not novel at all. It was integral to the entire Christian culture of the West. Thus, during my time based in Spain, I once wrote to Les from my cyber group regarding the Fall. And his reply struck me as entirely

symptomatic of modern secular culture:

What you said . . . about the human condition being broken (although I think it may have been different words you used then) has stuck in my head and I have often thought about it, particularly when I try to understand all the mad things going on in the world.

My words “stuck” in Les’s head precisely because the idea of the Fall is no longer commonplace in Western civilization. It was novel to him. I then pointed out the notion of fallen human nature was once central to our culture. His honest response is telling indeed:

I have actually never been aware that [as I had put it to Les] “fundamental brokenness of the human condition was once at the *very core of the entirety of Western Culture*” and am very interested in understanding this also and why I have not known it.

I am grateful to Les for confessing his cultural ignorance, because his wholly honest admission reveals *the crisis of Western culture*. Let us examine it. First, Les admits “my” notion of inherent fallenness has “stuck” in his head. Perhaps it appeared somehow odd to him, yet helpful in understanding the “mad things” in this world. Then, he reveals his ignorance that “my” idea was once fundamental to Western culture. Then, he asks: *Why was I never told this?*

It might be added Les was nearly forty when he wrote these words and has one of the finest university educations Britain can afford. Yet Les has been *robbed*. Nothing in his education has given him any real inkling of his cultural roots. Nothing in nearly forty years of media inculturation has provided it either. He is yet another victim of the blackout of the Christian Mystery.

How many souls will live out their lives enshrouded by Secular

Materialism? How many will never realize what it *truly* means that Europe was once Christian. Europe, moreover, was not simply Christian, but *traditionally* Christian. This is to say: It was once Catholic-Orthodox. For European culture was formed by the tradition of the Latin West and the Greek East. It was formed by those Churches that are traditional, inasmuch as they *preserved fifteen centuries of tradition* prior to the Reformation and they never rejected that tradition for *sola scriptura*.

For if we travel back in time to the Fifteenth Century—i.e., the period just before the Reformation, what do we find? Europe, from Paris to London to Munich, is Christian. *This* Europe understands the Fall. The same, of course, is true of Eastern Europe as well. From Moscow to Constantinople, the Eucharist is celebrated. Everywhere from Bucharest to Dublin to Reykjavik, people recognize the Sacraments—and why they are needed. The Holy Mass is celebrated because Europe is Christian, because Europe understands the Fall and because Europe understands the need for a Redeemer. Back then, Europe knew that, in the Holy Mass, we meet the One who CARES infinitely for our fallen, broken hearts. But in Europe today, all this is forgotten, even by thoughtful people, with the finest university educations.

### **Without Hearts that are Pierced**

THE Fall and the Redemption are consigned to oblivion in secular culture as well as the New Age that emerges from secular soil. And when His Sacred Heart is forgotten—that Heart pierced by the billions of human souls who suffer the Fall—much else is forgotten as well.

For without the memory of His Sacred Heart, clear-sighted recognition of the Fall is *unbearable*. The temptation is to deny the Fall, if one no longer recognizes a Redeemer. Here is one reason why “holistic” spirituality usually rejects the Fall. For many souls it is

deeply uncomfortable to be continually reminded of being fallen. How does this fit with a “universe of abundance,” wherein one deserves to have it all? How does it fit with the reality of untold numbers in the so-called Third world, who cannot afford to eat, let alone a multi-hundred dollar workshop in “prosperity consciousness”? Did they create their own reality? They cannot be “victims” at any rate. From the New Age perspective, there is no Sacred Heart that bleeds for them. The only “Jesus” many New Agers will ever know is one who tells them their suffering is unreal.

Dear Lector, I speak severely of a New Age *tendency*. I do not claim every New Ager succumbs to it. For the Christian spirituality of a bleeding heart can be found in the New Age—where, as I have said, it is often indebted in psychotherapy.

A paradox exists here. Whilst the roots of the New Age are far more Eastern than is usually recognized, the New Age movement obviously emerged in the West. And the West, even the Anglosphere, was once profoundly Catholic! Psychotherapy is also of Western origins. It draws on the soil of European culture, which, even in England, was once permeated by the Christian Sacraments. However much that ground has now become de-Christianized, the Christian roots of the West remain deep. Paradoxically, I would say then, Western psychotherapeutic elements have somewhat softened, even Christianized the Eastern theosophical background of the New Age. As I say, by the time I arrived at Findhorn, most people were not drawn to the rigorous regimes of Alice Bailey. They preferred a cultural mix where Eastern ideas mingled with Western psychotherapy.

Yet whilst many a New Ager has a heart that bleeds, it remains striking how often the spirituality of the bleeding heart is repudiated. The sense for human tragedy is regularly confused with morose “negativity” in the New Age. Now, Lector, it is not that I have anything against joy, creativity, or success. Rather, the *one-sidedness* here troubles my heart. One should certainly glorify God’s creation—

as the aforementioned New Age speaker did. This hardly means one must trivialize, relativize, or outright deny the Fall!

Usually, “holistic” literature is silent on the Fall. Sometimes, however, the Fall is reinterpreted in a positive light, as nothing but an evolutionary ascent of consciousness. In this hermeneutic, Adam and Eve simply gain needed self-awareness and autonomy. And nothing else. The heart does not engage with the unimaginable scale of tragedy expressed in *Genesis*. For the story of eating of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil is about the fall into *evil*. It entails the exile of the entire human race from the miracle of God’s love and entering *toil, suffering, and death*. It involves witnessing one’s own children doomed. Cain murders his brother Abel. Imagine, Lector. You have two dear children. And one of them grows up to murder the other. The story is horrific. And this is *how it is presented* in the Judeo-Christian Tradition. There is no attempt to prescind from tragedy. There is no attempt to deny the serpent of evil.

None of this means the Christian understanding of *Genesis* is devoid of paradox. *O Felix Culpa* is an early cry of Christians: “O happy fault that earned us so great a redeemer.” This simple exclamation expresses the universe of paradox at the core of Christianity. For the Fall and the Redemption are matters of unfathomable mystery, exhausting even a lifetime of Christian meditation. But the New Age reading of *Genesis* hardly exhausts a lifetime’s meditation. For it lacks any heartfelt engagement with the tragedy of suffering and evil.

## On Evil

INDEED, the notion of evil is usually conspicuous by its absence in New Age discourse. Important New Age texts clearly dismiss evil. For example, *A Course in Miracles* maintains the non-reality of evil, of the Fall, and the devil. It wishes we would identify ourselves simply as

the Sons of God. It would seem the Johannine notion we are “children of darkness” is discarded by the *Course*, as yet another erroneous teaching of the Apostles. And so *A Course in Miracles* harmonizes with *The Da Vinci Code* and Alice Bailey in a New Age chorus, which claims Christianity was perverted from the outset by Christ’s immediate disciples.

However, preternatural malevolence is not always dismissed in “holistic” writings. Evil, for example, is not denied by Alice Bailey. Justice must be done. Theosophy cannot account for the common New Age aversion to considering darkness. Indeed, New Age literature, by itself, is insufficient to explain “holistic” resistance to notions of evil.

How to account, then, for this evasion of the problem of evil? Of course, the upbeat, feel-good atmosphere of New Age fosters a culture of denial. Still, popular secular ideology also plays its part. In both arenas, the concept of evil is associated with a Judeo-Christian inheritance, where (so it is said) it has only repressed people—imposing meaningless burdens of sin and wickedness. Contemporary liberal attitudes are greatly indebted to Freud and his successors: better to speak of needs and dysfunction, rather than terrify people with talk of demons! Such talk is likewise unpalatable to materialistic minds—which will only consider pathological complexes within the human personality, rather than admitting *independent* supernatural entities. How easily all this gels in a New Age culture, which demands people be “non-judgmental” and think positively! Disentangling secular and New Age values is no easy task.

Do not be negative. Do not be morose. Do not talk of evil. One hears many such restrictions in “holistic” settings—particularly if one dares to speak as a Christian. A friend in my cyber group once cautioned me in speaking about evil. For her, I risked sounding like British tabloids, which regularly feature lurid crimes and excoriate their perpetrators as evil—with neither compassion, nor understanding for how these people become what they are. There is noble sentiment

in my friend's caution. Her sensitive heart is pierced by the moral ugliness of the gutter press.

However, to avoid the language of these tabloids is to avoid the language of tradition. This tradition is rooted in the sober, clear-sighted, and unsettling experience of countless Saints, mystics, and geniuses. For saints, mystics, and geniuses experience the working of the powers of darkness and they do not cease to warn of evil. Strikingly, my friend later revised her opinion—and even found herself affirming Christian tradition in the process. It is as though she senses, I think, that anything else may be insufficient, when dealing with the disquieting reality of evil:

I used to think there was no such thing as evil. But I have had experiences of evil as a force or entity, coming to me in dreams and waking me up, which could only, apparently, be dispelled by my invoking Christ, making the sign of the cross and saying the Lord's Prayer out loud. I was absolutely terrified and paralyzed by fear—it was a phenomenal effort to get any words out at all. Might sound mad to some of you, not to others, I'm sure, but this invocation and prayer was what instinctively I felt the situation called for.

This is not a book about the powers of darkness. Suffice it to say many souls across the ages have felt such terror in the face of evil. And the Church provides real means to deal with a real problem. But all this is dismissed by a materialistic civilization. My friend confesses she "might sound mad." Here is testimony to the *scandal* talk of evil creates in our supposedly liberal, tolerant culture. Those who suggest dark forces truly exist are frequently stigmatized as "mad."

Both Secular Materialism and the New Age suppress Christian tradition, which they aspire to supplant. Millions of souls are thereby

stripped of the language, prayers, and insight that tradition provides to deal with evil. But whilst the Angels weep at this state of affairs, doubtless there are *fallen angels* who do not weep.

### On Monism

THE rejection of evil, the Fall, and the tragic side to existence: all these relate to a distinct monist tenor in New Age thinking. Monism entails the philosophical view that the manifold nature of existence can be reduced to one sole substance. In common New Age parlance, it is usually expressed by the word “oneness.” It is a familiar New Age refrain: “We’re all one. There is no real separation between us. It is only in our lower selves that division exists.” Monism, then, denies any ultimate significance to the separation that belongs to normal, healthy human relationship. In Monism, separateness is disregarded in favor of belief in an underlying unity.

New Age “oneness” owes much to Eastern philosophy. For although there have been Western monists (e.g., Spinoza and Fichte) they exert little influence in the New Age. That being said, *A Course in Miracles* is not Eastern, but it is certainly monist. According to the *Course*, the everyday world we know—with all its multiplicity, diversity, and division—is illusion. There is only one reality—a reality where suffering and evil do not exist.

Aside from the *Course*, however, New Age monism remains largely Eastern in origin. Certainly, Theosophy is monist, though less obviously so than the *Course*. Eastern Theosophy is, of course, not the only route by which oriental philosophy penetrated the New Age movement. For example, one might consider the enormous cultural impact of the Beatles. As is well known, the Beatles were influenced by Eastern religion. Thus, John Lennon intoned, “I am he, as you are he, as you are me” in *I am the Walrus*, whilst on *Sgt. Pepper* George Harrison sang: “The time will come when you see we’re all one. /

And life flows on within you and without you.” Monism, then, bored itself into the Sixties’ mind through the ceaseless reiteration of pop songs spinning round and round on endless turntables.

All this has only fed “holistic” notions of illusory separation—and the idea that, as one transcends “illusion,” one realizes oneself as indistinguishable from God. And so it happened that, back in the 1980s, we New Agers celebrated a “breakthrough” mini-series televised across the planet. For in *Out on a Limb*, the Hollywood actress Shirley MacLaine could be seen shouting on a beach: “I am God!”

It hardly need be said this runs entirely counter to Christianity! As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1913 states:

Monism denies that . . . manifoldness is real, and holds that the apparently many are phases, or phenomena, of a one. . . . The weak point of all metaphysical Monism is its inability to explain how, if there is but one reality, and everything else is only apparent there can be any real changes in the world, or *real relations*. . . . The Monist in one way or another . . . *obliterates the distinction between self and not-self, and denies that the external world is real.* [Italics mine]

Here we return to the New Age problem of evil. For how can Monism account for evil, if everything is indistinguishable from God? Unsurprisingly, the New Age answer is often that evil is purely and simply illusion. Clearly, *A Course in Miracles* teaches that every manifestation of darkness—from the serpent of Eden to Auschwitz—is unreal. As we have seen, the *Course* teaches there are no real victims. Rape, cancer, concentration camps are all illusory—in reality, they never happened. And, therefore, “Jesus” could suffer neither in Gethsemane, nor on the Cross, because he realized persecution was

unreal. This “Jesus” in fact speaks like this: “My brothers slept during the so-called “agony in the garden,” but I could not be angry with them because I knew I could not *be* abandoned.”<sup>1</sup> In the *Course*, one is not far removed from the laughing “Jesus.”

Given all this, it is not surprising when New Agers judge people, who appear insufficiently “detached from illusion.” One may well be castigated because one “buys into” the illusion of suffering. Once, I was even admonished for blasphemy by a “holistic” thinker! For in critiquing the ills of society, I was told I risked criticizing God! Did I not realize that God is one and God is everything—including what we judge as evil? What of pornography, I asked. “Do not forget God is present there as well!”—here was, in essence, the response I received. “In the naked bodies, the colors, even in the ink upon the pages of those magazines. . . . Do not become negative! Do not become intolerant—else you risk blaspheming God!” All is Oneness. Such was the “holistic” view of pornography.

Here is a subtle mixture of truth and falseness. For the Christian Mystery certainly declares God’s presence in all things, including the human body. However, Christianity also asserts the Fall. That is to say, it declares *human freedom*. For the Fall originates in God’s ultimate gift of freedom. In the Christian Mystery, God imparts to us His Image and Likeness. That Image and Likeness entails the gift of His own free will. God grants us the freedom to turn away from Him.

But God *cannot impart freedom* in a purely monist conception of the universe. My hand is one with me. Is my hand free and independent of myself? Evidently it is not. But you, dear Lector, are free and independent from myself. If you were simply one with me, you would never be free. Either you would be an appendage of myself or I would be your appendage, helplessly tied to you. To love my hand—this is not real love. Or at least, it is not the same love, as if I were to love you, Lector, as a real, separate, autonomous being with your own real, separate, autonomous agenda. Because your own

agenda might even mean to crucify me. Here is the Love of Christ, who loved others—even whilst they crucified Him. And He did not love them because He had transcended the illusion of agony or because He realized His crucifiers were inseparable from Him. Our Lord is the Master of Love, which is to say, He is the Master of loving, real, autonomous beings with real, autonomous agendas. To accept my hand—this is easy. To accept another, whilst he pounds nails into my hands—this is not easy.

Monism denies freedom. Yet it is only freedom that allows for love. This is why the *Catholic Encyclopedia* declares Monism denies “real relations.” In other words, whilst the New Age tends to absorb everything into Oneness, Christianity venerates *Twoness*. For the Christian, Twoness is not the result of an illusory veil of separation—it is a gift from God. For only in Twoness do we find the possibility of LOVE!

It is not that Christianity denies our unity with God. Rather, the Christian Mystery posits *both* a real Oneness and a real Twoness. In a mysterious fashion, beyond all comprehension, we are united to God. Yet, equally mysterious, God has rendered real freedom, which entails separation from Him—and each another. The gifts of God include Oneness and Twoness. Love is only possible where there is both union and separation.

Sadly, this is too often altogether missed in the New Age circles, where oneness is affirmed whilst separateness is often denied. Oneness *denying* Twoness is Monism, pure and simple. Now, in the New Age movement, it is *spiritual* Monism that is meant. Perhaps you will wonder if there is also *material* Monism? Indeed, there is. Whilst New Agers reduce everything to one spiritual reality, there are certainly those who reduce the world to nothing but material reality (whether theoretically or practically). This is the attitude of philosophical and scientific materialism, which devours our world today. Here the reverse of spiritual Monism is held. Indeed, there is only Oneness—it is said

—because we live in a universe composed solely of matter. What we call the spirit, soul, or consciousness has no reality distinct from matter. Only matter exists: atoms, which form into molecules; molecules, which form into cells; cells, which form into tissues. And in human beings, these cells form brain tissue that produces this thing we call self-consciousness. And so it is said self-consciousness derives entirely from matter. An *independent* soul is impossible; it can only be an *epiphenomenon* of the brain. When the brain stops functioning, so does consciousness. Here is the creed of materialistic Monism: neither the soul, nor God, nor meaning exists. (And it *is* a creed—for there is no proof that matter is the sole substance of the universe. There is only *faith* that Creation and consciousness can be adequately explained by random material events.)

Reams of philosophical speculation have been devoted to Monism and Dualism. The latter affirms there is no Oneness—but *only* Twoness: Spirit and matter both exist sans any connection between them. They have nothing to do with one another. This is not the space to enter into age-old controversies between Monism and Dualism. Suffice it to say Christianity has long rejected both. Christianity rejects pure Monism—either a spiritual or materialistic version thereof. But Christianity also refuses radical Dualism. Such Dualism was embraced by the Manichaeans and the Cathars, for example, who venerated the Spirit, whilst repudiating matter. By contrast, Catholics have prayed for centuries: *Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua* (Heaven and Earth are full of your glory).

Christianity holds Truth to be far more paradoxical than the rational mind can comprehend. Not only does Christian Faith glory in both Heaven and Earth, but it celebrates Twoness and Division. As Christians and Catholics, we have nothing to do with New Age Monism. We affirm Freedom and Love.

But in affirming Freedom and Love, one allows for the tragedy of human evil. One allows one's heart to be pierced, just as His Heart

was pierced. Unlike Monism, Christianity recognizes the cosmic catastrophe of freely eating from the Tree of Good and Evil. The Tragedy of the Fall is premised on real Twoness and real freedom. We are free beings, free to reject God, who has never ceased to love us—so much so that He became One of Us and was crucified for us. *Crucified*, which means neither laughing at illusion, nor merging in Monism—but suffering in *infinite solidarity* with every human soul that exists.

### **What Need for Redemption?**

ALL this is excluded by the “inclusive” Monism of the New Age. Here is what I was forced to conclude, after all my cherished hopes of reconciling New Age-ism and Catholicism. For I never wanted to say such a radical “no” to the New Age. Even ten years ago, I would have felt horrified to write this book. But the reality became ever clearer to me: New Ageism cannot include Christianity. *A choice must be made.*

The New Age rests on the exact opposite of this need for conscious decision. It claims no choice is necessary, because New Ageism *already represents Christianity*. Indeed, New Agers sometimes claim to represent Christianity better than the Church Herself! Eckhart Tolle has suggested precisely this—that people might better understand Christianity, if they turned to him instead of the Church. I discovered Tolle in Orgiva, another “holistic” star. Earlier I had missed Tolle. His bestselling *The Power of Now* was first published in 1997—the year I started my long, slow exit from the New Age. Since then, *The Power of Now* has become a major New Age text. Translated into thirty languages, it has sold millions and made the Number One spot on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. (All this constitutes a striking, and sobering, phenomenon that would have seemed unimaginable thirty years ago.)

In Spain, I found an early edition of Tolle’s book. The marketing on the back cover spoke volumes. Oprah Winfrey is quoted, saying:

“It can transform your thinking . . . the result? More joy, right now!” How easily this slots in with all the other New Age texts in Orgiva. More joy! More success! More power! More creativity—right now!

Of course, Tolle’s philosophy is more complex than this sorry hype. Whilst we lack scope to do it comprehensive justice, I hope a few limited remarks will not err too much on the side of over-simplification. For Tolle clearly espouses a spiritual Monism—one where ordinary reality is discarded for the “Power of Now,” where neither time, nor separation exist—but only Oneness. Enlightenment, for Tolle, means discovering this timeless place beyond all pain and suffering. In fact, Tolle’s monistic philosophy is based on a pivotal interior experience, which completely transformed his life. Prior to this life-changing moment Tolle suffered depression and anxiety. Yet, suddenly, he recognized two beings within himself, and decided *only one of them was real*.<sup>2</sup> Tolle rejected the second personality as illusory, till only peace and Oneness remained.

Tolle, as we say, suggests he represents Christianity—without the least recognition that Christian faith remains entirely incompatible with his Monist philosophy. Here is how he regards “ancient religions,” clearly including Christianity:

When I occasionally quote the words of Jesus or the Buddha . . . I do so . . . to draw your attention to the fact that *in essence there is and always has been only one spiritual teaching*, although it comes in many forms. . . . The ancient religions, have become so overlaid with extraneous matter that their spiritual essence has become almost completely obscured by it. To a large extent, therefore, their deeper meaning is no longer recognized and their transformative power lost. When I quote from the ancient religions . . . it is to reveal their deeper meaning and thereby restore their transformative power—

particularly for those Readers who are followers of these religions or teachings. I say to them: *There is no need to go elsewhere for the truth. Let me show you how to go more deeply into what you already have.* [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

And so, dear Lector, if you follow any religion—say Christianity—you are enjoined by Tolle to abandon it and follow him instead: “Let me show you how...” The message is clear: Eckhart Tolle knows better than the Church. For the Church, along with other religions, has lost her “transformative power.” We return to the same breath-taking inflation in Bloom’s *Soulution* “perceiving what is best and most useful” in world religion.

Yet the vast difference separating Tolle’s monism from Christianity becomes readily apparent when Tolle speaks of the Way of the Cross:

The way of the cross . . . is the old way to enlightenment, and until recently it was the only way. But don’t dismiss it or underestimate its efficacy. It still works.

The way of the cross is a complete reversal. It means that the worst thing in your life, your cross, turns into the best thing that ever happened to you, by forcing you into surrender, into “death,” forcing you to become as nothing, to become as God. . . .

Enlightenment through suffering—the way of the cross—means to be forced into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. You finally surrender because you can’t stand the pain anymore.

. . . .

Enlightenment consciously chosen means to relinquish your attachment to past and future and to make the Now the main focus of your life. It means choosing to dwell in the state of presence rather than in time. It means saying yes to what is. You then don't need pain anymore.<sup>4</sup>

Grave confusion exists here. Tolle evidently believes the Way of the Cross is simply another means to achieve his own species of Enlightenment. He confounds the Christian path of *bearing* suffering voluntarily with New Age *rejection* of suffering! For one does *not* carry the Cross here. Instead, one becomes so fed up that one drops it!

What is happening here? I can only offer you my opinion, dear Lector, which is as follows. Whilst many might dismiss Tolle as little but confused or inflated, I personally think the truth goes deeper. In my view, Eckhart Tolle is an honest man, who has genuinely experienced something extraordinary and life-changing. I do not doubt his sincerity, nor the possibility he has achieved *some* form of liberation.

However, Tolle's experience does not *stop* at simply experience. It then *proceeds* to doctrine—for example, the New Age doctrine that religions are compromised versions of a universal spirituality. Hence, Tolle makes a LEAP. Christianity, he concludes, is only a corrupted version of his own spiritual experience. In other words, Tolle's experience appears to have *merged* with New Age ideology. For after his extraordinary transformation, Tolle started reading the monist doctrines of “holistic” texts such as *A Course in Miracles* (to which he often refers).

Saddled with New Age ideology, Tolle has no choice but to place his transformation within its context. He draws the conclusion that his own spiritual realization must be the *same realization* underlying every religion—including Christianity. Whatever Tolle experienced simply *has to be* the same thing Jesus Christ experienced. His teaching *has to be* what Jesus taught. New Age dogma permits no

other interpretation: there is only one universal spirituality. *Ergo*, Tolle and Jesus are different expressions of that same universal spirituality. Tolle has discovered Jesus's true message before it became corrupted by non-monistic Church teachings.

But what happens if the New Age dogma is not true? What happens if the agony of His Sacred Heart is real and Tolle's transcendence of agony has nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity? What happens if Tolle has not found the way of Jesus, but another way entirely? What if Christianity and Tolle-ism are *two different paths*?

Alas—questions like this are beyond the pale in New Age circles. It is not surprising, then, if New Agers start to ask: What need of the Church? What need of Redemption on Calvary? Because if every form of spirituality amounts to the same thing—then spirituality *prior to* the Redemption on Calvary is the same as spirituality *after* Calvary!

In a spirituality that prioritizes the timeless now, *events that happen in time*—like the Crucifixion and Resurrection—appear to have little significance. For New Agers, like Tolle, the Mystery of Calvary means nothing whatsoever. Certainly, it is not the cosmic turning-point that separates the old universe from the new universe, born of the Cross! There is no Redemption, for them, because there is no Fall, for them. And, for them, there can be no God who takes the Fall so seriously that He undertakes the greatest of sacrifice of all. He incarnates. He dies. His Sacred Heart is pierced. Blood and water pour forth and the cosmos is transformed.

### **The Practical Consequences of Monism**

THUS, the pierced heart of Jesus Christ goes unrecognized by New Age “universalism.” But surely all forms of spirituality amount to the same? Here is what many New Agers will protest—*indignantly!* Surely, Eckhart Tolle and the Bible express the same basic core

spirituality? Surely, Adam and Eve are not truly separate from the Oneness that is everything? Surely, there are no real differences!

But there *are* differences that are not simply theoretical. Because theory cannot be separated from practice. And the practical consequences of Tolle-ism and Christianity are marked.

How could they not be? Repudiating the Cross clearly brings different results to carrying the Cross. The consequences are *a profoundly different orientation of the human soul*. No one has helped me understand this better than Valentin Tomberg, who, once again, enabled me to see the superiority of the God of Personal Love who carries the Cross over and above any Eastern form of rejecting the Cross. Thus, I turn once more to the astonishing, sustained discourse on Christian Love that runs throughout *Meditations on the Tarot*. Here Tomberg talks of the Monist path as *the aspiration to being*, whilst Christianity is *the aspiration to love*:

The consequence of choosing between these two. . . “attitudes of soul” lies above all in the intrinsic nature of the experience of practical mysticism which consequently derives from this choice. He who chooses being will aspire to true being and he who chooses love will aspire to love. For one only finds that for which one seeks. The seeker for true being will arrive at the experience of *repose* in being, and, as there cannot be *two* true beings . . . or two separate co-eternal substances but only *one* being and *one* substance, the center of “false being” will be suppressed (“false being” = *ahamkara*, or the illusion of the separate existence of a separate substance of the self). The characteristic of this mystical way is that *one loses the capacity to cry*. An advanced pupil of yoga or Vedanta will for ever have dry eyes, while the masters of the Cabbala, according to the *Zohar*, cry much and often. Christian

mysticism speaks also of the “gift of tears”—as a precious gift of divine grace. The Master cried in front of the tomb of Lazarus. Thus the outer characteristic of those who choose the other mystical way, that of the God of love, is that they have the “gift of tears.” This is in keeping with the very essence of their mystical experience. Their union with the Divine is not the absorption of their being by Divine Being, but rather the experience of the breath of Divine Love, the illumination by Divine Love, and the warmth of Divine Love. The soul which receives this undergoes such a miraculous experience that it cries. In this mystical experience fire meets with FIRE. Then nothing is extinguished in the human personality but, on the contrary, everything is set ablaze.<sup>5</sup>

These words evoke my own life-experience. For in my youth, I travelled an Eastern road of New Age Monism. At Findhorn, ordinary forms of human desire, emotion, fear, and suffering became very quiet in my soul. For a while, at least, I lost the capacity to cry. But then I found Christ and His Church and the “gift of tears” was restored to me.

Yes, the Eastern Theosophical practices of Alice Bailey were efficacious—at least for a little while. They were not simply bunk—they produced results. Here were Eastern fruits that are very different from the Sacramental fruit of the Church. Once, I walked a path of Monist *being* rather than Christian *love*. Today, I cannot help but wonder if I tasted a small, fleeting corner of Tolle’s own transcendent experience. For myself, at any rate, vast peace reigned for a brief while, but it was not the Peace of Christ.

Eckhart Tolle may have found a transcendent peace, freed from ordinary human egotism, vice, and greed. Such transcendence accords with the monist aspirations of “hidden New Age masters.” It also

accords with the “Jesus” of *A Course in Miracles*, who does not suffer. Likewise, it accords with theosophical ambitions to be serene, detached, and firmly in control of the emotional “vehicle.” But it does not accord with Christ suffering on the Cross. And so the New Age eliminates the agony of Christ. Jesus laughed. He did not suffer.

The suffering Jesus and the non-suffering Tolle reveal entirely different spiritual orientations. Not everyone is looking for the same thing, although Eckhart Tolle would seem to think they are: “It wasn’t until several years later, after I had read spiritual texts and spent time with spiritual teachers, that I realized that what *everybody was looking for* had already happened to me” [italics mine].<sup>6</sup>

Tolle may have spent time with spiritual texts and teachers. But it is doubtful any were truly Catholic or Christian. Rather, I imagine Tolle turning to New Age texts, like *A Course in Miracles*. From these, he absorbed the New Age ideology that everybody was looking for the same thing—and religions had lost “their transformative power.”

What can I say? The Catholic religion has certainly transformed me! However, Tolle is not interested in *this* kind of transformation—from New Age peace to weeping in the Church! Because, from Tolle’s perspective, I would seem to be *transformed in the wrong direction*—turning away from “the Power of Now.”

There are different types of transformative power, it would seem. What would Eckhart Tolle say, I wonder, if he heard the Church never lost *his type* of “transformative power,” because *it never possessed it in the first place*! Christianity was never interested in achieving the “Power of Now,” if this means a timeless, non-suffering, transcendent peace, wherein one loses the capacity to cry.

Once I was a New Ager seeking the same thing as Eckhart Tolle. Today, I am not interested. Nor are millions of other Christians. But I mean no disrespect for this man, who, I am convinced, means well. I only evoke Tolle to illustrate the confusion that New Age ideology

generates.

Now, the confusion is understandable, because Eastern Monism and Christianity obviously share some common, noble features. Both can lead, I suggest, to overcoming ordinary human vice and greed. Both, in this sense, are purificatory. Yet each path rejects vast chunks of the other's vision. Catholicism excludes a remote, detached spirituality of non-suffering. Monism like Tolle's excludes the cosmic turning-point that separates pre-Christian spirituality *without* Redemption from Christianity *with* Redemption. In truth, there are two different universes here: the pre-Christian cosmos and the post-Christian cosmos.

A clear choice, therefore, must be made.

No one has clarified the stark nature of this choice better for me than Valentin Tomberg. And so I close this chapter with some final remarks from him, which contain a serious warning:

We can decide in favor of monism and say to ourselves that there can be only one sole essence, one sole being. Or we can decide—in view of considerable historical and personal experience—in favor of dualism and say to ourselves that there are two principles in the world: good and evil, spirit, and matter, and that, entirely incomprehensible though this duality is at root, it must be admitted as an incontestable fact. We can, moreover, decide in favor of a third point of view, namely that of love as the cosmic principle which presupposes duality and postulates its *non-substantial but essential unity*.<sup>7</sup>

Christianity is all to do with this last choice. For Christianity, as Tomberg elaborates:

does not aspire directly to unity, but rather to the *unity of two*. This is very important for understanding the

standpoint which one takes toward the *infinitely serious problem* of unity and duality. For this problem can open the door to truly divine mysteries and can also close them to us . . . for ever, perhaps, who knows? *Everything depends on its comprehension.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous (Helen Schucman), *A Course in Miracles: Combined Volume* (Glen Elen, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1992), 93.

<sup>2</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–68.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 31–32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

## PART II

*(Mainly) On Christendom  
& the Catholic Mystery*

## XIII

### Into the Catholic Mystery

*One of us grew up in an integral Catholic culture, permeated by the *Mystici Corporis Christi*.*

*One of us did not grow up in such a culture.*

*One of us rejoices that a small island nation opened his eyes.*

**T**ROUGHOUT the first half of this book, a story has been told. It is the story of a man who was advised—incessantly!—that significant religious differences did not exist. Rather, there was one great “universal superhighway,” which he might tread entirely by himself, unaided by religion. Year upon year, he was informed there was neither need of Priests, nor tradition, nor authority. He was permeated—through and through—by a worldview that saw no necessity for the *Mystici Corporis Christi*—the Mystical Body of Christ. Even more, he was never even informed that the *Mystici Corporis Christi* existed! He was repeatedly told the Church was simply an artifact—a human institution preaching a belief system. He never heard how the Body of Christ is neither a vague abstraction, nor a metaphor, nor an organization, but rather a *Living Mystery*.

All this, of course, is not simply the isolated story of a solitary individual. It testifies to global stupefaction—with tragic consequences. For we live on a planet of rending suffering. To confront that suffering honestly—a suffering entailing one’s own personal tragedy and billions more—is plainly beyond any man’s capacity. Clearly, our need for moral and spiritual sustenance is dire. Yet fewer

and fewer in the West, enfolded in Secular Materialism, realize the sheer miracle of grace available to them, day and night, through the Sacramental Channels of His Mystical Body.

Still, even in these darkened days, people awaken to the reality of the *Mystici Corporis Christi*. Here, the author of this book is hardly alone. Throughout the ages, countless souls have discovered—often against all odds—His Mystical Body. Nearly two thousand years after St. Paul, conversion stories continue to occur. Ancient pagans and modern New Agers alike discover the Mystery of the Holy Church!

Despite such conversions, much of the world remains utterly ignorant of the Church's central claims. Naturally, this includes innumerable Indians, Chinese, Africans, and others who have never glimpsed the mystery. But what of the once-Christian West? A massive void of blank incomprehension now exists, even amongst those born in the Occident. Cultural forgetting on a vast scale has been ensured by the waves of Protestantism, secularism, liberalism, materialistic education and now economic tyranny.

Let me be clear: I am not simply saying that Western people no longer *believe* the claims made by the Sacramental Church. I am saying that many Westerners—Anglophones above all—no longer have the least idea as to what those Sacramental claims even are!

Memories come, as I write. Here is one. An educated Englishman stops me to ask what a Sacrament is. I have known similarly educated English people with cultural awareness aplenty. Yet they cannot comprehend my daily hunger for the Mass. One such lady seems to think I search for community; my need for the Church is one of human contact. She has, I think, little idea how solitary I am, nor what my real yearning is. Every day in the Catholic Church, I tell her, a sublime Mystery is enacted. I suspect she is surprised indeed.

Like many English folk, her cultural background appears Church of England to me. I wonder, then, if she might retain distant childhood memories of Anglican communion services, once or twice a month

perhaps, though not every day. Yet even if she dimly recalls Anglican services like this, she will never have seen anything like the Sacraments of Penance or Extreme Unction. Of course, if her background is “low church,” rather than Anglican, it is even more doubtful that she possesses even the most elementary notion of the Sacraments. Once again, even sophisticated English people like her, pay a heavy price for the Wind of the Tudors.

Here is another memory. I encounter a woman in cyberspace, with apparently both Christian and New Age sympathies. She was American, I think, and plaintively she asked a question: *Where are the temples today?* It would seem she recalled the ancient pagan cultures, with their places of mysterious and sacred rites. She was a “New Age Christian,” perhaps, who longed for ancient Egypt or Greece. And she imagined temples with sacred rites no longer existed in our culture. But there are Catholic churches all across America! Yet I suspect it never even crossed her mind that here are the modern temples of Divine Mystery, which have replaced the temples of time gone by.

My impressions may be imprecise, but I think they represent broad tendencies today. The Catholic Mystery remains completely invisible to folk like this from Protestant cultures. Now, earlier, I indicated a peculiar act of love that issued from the Vatican in recent times. “Church” was a term, Rome declared, which, properly speaking, could not be applied to Protestant confessions. Instead, these must be recognized as “ecclesial communities.” Here is the declaration of *Dominus Jesus* from the year 2000—a document drafted by then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and approved by St. John Paul II, who described it as “dear to my heart.” Many were scandalized. But here is a courageous act of love—for it speaks to the *cultural forgetfulness* of the West. For a distinction must be made between those who hold to the original sacramental conception of the Church (i.e., Catholics and Eastern Orthodox) and those who reject this notion. Yet this distinction becomes effaced, when the term “Church” is accorded to

any group of Christians (no matter how sincere they are). Thus, Rome refuses to blur the definition of the *primary charge* of the Church. She will not brook the cultural misunderstanding that the temples of Mystery no longer exist! She will not collude with subtly materialistic notions that confuse the Church with simply a human organization.

Clearly, Joseph Ratzinger tried to tackle the wreckage following the Second Vatican Council—precisely because of the great effort that was made, in many quarters, to efface the distinction between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of Christianity. A primary agenda of the Vatican II was ecumenical outreach to other Christians and when, after the Council, Bl. Paul VI refashioned the Mass, he clearly had such ecumenism in mind. For the *Novus Ordo* was fashioned in a form, far more in keeping with Protestant practice (e.g., use of the vernacular, the Priest facing the people, emphasis on the Old Testament, etc.).

Ecumenism by effacement of distinctions; ecumenism by flattening Holy Mystery; ecumenism by disregarding the Blessed Virgin or the Sacred Heart. All this has devastated the Church in recent times. How frequently the Holy Mass is now celebrated as though it were a Protestant service—with a long sermon, followed by a cursory, rushed “celebration” of the central Mystery of the Church! All this simply reinforces the notion the Church’s purpose lies in moral instruction and communal gathering. Alas! This is precisely what many Catholics think today. And who can blame them?

### **Approaching the Sacred Mystery**

GIVEN this grim situation, it is necessary to unambiguously articulate the true nature of the *Mystici Corporis Christi*, which has become utterly confused with a notion of the Church as nothing more than a confession, a congregation, or a community sing-a-long.

What is truly involved in the Catholic Mystery? For nearly two thousand years, billions of souls have been incorporated into this

*Mystici Corporis Christi*. Through Seven Sacramental Portals, they participate in the Mystical Body of Christ. They enter first through the Portal of Baptism and then proceed through Confession and Confirmation. But if they are sincere, the Mystery continues deepening ever afterwards, as they continue to receive—reverently and gratefully for the whole of their lives—His Body and Blood into their innermost being. Meanwhile, they continue to be repeatedly cleansed by the Absolution of their sins. Moreover, their lives may be further sanctified by the Sacraments of vocation—either marriage or Ordination. Until at last, there is the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Let us not forget the sacramentals, either. The Rosary is not a Sacrament, yet who can calculate the effect of billions of Rosary prayers sent up to heaven? Who can say how much benediction rained down, for example, on humble Irish cottages each night, as families took out their beads and began to pray the joyous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries? What of the apparently simple act of taking a moment to cross oneself with Holy Water? It might be added that in Ireland, one crossed oneself with Holy Water not only on entering the Church, but also at the threshold of one's own home. The sacramentals—they are not there for nothing! This simple act of crossing oneself with Holy Water throughout one's lifetime—what does it *really* signify?

Here are faltering words to evoke the immense Mystery that stands utterly apart from common-or-garden notions of a confession, a congregation, a community sing-a-long. No words can do justice to the Mystery of the Church. Yet, however inadequate they are, words remain necessary. How we articulate things *matters*. Thus with *Dominus Jesus*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger tried to restore the original understanding of the Church.

In that understanding, Christ came to found the Church: “Upon this rock, I shall build my Church.” The terminology here is unitary and not multiple. Our Lord does not say: “On these rocks, I shall build my various denominations.” Beginning with the tragic rupture of

the Church between East and West (more or less finalized by 1054) the unity of the Church was apparently lost. Yet, as terrible as this was, it cannot compare to the catastrophe of the Reformation that splintered Christians into countless “denominations.”

Yet the Mystery of the universal Church of Christ has not been splintered. It continues to exist and according to *Dominus Jesus* it fully expresses itself in Catholicism (although it remains present in the Orthodox Churches to such an extent that they, too, can legitimately be called Churches).<sup>1</sup> This is to say the Church has nothing to do with *abstractions*. Thus, Hilaire Belloc expressly meant to combat this erroneous idea by bluntly referring to the Church as *the Thing* (with a capital T):

The Thing is what it is; an organism endowed with a life, having a character and savour of its own: a personality, and above all, a personality undoubtedly and wholly One.<sup>2</sup>

The Church is an Organism and not an organization. Any common-or-garden human organization, which decides to call itself a “church” does not *ipso facto* belong to the mysterious Organism that is the Church. That Organism is a specific living reality charged with living spiritual mystery. The Catholic Church dares to take this specific Living Mystery seriously—dares that is, in a world that prefers to reduce it to nothing but human constructs.

We speak, haltingly, of that Living Mystery by which we are *united to Christ* through the Sevenfold Doorway of His Holy Sacraments. This Sevenfold Mystery depends, in its turn, on the apostolic succession and the Rock of Peter. Catholics continue to honor the fundamental, sacramental constituents of the Sacred Mystery, *transmitted* to them now for two thousand years. Our word tradition derives from the Latin verb *tradere*, which means precisely this: to transmit. Catholics are traditional Christians inasmuch as they honor

and transmit what has been passed onto them, and inasmuch as they refuse to honor and transmit modern innovations that negate that transmission. Thus, they refuse modern Protestant innovations that treat the Church as little more than a hive of congregations. And they equally refuse modern rationalist innovations that reduce the Living Mystery of the Church to human factors. All these are unfaithful to the Mystery He entrusted to St. Peter as head of the Apostles. But traditional Christians, whether Catholic or Orthodox, venerate the Mystery transmitted through Tradition for nearly two millennia, since it was first elaborated in Holy Scripture. For in the *Acts of the Apostles* we read that:

Saul, as yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high Priest. And asked of him . . . that if he found any men and women of this way, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he went on his journey, it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus; and suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And falling on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Who said: Who art thou, Lord? And He: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. (Acts 9:1–5)

Thus Saul became Paul, at the moment he understood that in *persecuting Christians he persecuted the Lord*. This pivotal understanding led to his recognition that the Church was neither a sect, nor an organization, nor an abstraction, but a *living being*:

For as the body is one and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body: So also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free: and in one Spirit we have all been made to

drink. For the body also is not one member, but many. . . . There are many members indeed, yet one body. . . . God hath tempered the body together. . . . That there might be no schism in the body: but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer any thing, all the members suffer with it: or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it. . . . Now you are the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:26)

And of course, everything that St. Paul expresses regarding the Body of Christ was already anticipated by Our Lord at the Last Supper:

Abide in me: and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine: you the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. (John 15:4–5)

Here scripture provides early images of the Church as a Divine-Human Organism, not a human organization. From scripture, there followed two millennia of inspired reflections by Saints, theologians, and Popes. All these served to elaborate our understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ, which, until very recently, was familiar Catholic teaching. However, we possess neither the scope, nor erudition to enter into two thousand years of theological development, regarding the *Mystici Corporis Christi*. We can, however, briefly note more erudite Catholics than myself, who nobly summarize the Church's understanding.

Let us turn first to Canon Francis Ripley, whose 1951 catechism *This is the Faith* features a clear presentation of the true nature of the Church that, sadly, might startle many Catholics today:

Those who are united with Christ through grace share in the supernatural life of Christ. By this sharing *we receive powers that far exceed those that are natural to us.*

We see how closely we are related to Christ in the Mystical Body—more closely than we are related to our natural mothers, fathers, sisters, or brothers. We are not merely members of the same family or society but *members of the same body.* [Italics mine]

And Canon Ripley is neither embarrassed, nor hesitant to declare:

*Christ transferred His own power to St. Peter* and to a lesser extent to the apostles. He completely identified the Church with Himself. He was indeed the Bridegroom. She the bride, but they were to be “two in one flesh” (Cf. Matt. 19:5–6). Every important section of His life, every significant interest of His heart, He transferred to His Church.

The Church, then, is comprised of those who are in Supernatural Union with Christ through His Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance.

Now, let us consider Ven. Pius XII. For it is not only recently that the Papacy has been alarmed by the effacement of the understanding of Church! Back in 1943, Ven. Pius XII saw the chill winds of demythologization blowing from liberal Protestantism into the Church. He was gravely concerned by the mounting peril of materialistic Christianity and addressed the *Mystici Corporis Christi* in a great encyclical, bearing the same name. From the beginning of *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Ven. Pius XII invokes the profound matter of the Fall—for one cannot understand the new Body of Christ, without understanding the old body of Adam, corrupted by Original Sin:

After the unhappy fall of Adam, the whole human race, infected by the hereditary stain, lost their participation in the divine nature and we were all “children of wrath.” But the all-merciful God “so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son,” and the Word . . . assumed human nature from the race of Adam . . . so that He, as the new Adam, might be the source whence the grace of the Holy Spirit should flow unto all the children of the first parent.

Through the sin of the first man, they had been excluded from adoption as children of God; through the Word incarnate, made brothers according to the flesh of the only-begotten Son of God, they receive also *the power to become the sons of God*. [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

Through Christ, then, we join a brotherhood—a family—bonded in the new Mystical Body of Christ. We become flesh of His Flesh, in and through the Church. And Ven. Pius XII continues:

The Church was born from the side of our Saviour on the Cross . . . “And it is now,” says the great St. Ambrose, speaking of the pierced side of Christ, “that it is built, it is now that it is formed. . . . Now it is that arises a spiritual house.”<sup>4</sup>

A new spiritual house on the face of the Earth has appeared, formed out of the side of the Lord from His pierced, Sacred Heart. Here we have the unembarrassed, unequivocal testimony of St Ambrose and Ven. Pius XII. And it was this “new spiritual house on the face of the Earth”—or the Church of Christ—that Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in *Dominus Jesus*, declared was only fully present in the Catholic Church (even if it exists in great measure within Orthodoxy, as well).

## To Contemplate Personal Experience

THIS 1943 encyclical bears an understanding of the Church that is faithful to the experience of two millennia of Apostles, Saints, Popes, and the mystics and geniuses of the tradition. To this vast storehouse of treasure, I would now add something that may seem foolhardy: my own paltry experience. But what can I give compared to all this? It is meagre, I know, but that does not mean it is worthless.

Indeed, Catholics who feel themselves daily sustained by His Mystical Body may have a *critical duty* to testify to their perceptions! In our materialistic age, even one's limited experience may help pierce the fog of misconceptions enshrouding the Church.

Thus, I have resolved to speak, however feebly, of my own personal experience of the Catholic Mystery. In this, a certain factor has played a part—the individual testimony I have received from other Catholics since I converted. These people were not great saints, yet their stories *helped* me nonetheless. Things change when one converts to the Church. For many converts, it may be the first time they ever truly meet a sincere, practicing Catholic. At least, I met countless “spiritual seekers” for many years in the New Age—but not devout Catholics, who would have seemed like aliens from another planet! But now, for the first time in my life, I started encountering these “alien beings”—Catholics who took their Faith seriously. New friends were made and they shared riches with me, the like of which I had never heard. Yes, everywhere around us, there are innumerable devout, practicing Catholics, even if one never meets them! And now a hidden world, which had existed all around me, became visible before my eyes.

Moreover, another kind of soul was now introduced into my life—one who has been *sacramentally altered* in a special fashion. For the first time, I encountered Priests, especially as—gingerly—I began intimate dialogues in the confessional, seated at first, but then on my

knees.

Who were all these “alien beings” I now encountered? For me, they were *ambassadors of the Catholic Mystery*. And here I thank all those who have spoken to me, often privately, of their experience of the Mystery. For I have heard beautiful and, on occasion, astonishing testimony that *helped* me. Thus, I venture a little personal testimony myself

Now, the testimony I have in mind requires contemplative attention to one’s *inner experience of the Church*. In other words, it means observing *what happens to us* in our ongoing encounter with Holy Mother Church. If we are quietly attentive to the Sacraments, important things may become evident, which are otherwise not easily noticed. Indeed, we may notice subtle, yet significant changes of consciousness within ourselves. For example, one may feel more keenly aware or open to insight.

But even if nothing special is noticed, when receiving a particular Sacrament, one can still enquire: What are the cumulative results of meeting Christ in His Church, time after time? What *amasses* in us, as we participate in Mass after Mass after Mass? For as Canon Ripley has also written: “The purpose of Holy Communion is to incorporate us more completely into the Mystical Body of Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

What really happens to us in the Holy Mass, even if we are scarcely awake to it? Such enquiry can prove valuable. Let me illustrate. I address you, dear Lector, seventeen years after I first encountered the Catholic Mystery. Now, if we, as Catholics, are continuously incorporated ever “more completely into the Mystical Body of Christ,” can we observe anything noteworthy in our souls as a result?

It would be futile to deny that much of note has happened in these seventeen years since the Catholic Mystery started working on my soul! Clearly, my spiritual orientation is decidedly changed from my New Age days.

That decisive change is not Pelagian! It is not something I, myself, have done. Rather it is something *done to me*—via *His Mystical Body*. And it began that autumn of 1997 in Cambridge, when a Priest first blessed me in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It continued as I was baptized an Anglican, then confirmed Catholic. It happened to me as I regularly received Holy Communion. Thus, my spiritual orientation was transformed—by Sacramental Grace.

My whole book concerns this transformation of my soul. Now, there is one aspect to this transformation, which particularly expresses the abyss between my former New Age self and myself today. For today my soul is *disturbed* like it never was before. Yet unlike my New Age self, I think this disturbance good, because it indicates my soul has gained a deepened capacity to be disturbed. For a deepened soul-capacity to be disturbed means a greater capacity to *feel*. It means possibilities denied me, when I aspired toward aloof New Age detachment. Here is what Valentin Tomberg saw so clearly: “One loses the capacity to cry,” pursuing the path of Eastern Monism. But my own life-experience confirms what Tomberg wrote, another road exists—which restores the “gift of tears.”

The “gift of tears” is the gift of the Master of Love. For it is Our Lord who feels most deeply the pain of this world. Here is why St. Margaret Mary Alacoque beheld His Heart encircled by a Crown of Thorns. His Heart—being Infinite Love—*feels everything*. His Heart bleeds for our broken, fallen hearts. I do not think I can express this better than by turning to a little, old prayer book devoted to the Spirituality of His Most Sacred Heart. Here one reads a prayer from 1914 written by a long-forgotten Jesuit father, simply named as Rev. W. Roche:

Remember, most gracious Lord for Thy Son’s sake, all those whose lot He shared on earth: the poor, the

workpeople, the lonely, the oppressed. He is the man of sorrows gathering in Himself His people's griefs and bearing all human burdens in His Heart. He is sorrowful with the sorrowful, hungry with those that hunger, in pain with those who suffer pain. His soul responds by sympathy and love to every secret misery and silent agony. His heart-beats are as echoes to every pain and pang and cry of woe. For His sake, O God! For His sake whose life is one with ours, let comfort and courage be carried everywhere to every struggling soul, by the ministry of Angels and of men, from the copious treasures of the Eternal Sacrifice wherein is all the hope of all mankind.

He is in pain with all those who suffer pain! Here is the universe of difference, separating the Christian Mystery from the New Age.

Now His Heart—bearing Infinite Love—can bear the agony of every fallen soul. He bears what our tiny, finite hearts cannot begin to bear. For normally, our tiny hearts are only called to carry the sufferings of those closest to us: our own family and friends. And how our hardened hearts fail even in this! Yet the whole of humanity constitutes His family, His friends. But as one draws closer to His Sacred Heart, one's own fallen heart may begin to feel more tenderly (if only a little) the pain of humanity: His family, His friends. By His Mercy, one starts to weep for the world.

All this I invoke, precisely because it runs so counter to my former New Age preoccupations. Certainly, at Findhorn, I never aspired to weep for the world! Such a thing was alien to my theosophical aspirations to remain firmly in control. Clearly, my old New Age friends notice a change in me and they sometimes think I have become morose, filled by unhealthy angst. But I am grateful for what they notice. For that change has come *through His Mystical Body*—the Church.

Now, what is it to feel—at least, start to feel—the tears of the world? Is this not the beginning of moral gravity? The answer is yes—provided this feeling leads neither to ranting, nor recrimination. For if one registers the world agony in a way that is neither bitter, nor sentimental, nor despairing, but rather fosters creative action on behalf of the world—this has everything to do with moral gravity.

Would it be pompous of me, Lector, to suggest I have developed a deepened moral gravity since my New Age days? It would be pompous indeed! For I, alone, have developed nothing whatsoever! To think like this remains Pelagian. It denies the One who said: “Without me, you can do nothing” (John 15). Still, one should gratefully acknowledge the birth of new attitudes in one’s soul, even if these attitudes remain like tender shoots, frail and undeveloped. But when one is Catholic and not Pelagian, one will regard these tender shoots and say: “Not I, but Christ in me.”

By His Grace, we, as Catholics, have been renewed. And as Catholics, we are obliged to render gratitude for the Sacramental Grace that continually renews us. We are obliged to honor every Mass, every Absolution, every drop of Holy Water that has ever been sprinkled upon us. It follows that we are morally bound to honor the Church and all that is essential to Her, including the Ordained Hierarchy. For it is only via the Ordained Hierarchy of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons that one is enabled to partake in the miracle of the Sanctifying Grace of the Church. Let us give credit where credit is due!

Now, in this chapter, we are concerned with the Church’s true nature, which is no arbitrary construct, but an inexhaustible and unfathomable Mystery. Now, I speak of the gift of the Church to awaken the soul to the spirituality of His pierced heart. All this, of course, can be difficult to bear. And so it should be stressed that these are not the *only* Sacramental gifts of the Church.

No, the Church opens one’s soul to new joys, new riches as well! What can I say? As a convert, I have already spoken to that Easter

night in which I felt that startling rush of joy, as I was confirmed into the Mystery. And I have told how that joy deepened, year upon year, such that after leaving the New Age behind I never missed it. Being confirmed into the Mystical Body of Christ brought me riches utterly unknown, and I sometimes feel utterly inexpressible to those who do not feel what I feel. Now, feeling these ineffable things, I was especially gratified to receive some moving words from Billy Bishop, a convert who reads my website:

What you have . . . said so often is how cold the world has become, how hard people's hearts have become.

It's like Hans Christian Anderson's story of *The Little Match Girl*. She sold matches to make money and had no place to stay. In the end, she lit those matches in an effort to keep warm in the snow and cold, even seeing some beautiful images before finally succumbing.

Imagine if someone had instead found the girl, brought her inside a large house filled with all sorts of warmth: comforting fireplace, blankets, food and drink, and most especially people who cared. Maybe that sounds like the kind of ending out of Hollywood. As a human being, she will no doubt suffer in the future. For now, we can rejoice that she has been saved, redeemed.

That's what the Mass and the Sacraments are like for me, coming into the Lord's house and out of the bitter cold. I didn't even realize how cold I was or how used to being cold, to being hard, I had become. As I thaw out, I can only hope to become softer still, more human. Every time I receive Communion, every time I confess, every time I go to Adoration, I feel like I do and I pray God it's true and will always be true.

Fellow convert, how your words resound in me! You did not even feel how cold you were until you found this unexpected warmth. Billy's words indicate, I think, why converts—as is regularly noted—often differ in intensity from cradle Catholics. For Catholics from the cradle have *never known anything* different from this silent Grace in their lives. Their Catholicism is just “normal” to them, something that may even be barely liminal, even whilst it is all-important. By contrast, Catholicism is not “normal” to a new convert, who may be more acutely awake to the Sacramental Mystery, now operating in his soul—precisely because it stands in such contrast to his former existence.

Be that as it may, we, as Catholics—whether converts or cradled in the Faith—can actively contemplate what the Church extends to us. A world of consumer capitalism asks us to “contemplate” so many false riches: gadgets, fashions, food, and all the rest. Would it harm us to actively ponder, instead, how much our lives are daily enriched by the Church? At any rate, here is just a little gratitude from one man who, after decades of darkness, fell upon the Catholic Mystery. But I am only one man—amidst a billion other souls participating in the Sacramental Mystery of the Holy Church.

### **The Church: the View from the Exterior**

SO FAR in this chapter, we have considered the *Mystici Corporis Christi* from differing perspectives—looking first from one angle, then another. Thus, at one moment, we considered the *New Testament* with St. Paul's literally blinding insight that he had wounded the Body of the Lord. At another moment, we heeded Ven. Pius XII's great encyclical. We then encouraged contemplating the Ecclesiastical Mystery as it works in the depths of our own souls—Sacrament by Sacrament, encounter by encounter with the Risen Lord.

Yet there is another approach I turn to now. It involves reflecting

on the phenomenon of the Church in the world, or its *visible expression in time and space*. The Catholic Church comprises more than a billion baptized members—approximately one sixth of humanity. It is the greatest single body belonging to any organized religion on the planet. More than half the world's Christians are Catholic. There are 700,000 religious nuns and monks across the world and 400,000 Priests. There are tens of thousands of Catholic institutions, too: hospitals, orphanages, dispensaries, leproseries, primary and secondary schools, and universities. There are 400,000 parishes and missions. Never in human history has so much activity been marshalled by a single institution.

All this is simply the *body* of the Catholic Church, comprised as it is of Roman Catholics and certain Eastern Catholics, who recognize the Pope as their head. This Catholic Church represents the most far-reaching manifestation of the Church. Beyond Catholicism, there are the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which according to *Dominus Jesus*, also express the Church of Christ. These Churches spread out across Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East—with a small presence in the West, as well. After the Catholic Church, they contain an additional 300,000 members: Bishops, Priests, monks, nuns, and laity participating in the Seven Sacraments of His Mystical Body.

All this testifies to the Church's extraordinary extent in space—across the face of the planet. But one may likewise consider her extraordinary *duration in time*. The Catholic Church and her principles have stood for nearly two thousand years. Meanwhile, other institutions, other values have come and gone. For in two millennia, we have witnessed the Roman Empire and its fall—followed by barbarianism, feudalism, monarchism, secular democracy, and now *economicism* (as St. John Paul II called it). Increasingly, we are governed neither by feudal lords, nor by kings, nor by democratically elected leaders, but rather capitalist corporations and markets.

Yet whilst these systems shift and change, *the Church stands*.

She stands far from perfectly in her all-too-human expressions, yet with a remarkable consistency in her norms, values, rites, and institutions over a vast span of time. Whence that striking consistency that spans both centuries and cultures from Europe to Asia and the Americas? For here we see—even in the empirical realm of data—an enterprise unlike anything else on earth. *Why?* What lies behind two thousand years of this vast undertaking? How is it that, for all this time, people from vastly different cultures were inspired to become Priests, nuns, monks, theologians, missionaries—as well as martyrs? Why is it that some 1.5 billion people are baptized into the Catholic and Orthodox Churches alone—to say nothing of further hundreds of millions baptized as Protestants (which baptism is an incorporation in Christ and is recognized as a communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church of Christ)?<sup>6</sup> What Mystery lies behind this immensity in numbers, space, and time? For the Catholic of Faith, the answer is clear: This extraordinary coherence is only explained by the continuing presence of an immortal body—the *Mystici Corporis Christi*.

This contemplation of the Church's outer dimensions gives us pause to reflect. However, we should also beware. For quantitative material data can blind us—resulting in materialism. What is necessary is to take the data and then probe deeper. Bearing this in mind, let us ponder a mighty planetary occurrence, which happens each day we live and breathe. For hundreds of thousands of times every day, bread and wine become transformed into His Body and His Blood. Now, we cannot calculate the precise number of times the Holy Sacraments are celebrated. However, a Catholic Priest is expected to celebrate the Eucharist every day, whether anyone else is present or not. Not every Priest is faithful or active. Still we can be sure that at least two or three hundred thousand times each day, bread and wine are trans-substantiated somewhere on this planet and Jesus Christ becomes present on the altars of the world. Two or three hundred thousand times each day, His Body and Blood pour out to the human race. Here

is the planetary beating of the Heart of the World.

Most people live out their entire lives asleep to this astounding reality. This is true even of many practicing Catholics, who frequently hold (subtly) Protestant conceptions of the Church since Vatican II. Little do they acknowledge—let alone contemplate—the Sanctifying Grace pouring out over the planet. Thus Catholics might notice spiritual changes occurring in themselves or their friends. Yet they may never credit what lies at the root of such changes—the *Mystici Corporis Christi*.

Stupefaction regarding the Church prevails in the world. But genuine enquiry can help to remedy this. Let us enquire, then, not simply of the great saints, scripture, and tradition, but of everything, which is available to us—including the personal experience of our own souls and our Catholic friends and family. Let us look to even very ordinary folk, who have been continuously steeped—usually since birth—in the visible and invisible currents of the Church.

These currents of the Church. Are they not the arteries of His Sacred Heart, bearing LIFE to every member of His Body? Lector, I invite you to actively contemplate these questions. What do such things truly *mean*? What does it mean to be BATHED in these currents—week in, week out—over the course of a lifetime? What happens to a human soul, baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church, who continuously seeks out the Sacramental Channels of His Sacred Heart? What transpires in the soul who *regularly* prays the Rosary, is blessed by Holy Water, receives the Sacrament of His Flesh and Blood and is cleansed by Absolution of sin? All this, we are told, is to receive Sanctifying Grace. But let us not content ourselves with rote answers! Instead, keep asking: What does this really signify for the individual seeker? What does it mean for a community? Indeed, what might it mean for an entire people?

For there have been times, when it was not only individuals or religious communities that were formed by the *Mystici Corporis*

*Christi*, but entire nations! Moreover, such times were not so long ago. Indeed my own life has been transformed by a country that, even very recently, remained steeped in these arteries of Sanctifying Grace. I speak of Ireland, which astonished me when I first went to live there in 2004. For there I found the still-glowing embers of an integral Catholic culture—one where the *Mystici Corporis Christi* had reached out and permeated all of culture. In living memory in Ireland, there is a time when over ninety percent of Catholics went weekly to Mass and fifty percent went monthly to confession. And these Sacraments were not without profound effects for the culture—effects, which, I will suggest later on, rendered it warmer, softer and more reverent.

But there is a point to my digression, because we can also witness the power of the *Mystici Corporis Christi* as it transforms peoples and cultures. Integral Catholic cultures such as once existed in Ireland were very different from societies elsewhere in the Anglosphere and later on we shall ponder how the Mystical Body of Christ works to transform not only individuals but also culture. For this is a book about Christendom and the power that once animated Christendom.

### **The Debt of Gratitude**

AS CATHOLICS of Faith, we owe an unfathomable debt of gratitude to this power. Now, ultimately this debt, of course, is to Him who died on the Cross, and to His Mother without whose *Fiat* He could never have entered this world to die. However, are we not also indebted (albeit to a far lesser extent) to every faithful member of His Mystical Body? This means to say the faithful who have walked before us and forged *receptacles* for the Catholic Mystery in untold books, poems, treatises, churches, cathedrals, monastic communities, or even national cultures.

The Catholic Mystery? But why *only* Catholic? The Mystery of Christ is universal! Now, the word “catholic,” of course, does mean

“universal.” And so, in one sense, we invoke the universal Mystery of the Church. However, in a more restricted sense, talk of the Catholic Mystery—with a capital C—might appear to single-out only those Christians who follow the Pope. One might ask then: Are we not beholden to the *entire* Christian Mystery, as it is represented by Christians everywhere—not simply Catholics? Is His Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection not a Mystery, which we kneel down and adore, alongside other Christians? Are we not indebted to countless Orthodox and Protestants who have long witnessed to the Christic Mystery? Do they not belong to His Mystical Body as well? All this is undoubtedly true—everyone who is validly baptized enters His Mystical Body, even if they are lacking in full Sacramental communion.

Yet for myself and more than a billion other Catholics—the majority of Christians—our greatest debt remains to the Mystery of the *Catholic* Church. Speaking very personally, I am more grateful than I can ever say for the *daily* Sacraments that the Catholic Church extends. The Eastern Churches have all Seven Sacraments. But, as a rule, they celebrate the Eucharist once a week—with a reverence and ritual that puts most Catholics today to shame. Profound gratitude is owed to the Orthodox for maintaining the treasures of Christianity across the centuries.

I also cannot omit mention of the Rosary, which is a unique part of the Catholic Mystery. The Rosary—words cannot possibly express its silent riches. The more one begins to pray it, the more its wonders permeate the soul. And as the soul becomes steeped in its fragrance, the more one comes to know, venerate, and dearly love Our Lady. In this book dedicated to His Sacred Heart, perhaps I say too little of the *Mater Dei*. Here, then, let us note the Catholic Mystery consists of much that has been ignored not only by Protestants, but also by the Orthodox. For the Orthodox have generally not recognized the great modern Apparitions of Our Lady. For example, Our Lady of

Guadalupe, Our Lady of Knock, and Our Lady of Fatima have brought inexhaustible treasures to the faith. No, the Orthodox have neither the Rosary, nor the fruits of the great recent Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin. Nor do they recognize the Sacred Heart revealed in Catholic France. Still, one should acknowledge the other treasures they guard—the Jesus prayer for example—which many Catholics have yet to taste.

Thus, one may justifiably affirm that *a particular Catholic Mystery exists*, which has developed over time and expressed itself through countless individuals, monasteries, convents, parishes, dioceses, and even whole nations, which were once steeped in the Tradition. The Mystery of Jesus Christ has been elaborated by innumerable Catholic Priests, monks, nuns, laity, theologians, artists, composers—even filmmakers or novelists, such as Mel Gibson and Graham Greene. (And here, I cannot resist paying brief homage to Greene—whose literary genius in novels such as *The Power and the Glory* and *The End of the Affair* amply illumines the power of the Catholic Mystery to transform the human psyche.)

Be that as it may, the Twenty-First Century continues its headlong plunge into Secular Materialism. And the honest, faithful Catholic—who confronts both the fallen state of the his soul and that of the world—can only conclude one thing: Our sclerotic culture stands desperately in need of the Sacramental rivers of Grace that pour out to the West through the Catholic Mystery. With this in mind, let us turn specifically to the Holy Sacraments of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Her understanding of the Mystery built upon the Rock of Peter, the Church of Christ subsists fully only in the Catholic Church. Though according to *Dominus Jesus*, the Eastern Orthodox also merit the name of Church, precisely because this same Mystery of the Church of Christ is also present and operative in the Eastern Churches, which have validly preserved the Eucharist and the Apostolic succession. Thus, the Mystery of the Church is present in Catholicism and in the particular Churches of the East that have never discarded the original

understanding of the Church.

<sup>2</sup> Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, n.12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, n.28.

<sup>5</sup> Canon Francis Ripley, *This is the Faith* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2002), 201.

<sup>6</sup> *Dominus Jesus*, 17.

## XIV

### On The Holy Sacraments

*One of us sees a membership card in a club.*

*One of us sees Moral Energy pouring from His Mystical Body.*

**D**ECISIVE MOMENTS arrive in the thought-life of every thinking person. There are instants of recognition, wherein important matters come suddenly into focus, which had previously been less than fully clear. Such a moment once happened to me, reading a church bulletin in France, which “explained” the Sacrament of Confirmation. The “explanation” went like this: “With Confirmation, one becomes a full member of the Christian community.”

Now, this is less than theologically accurate. For one becomes incorporated into His Mystical Body through Baptism—not Confirmation. However, what most disturbs me here is that the mystical life of the Church receives no mention whatsoever. No reference is made to the descent of the Holy Spirit. Nothing more than a mundane occurrence—like joining a club—is indicated. It took but an instant to register the heartbreak in those words. But in that brief moment, the crisis of the modern Church came crashing down on me.

And yet, for years, I had seen, repeatedly, much the same—the Catholic Mystery treated as something worldly and commonplace. But somehow this bare, mundane “explanation” distilled the entire, appalling tragedy at once for me. The Mystery of Confirmation became reduced to something like a *membership card*. Here is materialism, pure and simple, because any common-or-garden materialist can easily

understand the need for membership cards. But the Church beckons us—or should beckon us—to something far greater than common-or-garden materialism.

Throughout the West, the modern Church drowns in materialism. Despite the recent, valiant papacies of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, this appalling problem persists everywhere. There are no statistics for counting materialistic presentations of Catholicism across the world. Alas! For if there were, the full scale of the catastrophe would become readily apparent.

### **Testifying to the Mystery of the Sacraments**

SOMETHING is desperately needed to counter ecclesiastical materialism like this. Plain, unequivocal testimony to the supernatural reality of the Sacraments is called for, which is precisely the sort of testimony that was once the norm in the Church. In our last chapter, we heard how the pre-Vatican II Church spoke unashamedly of the Mystical Body of Christ. And I turn, once more, to Ven. Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis Christi* as he declares how Our Lord has:

Provided in a wonderful way for His Mystical Body, endowing it with the Sacraments, so that, as though by *an uninterrupted series of graces*, its members should be sustained from birth to death.

. . .

Through the waters of Baptism those who are born into this world dead in sin are not only born again and made members of the Church, but being *stamped with a spiritual seal* they become able and fit to receive the other Sacraments.

By the chrism of Confirmation, the faithful are *given*

*added strength* to protect and defend the Church. . . . In the Sacrament of Penance a saving medicine is offered.

. . .

Nor is that all; for in the Holy Eucharist the faithful are nourished and strengthened at the same banquet and by a divine, ineffable bond are united with each other and with the Divine Head of the whole Body.

Finally, like a devoted mother, the Church is at the bedside of those who are sick unto death. . . . Through Matrimony . . . the contracting parties are ministers of grace to each other. . . . Through Holy Orders men are set aside and consecrated to God, to offer the Sacrifice of the Eucharistic Victim, to nourish the flock of the faithful with the Bread of Angels . . . and to *strengthen* them with all other *supernatural helps* . . . at the beginning of the Christian era, He supplied the Church with the means necessary to overcome the countless dangers. [Italics mine]

“Countless dangers” . . . “supernatural helps” . . . “stamped with a spiritual seal”! Here is the clear, straightforward language so lacking today. Here is a Church that refuses to kowtow to worldly sensibilities. *Kowtowing*. The word comes from China and refers to extremely deferential and submissive acts to authority. It is a word that sadly describes many Catholics today when faced with worldly sensibilities.

But now the need is urgent to refuse kowtowing like this. Love, love of humanity, demands no less. The Church needs to speak again as unambiguously as Ven. Pius XII once did.

For, until very recently, the Church always spoke in accord with the great Christian mystics and saints. And we do well to recall how the Saints spoke of the Holy Sacraments. For Maximus the Confessor

has said: “The Eucharist transforms the faithful into itself.” And St John Damascene writes: “The Bread of the Communion is not mere bread, but bread united with the Godhead.”

Going backwards in time, we have moved from Ven. Pius XII to the Fathers of the Church. But why stop there? Why not listen—really listen—to the words of Our Lord Himself?

Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed: and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him.

Need anything further be said? These words were more than sufficient for generations of Christians. And they remain so today—unless, that is, one joins the ranks of modern “historicists” who dismiss the Johannine Gospel as the “least historical” of the Gospels, whilst ignoring the tremendous font of inspiration this Gospel has provided for nineteen centuries. The authority of this inspiration should suffice to convince us that Christ is present in this Gospel in a unique way—even if “demythologizers” fail to see what is before their eyes. But the brilliant minds of the early Church wasted no time or energy on so-called problems such as the “non-historicity of the John Gospel.” They rendered the Gospel the veneration it was due. Thus St. Justin Martyr writing around AD 150—not long after the Johannine Gospel was finished (circa AD 100)—tells us:

For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Saviour was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food

which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and *by the transformation of which our blood and flesh is nurtured*, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus.

Thus the martyr Saint is clear. The transformed bread and wine of the Eucharist is sufficient to affect even the cells of the physical body! One might ask: How could it be otherwise? To participate in the Eucharist is to encounter Our Lord. And encounters with the Master of Love can certainly regenerate the cells of the physical body! Two thousand years ago, the lame were healed, the blind given sight, the dead were raised. Similar miracles have occurred ever since. Even in recent times, there are, for example, numerous well-attested cases of saints and holy people living entirely from Holy Communion, including Twentieth-Century stigmatics like St. Therese Konrath Neumann and Marthe Robin, who lived for decades on nothing but Holy Communion.

### **On Personal Sacramental Experience**

How richly we have been provided for! We have relatively recent teaching from the Holy See, the Church Fathers, and the words of Our Lord Himself. We have continued miracles down through the centuries. All this sufficed for earlier generations. Regrettably, tradition and miracles no longer suffice for many souls lost in the tangled thickets of historicism, psychologism, demythologization, deconstructionism, and further materialism. Living amidst this pathos, it may be necessary, sometimes, to communicate the Sacramental Mystery by different means.

Thus, I want to return to a very personal vein in speaking of the interior experience of the Sacraments—even if this is far from easy. Nonetheless, contemplative attention toward the Sacraments acting in

one's inner life may lead to important, even life-changing, insight. Certainly, my own ongoing participation in regular Confession and daily Communion involves feeling enlivened and succored in profound, indescribable ways. I depend on these Sacraments day-in, day-out. Moreover, it seems to me that if one turns one's attention inwards, paying careful attention to one's internal world, one may notice *subtle yet obvious sensations* in connection with the Sacramental life.

This may become particularly evident when the rhythm of daily Sacraments is broken, for example due to illness. For if the regular Mass-goer is attentive to his own interior experience, whilst receiving the Sacraments daily, and then compares this with being deprived of these Sacraments for a few days, a striking difference may become apparent!

At least, this testifies to my own experience. From inward attention over years, I speak, falteringly, of these subtle, yet clear, sensations of the Sacramental life. For I find myself with a set of delicate, yet repeated, familiar and precious experiences—which are admittedly hard to name. Although there have been times when the interior sensation is not so subtle. At times, there has been a distinctly palpable sense of *a difference* in my soul, even hours after receiving the Sacraments.

Yet how to convey this in *words*? Part of the problem here involves the fact that this soft Sacramental experience is unlike anything, which I knew outside the Church. That is to say, it has *no parallels* with my life-experience prior the Church, living in secular or New Age society. And it seems to me that most people outside the Church may have no parallel to the experience I struggle to communicate here. In other words, those who know the Sacraments may understand what I mean. For those who do not, my words may be next to useless.

To hazard an analogy, which is all-too-mundane, how would you

express the sensation of “appleness” to someone who had never tasted an apple? Perhaps you would say the apple is sweet? Perhaps you might describe a texture that crunches? But nothing you can say will convey the true experience of an apple. How much more difficult it is with the subtle, yet sacred experience of the Sacrament! One risks impiety even suggesting this metaphor!

Still, I have struggled for years to name the unnameable. What words to employ, when all words are useless? Yet over time, one word *has* occurred to me that seems to me a little useful. *Wholesomeness* (in the most beautiful sense of that word). One may feel something *subtly wholesome* is added to oneself through the Sacraments. There is also that word *peace*. In the modern liturgy, how banal these words often sound: “Peace be with you.” Yet in the Peace of Christ, there is nothing banal whatsoever.

Yes, one may feel an almost unnameable experience of wholesomeness and peace in receiving the Sacraments. The experience, however, is very fine and delicate, as I say. However, one may note it is often intensified after *receiving two Sacraments in short succession*. Here, I speak to an interior sensation, which may be felt when Confession is followed directly by Holy Communion. How often this impression of wholesomeness is distinctly marked then! This wholesome feeling of being cleansed by Absolution followed by reception of His Flesh and Blood can endure for hours afterwards. There may be times of waking the following morning and still feeling its imprint the next day. And frequently, on receiving the Sacraments, important inspirations and insights may be also gained. One may feel keener, more alert, particularly after receiving these two Sacraments together.

And there is yet another key to Sacramental experience that I would give: adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. How easily the modern sceptic dismisses this Catholic devotion as simply gazing at “a round piece of bread.” Yet how different is the experience of the

Catholic of Faith who allows the gentle power streaming from the monstrance to bring him ever more deeply into the silence. At least, this is what I have repeatedly found myself. I sit before the host, gazing, whilst the tension falls gently from my body. My face relaxes, then my torso relaxes. The silence deepens. Insights emerge in the silence. Yes, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament profoundly facilitates meditation, particularly, I find, up close with eyes open.

To my mind, all this subtle experience of the Sacraments has everything to do with that delicate, inner event that changed my life one autumn night in Cambridge, England. That night—in which I felt I would “thirst no more”—I tasted something new, almost indescribable. Yet, as I have said, it entailed a new humanness—committed and engaged—that stood at odds to my old aloof and detached Gnosticism. And, it seems to me, the result of receiving the Church’s Sacraments day in, day out, is a *deepening of what I first registered* that miraculous night in Cambridge. Through The Holy Sacraments, Jesus Christ, true man and true God, leads us ever more deeply into wholesome, authentic *humanness*.

At any rate, I find this subtle, precious experience elaborated in a remarkable passage by Valentin Tomberg. Tomberg ponders why experiencing the Eucharist is not *dramatic*—being, as it is, a meeting with Jesus Christ! Why are we not *bowled over* when receiving Holy Communion? Tomberg’s answer recalls the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, employing the hermetic symbolism of the Sun and Moon. Here the Sun corresponds to Jesus Christ, the Center of the Universe giving life to all. But the Sun may also blind, as St. Paul was blinded. And the Moon corresponds to the Church—as a means to reflect the Sun’s light, so that people are not overwhelmed by its intensity:

As the Sun—raying out light, warmth and life  
—“nourishes all beings and unites them in a community

of “nourishment,” so Jesus Christ functioned at the feeding of the five thousand as the “nourishment giving center” for the five thousand.<sup>1</sup>

Then the Moon is invoked to convey the Church—represented here by the apostles and disciples, as the first Priests of Holy Mother Church:

As the moon reflecting the light of the sun tones down the light in passing it on—so did the disciples . . . as they received from Jesus the bread, which he had blessed and passed it on to the people gathered there. They distributed it, that is: they toned down the creative stream of augmentation by handing it out in portions.

. . .

The disciples received and passed on the blest (eucharistic) bread, just as the moon receives and passes on the light of the sun in a dimmed, toned-down form. When one is talking of light, “dimmed, and toned-down” means not too dazzling,” it means bearable.

This mediating effect of the moon, which transforms the boundless streaming strength of the sun such that it becomes more individually acceptable, can also be understood in relation to the experience of the Sacrament of Holy Communion received at the altar. It is extremely rare for members of the church taking communion to be profoundly shattered or find themselves in a state of ecstasy, when receiving Holy Communion. Actually this should always happen, because the sacrament of communion is an inner meeting and unification with Jesus Christ, similar to the meeting, which St. Paul experienced on the way to Damascus which so shattered him that he

was blind for three days. What takes place however is a mild inner light, that arises in the people as a mood and works into a cheerful calmness. This mild light rather than an inner shock is the result of the merciful intervention and tempering effect of the moon-principle.

Also at the feeding of the five thousand, it was the disciples, who took up the mighty, enlightening, warming, life-giving force of the cosmic Word made flesh and passed it on as a “reflection,” i.e., they toned it down to the level of “refreshment and nourishment.” Thus the five thousand did not pass into a condition of ecstasy, but were simply refreshed and strengthened.<sup>2</sup>

Calm, cheer, mild light. Here is more that suggests the subtle Eucharistic experience. It can be felt as a gentle nourishment, renewing and strengthening, whilst not disrupting the course of ordinary life.

Still another means exists to identify the quiet Sacramental experience. As we mentioned, a striking difference can be noted when the daily Sacramental rhythm is broken. For an *absence* in one’s soul may be registered when one has not received the Sacrament. For some, a day suffices to feel the loss. But it becomes more obvious, when the absence of the Sacrament has been forced for several days—for example, due to illness. The loss may then feel particularly acute. Something may be felt as palpably *missing* from one’s life. At least, when I have not been in daily communion, I feel cut off—if only to a small extent—from the Church. And when I return, how I feel the relief of reconnection!

Continuing this very personal vein, dear Lector, I should like to speak of suffering. In most lives, there are occasions of great fear, desperation, and sorrow. How much I have been strengthened in these times by daily receiving the Sacraments! “Strengthened.” The same word is used by both Ven. Pius XII and Valentin Tomberg. And it is

absolutely true—you will be strengthened, as well as healed, by frequent or daily communion. For as Tomberg has also put it: “There is nothing in the physical world more holy and more healing in the deepest sense—than the bread of the Communion Service.”<sup>3</sup>

And so, dear Lector, if you are a Catholic and you suffer real burdens, but you do not know the healing and strengthening of daily communion, may I suggest an experiment? I propose that, after Confession, you receive Communion daily for an extended period, perhaps two or three weeks. You may also wish to seek out Eucharistic Adoration, letting yourself gaze into the Host and feeling tension dropping from your body. And if, during this period, you need to return to Confession, then do so. When this time has finished, review your experience. If your experience is like my own, your review could even reveal something of life-changing import. Although, if you *are* like me, you may not need this review! For the difference daily Communion makes to you soul may be all-too-evident!

But if indeed you are like me, dear Lector, you may find something difficult to bear. In our day and age, you may well need to suffer a Mass that seems lacking indeed—perhaps even a zany celebration of the new Mass, which afflicts your soul. (I think those who see no problem with the new liturgy are usually those who do not suffer it frequently!)

Yes, the celebration of the *Novus Ordo* is sometimes truly dreadful—even whilst Our Lord remains present within it. You may need to suffer if you have little choice as to daily Mass, as is often the case in rural settings. However, in the city, there may be a variety of *Novus Ordos* from which to choose, although it can be difficult to find good liturgy anywhere on Sunday. However, the weekdays may be different. During the week, you may find a noble Priest celebrating a simple twenty-five minute *Novus Ordo* with dignity and reverence. What gratitude is owed to such Priests for standing against the tide!

This being said, the ideal to my mind is the Extraordinary Form

of the Mass in Latin. For a world of difference exists between the attitude in most modern Masses and the spirit you will find in the prayers of the Latin Mass:

*Supplices te rogamus, omnipotens Deus, iube haec perferri per manus sancti Angeli tui in sublime altare tuum, in conspectu divinae maiestatis tuae; ut quotquot ex hac altaris participatione sacrosanctum Filii tui Corpus et Sanguinem sumpserimus, omni benedictione caelesti et gratia repleamur. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.*

Humbly we beseech thee, almighty God, command that these gifts be borne by the hands of Thy Holy Angel to Thine Altar on high in the sight of Thy divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most Holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Sadly, the Extraordinary Form remains often hard to find. However, dear Lector, I pray you do not scorn any Mass—no matter how dreadful the liturgy. And if you have not yet experienced the miracle of daily communion, I hope you can find a dignified daily celebration of the *Novus Ordo* that will cost little of your time, yet multiply riches in your soul.

### **The Sacrament as Moral Energy**

THE Eucharist, we have said, helps one to bear suffering. Bearing suffering—what does this really mean? What is it to really *feel* pain and carry it authentically? That is, without succumbing to temptations to deaden it by alcohol, drugs, entertainment, New Age platitudes, or a stoic “stiff upper lip”—and also without ranting or indulging in

morbid thoughts.

Truly bearing suffering involves at least two important things. First, it is to become ever-more compassionate: *being in solidarity* with all who suffer everywhere. For it negates self-pity, which is compassion restricted only to oneself. Authentic suffering has nothing to do with a “chip on one’s shoulder.” Second, authentic suffering means becoming stronger. How could it be otherwise? How could one *not* gain strength if one truly *bears* suffering, rather than denies it? And what does all this consist of—if not *moral development*?

All this has to do with the Sacraments. For the Heart of Christ calls us to bear the pain of this world, rather than deny it, detach from it, or transcend it. This requires moral courage. Yet Our Lord Jesus Christ knows, too, that our hearts are faint and thus pours out the Sacraments that our tiny hearts might draw from His.

Valentin Tomberg once called the Eucharist “moral energy.”<sup>4</sup> This simple two-word formula supplies a response to Les and Conor, who asked, earlier in these pages—*can one be moral without religion?*  
5

Now, in the past, I often answered this with a facile “yes.” I saw friends who were not religious but often seemed more ethical or sensitive than many Christians. Clearly, some degree of morality appears possible without religion—at least for some people, some of the time.

Yet how glib my answer seems today. What room for improvement exists in all of us! Every moment of waking life entails moral choice. Every instant, the soul may be either more or less morally vigilant. Thus, as a Catholic, I confess:

*quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo et opere: mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa* (that I have greatly sinned in thought, word and deed: through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault).

The *Confiteor* only states the obvious. Other souls are violated, to one degree or another, by our actions each day of our lives. Or they are deprived, to one degree or another, by our inaction.

These moral failures matter. Here is what the Heart tells us. In a fallen world, rent by unimaginable suffering, we are each called to be moral agents. The crisis of our times only heightens the heart's awareness of this eternal truth. On one side, we witness a soulless society, which is ever more atomized, impersonal, and mechanical, rushing headlong into materialism at the behest of mighty corporations. On the other side, we are menaced by ecological catastrophe. The Christian heart thinks to our children growing up in all this. Clearly, their vulnerable souls are inundated in ways entirely unprecedented in human history. They now have a steady—even relentless—diet of advertisement, TV, Internet, rock music, which restricts their horizons, whilst their education is stripped of the sacred. All the while, drugs, pornography, and violent video imagery stimulate human fantasy in hitherto inconceivable ways. Capitalism runs amok. Human souls become cogs in a gigantic global corporate machine.

What do I say to my old friends, Les and Conor, if I refuse glib answers? Most of us, it is true, do not pillage, plunder, or rape. But is this really enough? For every day of our lives we participate in a system of global exploitation that wreaks havoc on the poor and destroys the biosphere. Every day of lives, we love neither God, nor our neighbor as we ought.

With this in mind, I have mainly considered the Sacrament of the Eucharist in this chapter. However, a little must be added regarding Confession. Confession was first forgotten by Protestantism hundreds of years ago and it seems almost forgotten by liberal “Protestantized” Catholicism in the West today. But the West cannot afford to lose this miracle of absolution. Not only is the soul cleansed by confession, but *something else happens* as well. For in the Sacrament of penance, one

recognizes one's own individual failures ever more astutely, yet one also gains, slowly but surely, greater awareness of collective sin.

Now, ever-deeper awareness of human sin, both individually and collectively, might appear to be a grim, disheartening prospect. Yet here lies the true Sacramental miracle. For the Sacraments do not simply reveal one's heart of darkness—they then go further. They furnish *the moral energy needed to withstand and transform the darkness*. First absolution cleanses and renews, then regular communion heals and sustains.

Modernity denies the darkness of the fallen human heart, but modernity was stripped long-ago of the Sacramental medicine. Yet armed with the Sacraments, there is no need to deny one's blackened heart. There is neither need of Freud, nor positive thinking, nor a shimmering Aquarian dawn to relieve oneself of "Catholic" guilt. Instead, one confronts one's guilt, one confesses *mea culpa*—and one receives Sanctifying Grace, a furnace indeed of "moral energy."

How this clashes with the modern world's liberal and New Age dreams of "progress"! But this is the world that has rejected the Fall. And *it is also the same world that has refused the Sacraments*. The two things are not unrelated. For liberal and New Age denial of the Fall means rejecting the Catholic and Christian understanding of the guilty, dark, and broken nature of the human heart (e.g., by dismissing it as "Catholic guilt").

Yet it is the Sacraments that render the moral power to see and bear our culpability. Their "moral energy" helps to render us *realistic* regarding human fallenness. But facing moral failure without this "moral energy" to make amends is not easy. It is not surprising, then, that a desacramentalized world turns to things like psychotherapy to create freedom from guilt. Yet one cannot free oneself of guilt without God. Two choices confront us: to deny our guilt or to turn above, admit one's sin and ask for forgiveness.

What am I to say? My New Age friends genuinely seek to heal

humanity. If I were to tell them I have discovered a new therapy, a new form of holistic healing, a new meditation technique, they would listen with interest. But what if I say I have discovered nothing new, but rather something very old? What if I say it is more healing than anything I ever found as a New Ager? From long personal experience, the response is all-too-easy to imagine. I risk being judged as an evangelizer—proselytizing my belief system! No, I am forbidden to speak of my Catholicism with any passion. It is only New Age things that can be spoken of with enthusiasm. What a wonderful full-moon meditation that was! What a wonderful healing session I just had! What an incredible OM we just sounded together! But not what a wondrous Communion I just participated in.

But what can I say, when all my life-experience tells me this—that confession *does* cleanse the soul, that Valentin Tomberg *was* right to call the Eucharist “moral energy” and that the Catholic Sacraments *do* render something profoundly different to my old New Age cocktail of therapy, healing, and Eastern meditation?

Thoughts like this simply cannot be heard in the de-Catholicized West of today. Worse, Christian saints, mystics, and geniuses cannot be heard either. Yet innumerable saints—souls far more moral than the rest of us—still *craved the Sacrament*. Such was clearly true of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque who beheld His Most Sacred Heart. Reading that saint’s autobiography, one sees how acutely she witnesses her own inadequacy. Like so many Saints, she recognizes her sinfulness *viscerally*. Hardly any of us will ever recognize our hearts of darkness—at least this side of the grave—as St. Margaret Mary did. But very few will long more ardently than she to have their hearts made like unto His.

But Margaret Mary Alacoque was a saint. The rest of us have nothing like her strength. We possess neither the courage, nor the stamina to bear the full vision of our dark and broken hearts. Yet, even if one is not a saint, one may still aspire to a measure of humility

about our moral weaknesses, and our real need, then, for *help*. And if I may speak frankly here—I need all the help I can get! But I hardly think I am alone in this. Most of us are very much in need of all the help we can get.

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<sup>1</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–28.

<sup>3</sup> Valentin Tomberg, *Christ and Sophia: Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2006), 238.

<sup>4</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, 118.

<sup>5</sup> Pp. 85–86 in the present volume.

## The Catholic Mystery: Buried from Without

*One of us is repeatedly told that the Vatican is a “crackpot heartless Theocracy”—morally deprived of every human value.*

*One of us believes it.*

**I**N THE LAST CHAPTERS, we have tried to render *visible* the *Mystici Corporis Christi* in a world in which the Church becomes more obscured with every passing decade. But let us return our attention to the forces that have worked—and still work—to render the Church buried and invisible. For this book has told the story of a soul falling ever more deeply in love with Christ, His Church, and His Sacraments. And the more deeply the soul falls in love like this (and there are innumerable souls, across the ages, who fall in love like this) the more deeply that soul will grow aware of a terrible *disjunction*.

The disjunction I have in mind, is the chasm that now exists between the Church (which the soul has come to love) and the world of Secular Materialism (which no longer even understands the Church—let alone loves her). Souls in love with the Church will recognize, painfully, how clueless even the once-Christian West is today regarding the Church. And, feeling pained, such souls start to search. Questions burn in their hearts. *Why* does the world no longer understand what it understood so well in Christendom gone by? And what can be done about this heartbreaking ignorance? What, Lord, must I do?

The pierced heart cannot help but see the misery of this world and implore: *Where is healing to be found?* But the heart, which is not only pierced, but filled with Catholic Faith, knows there is nothing in this world that can offer healing like the *Mystici Corporis Christi*. It is not possible for the Catholic heart to cease from imploring, once these two things have happened. This is to say, once the heart really begins to *love* the gift of Our Lord in His Church and once the heart really begins to *suffer* the destruction of our secular age.

All around us, souls are swallowed up by materialistic civilization. Many of them are being lead into hell—whether it is hell in this life (the hell, let us say, of drug or sexual addictions) or whether it is hell beyond. For leaving aside the question as to the nature and duration of different forms of hell—whether hell on Earth or hell beyond—*hell exists*. And our civilization actively ensnares people in hell. For demons *are* at work in this world. And the work of demons *is* to ensnare. The disbelief, materialism, and hedonism of the post-Catholic West facilitates their work all too well. *Demons*. Liberal, materialistic forms of “Christianity” do not like to acknowledge them, preferring talk of pathological complexes, disorders, and so on. But demons are witnessed to in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and throughout the Tradition. They do not go away simply because we no longer believe in them! Instead, our non-belief renders them more freely capable to act.

Now, the true convert to the Church also starts to register another, related form of disjunction. Here the disjunction exists between the *riches* he experiences now and the *deprivation* he suffered in the past. The true convert remembers the poverty of his former existence and cannot help but shudder at the selfsame poverty he now witnesses everywhere around him in the secular world. For genuine converts, it is impossible not to care for the souls sucked into this secular poverty. Nor is it possible to ignore future generations of children growing up in this secular poverty.

## Buried in a World of Secularism

EARLIER, we tried to elucidate a little the historical roots of Secular Materialism. Now, we turn more fully to the present day. For centuries of denial have done their work. Iconoclasm now forms the marrow of our civilization. People in the Middle Ages were surrounded by a culture dominated by cathedrals, churches, stained glass windows, processions, prayer—which proclaimed the Central Mystery of the world. By contrast, the iconoclastic agenda of the last centuries has generated an all-pervading “surround sound” environment, which works “24/7” to divert souls from that Mystery. A visual, aural arena of a million books and newspapers and films and infomercials and tunes and tweets and blogs closes upon us. Entire populations are now *blanketed* by obscurantist ideology and propaganda, which thoroughly subverts the Catholic Mystery. Decent people cannot begin to glimpse the Church’s true nature, buried as it is beneath layers of prejudice.

Now, this tragedy is often poignantly experienced when souls, steeped in the love for the Church, find themselves talking with their friends, steeped in secularism. How the disjunction of universes becomes stark and visible at such times!

For how often such discussion becomes *hijacked*—forcibly dragged to the controversies engendered by the clash between the Catholic Religion and the Secular Creed. For adherents to this Secular Creed—often without the least consciousness they *do* adhere to a creed—frequently demand Catholics *account* for their deviation from this creed: “How do you defend your Church’s teaching on a male hierarchy or contraception? What about its homophobia?”

Such questions are asked, as though it were self-evident the Church must account for her “aberrations”—rather than having the least notion that it is a matter, here, of *possessing different creeds*: The secular world has one creed as to how things should be; the Church has another.

At such points, my heart protests: “But I am a Catholic! I do not subscribe to your Secular Creed! Do not presume I hold the same beliefs as your Secular Religion, which seem to me a half-conscious mixture of the Enlightenment and the post-Sixties revolution.” Yet this may incite still further hostility: “What do you mean Secular Religion? Everyone agrees—or should agree—about things like women priests and contraception. This is the Twenty-First Century! You Catholics are a scandal to the modern world.”

Clearly, terms like “the Twenty-First Century” or “modern world” represent a set of beliefs. And how often their adherents remonstrate against us “heretics” who refuse to submit. Enflamed controversies erupt because Catholics refuse to sign up—in toto—to secular dogmas. Such dogmas frequently concern life, sexuality, and gender. For the belief that abortion is morally acceptable is just that: a belief. The belief that homosexual acts are morally acceptable is just that: a belief. How many modern souls are *doctrinaire*—imposing doctrines without the least consciousness they even possess doctrines!

Frequently, these clashes with secular belief seem to represent the *sum total* of what modernity knows about the Faith. “Catholics: they’re pro-life and anti-women priests, aren’t they?” For often it is *only when* the Church defies the post-Sixties Zeitgeist that the general public gains the least inkling as to what Catholicism stands for. Thus, Catholics may find themselves harangued about contraception, abortion, homosexuality, and given marching orders to include female and married clergy in their Church. Do not mistake me, dear Lector. I am not suggesting these issues are unimportant. They involve matters of agonizing importance, which need to be addressed. Still, it is conspicuous how regularly these issues are raised to the *exclusion of everything else*. Few people today would seem to realize the Church amounts to much else besides these bones of contention.

Not long ago, I found myself conversing with a man, whose primary source of information was apparently television. Aggressively,

he pressed me on the controversies generated through secular media. He was uninterested in what the Church truly was, only in a highly-select range of issues—pre-selected, that is, by media elites and thus enflamed in his mind. But could he hope to gain any true answers without the least comprehension of the Church? I probed him. Did my interlocutor have any idea *why* the Church would face off against the modern world? Did he have the least inkling why She would *actively court* massive public disdain? Evidently not. When I asked, all I received were vague, confused mutterings about Vatican indoctrination and control. In his whole life, I doubt whether it ever seriously occurred to him there was anything more to it than that. There are many people for whom a simple little explanation suffices—particularly if it demands no serious expenditure of mental or moral energy. They prefer the life of automata, set in motion by the great currents of the media. The media is not interested in the central nature—the Mystery—of the Church. It simply feeds on the fodder of the kind of controversy that sells newspapers.

And so if Catholicism arises in ordinary conversation it is likely that attention will be *sidetracked* from the Church Herself to a few, isolated controversies: these “flashpoints” where She dares to defy the Great Secular Creed of our age. Thus, intelligent discussion regarding the Church becomes impossible, because the Church’s real nature has been *a priori* eliminated from the discussion.

And so it may never even occur to many people that human beings of painstaking moral gravity could actually exist within the Vatican. It never crosses many people’s minds there might be men and women who have, over a lifetime, brought everything they had to bear on the ethical issues of our day and saw *no other moral option* than to uphold traditional teaching. For such people, the Vatican is not filled with *serious* people thinking, and praying earnestly for the resolution to global problems. Instead, they seem to imagine the Vatican is simply filled with daff, old codgers, who just want to indoctrinate

people! My interlocutor may never have framed the thought in his mind as consciously as that. But in a fuzzy, uncritical manner, multitudes of folk make this kind of assumption: Catholic moral teaching boils down to nothing beyond a few feeble-minded reactionaries in the Vatican.

Sometimes, however, the assumptions are *not* fuzzy. My words are now being written in the aftermath of the 2010 Papal visit of Benedict XVI to the UK—a tour where militant atheists brandished the Vatican with terms like “crackpot” and “heartless Theocracy.” This, of course, provided further fodder for the media. Now, there are many discerning souls, who readily see beyond such ranting. But *what of those who cannot?*

For my interlocutor is hardly alone in his steady diet of television. He belongs to that vast legion of souls for whom it is *the media* that answers life’s profound questions. The post-1960s Secular Zeitgeist embodied in the media simply *has* to be right of course, omnipresent as it is in our modern existence. And many folk have little idea their cherished ideas DO belong, part-and-parcel, to that post-1960s secular Zeitgeist. They are not really conscious how many of their prized notions used to be unthinkable before the Sixties. Or if they *are* conscious, they remain reflexively certain it all amounts to progress.

We have already considered how, even in the recent past, it was unthinkable that freedom of speech included the “right” to splatter gore and graphic sex across society. Pre-Sixties Westerners considered it unacceptable—as they did many other things. Many people seem to forget that until very recently, centuries of tradition in many cultures—not simply Christian, but also Judaic, Islamic, Buddhist, and more—rejected manifold things that the modern secular world now accepts (or even demands!) without question. But why should all this be automatically wrong? And why should our worldview be automatically superior?

It would seem our own cultural superiority is all-too-evident. We, of course, live in an enlightened age of soundbites and reality TV. Our lives are replete with further technological dope, unknown before the Sixties. All this, of course, is to say nothing of *chemical* dope. Who can say how much our world has changed after the Sixties, due to the presence of *Tetrahydrocannabinol* and *Lysergic acid diethylamide* in our collective—and cultural—bloodstream?

At this point, the careful reader might accuse me of hypocrisy. I have derided the simplistic idea of “Vatican indoctrination.” Instead, I hold forth the notion of “media indoctrination.” Are things truly this simple? No, indeed. For the secular *Zeitgeist* is not without genuine idealism—just as noble values exist in the New Age. Throughout this book, I have tried to acknowledge such things. Whilst I believe media indoctrination plays an enormous role in widespread unconscious belief in “progress,” some people, at least, consciously recognize certain elements of genuine progress. For example, many readily recall how much racism and xenophobia existed prior to this era. They are, of course, right to do so. They are likewise right to celebrate every gain that secular society makes toward a more authentically human culture.

However, the automatic assumption of the superiority of the post-Sixties *Zeitgeist* is something else entirely. It is arrogance, plain and simple. And it is not right to hand authority over—*carte blanche*—to anything and everything that *Zeitgeist* demands.

### **The Act of Balancing**

REAL enquiry involves the art of carefully *balancing* different positions, before passing judgement. Alas! One finds little commitment these days to listening to both sides of the story. For example, one wonders how many people who oppose the Church on contraception have bothered an instant with *Humanae Vitae* and how many of them

simply run on a utilitarian auto-pilot, measuring morality in terms of units.

Still, whether one's ethics are utilitarian or not, whether one has rendered sixty seconds of attention to *Humanae Vitae* or not, whatever is genuinely noble in the Church's opponents must be recognized. Opposition to Church teaching on contraception (for example) may be one-sided, uninformed, and materialistic—yet still possess aching compassion for human suffering. Moreover, many of the Church's opponents are filled with a moral horror—not unjustified!—of tyranny in the Church's name over the ages. It is necessary for Catholics of Faith not to run on auto-pilot either. The act of balancing is demanded of us all.

For many today, the Catholic Church appears as *nothing but* horror and tyranny. It appears to be *nothing but* the mentality of the Inquisition, *nothing but* the campaigns that massacred other Christians (the Protestants and Cathars for example), *nothing but* the terrible intolerance that persecuted Jews and those it called witches. It is *nothing but* a Church forever tainted with colonialism and brutalities to indigenous peoples.

Catholics of Faith readily see the myopic reductionism of this “nothing but.” Still, it would be dishonest to claim that unspeakable massacres, sexual abuse, torture, and other atrocities have been absent from the Catholic past. Some things tragically mar the face of the Church that must never be forgotten. May St. John Paul II be an example for us here! For St. John Paul II so evidently loved the Church, yet he also repeatedly, courageously named the sins committed in her name, pleading for forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

What can one say? We are all fallen and this Catholic Church is, has been, and always will be composed of fallen souls. It is undeniable that fallen souls have committed atrocities and abuses in the past and no doubt will do so again in the future. However, it constitutes a great leap of faith to suppose the Catholic Church amounts to *nothing but*

these abuses.

How much naïveté permeates our present culture. How many people think it is fairly simple—a matter of the Church having sinned across the centuries and having discredited itself. Very rarely have these folk made serious enquiry into the complex, multifaceted nature of the truth here. This complex truth entails the fallen nature of the sons and daughters of the Church. It demands recognition that, at one time or another, the sons and daughters of the Church have inflicted every manner of physical and mental agony upon their fellow human beings.

Yet truth also demands acknowledging that the same is true for the entire human race! *Every one of us is fallen.* And amidst a vast collective of fallen human beings, there will inevitably be atrocities. And it does not matter whether it is the Catholic Faith or the Hindu religion. It does not matter whether it is the French Republic or the Soviet Empire or the American Empire. The great networks of human beings who spread out across the globe and across time will ineluctably manifest brutal behavior—at some point or another. All this must be held in balance, when considering the horror that has sometimes been meted out by the fallen members of the Church.

If one truly wants to confront the multi-faceted truth here, further factors must likewise be held in balance. Thus, one must recognize countless forms of charity inspired by the Church. How few people have any idea of the vast number of hospitals, clinics, schools, charities, shelters, efforts to address poverty, and more that the Church has brought forth across the centuries—and to the very ends of the earth!

“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.” So speaks Marc Antony in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. Such has long been the case with the global works of Catholic charity. But whilst the media rightly reports the filth of a twisted Catholic Priest, it has little interest for a missionary who clothes the naked and feeds the hungry.

Of course, this is to speak only of the corporal works of mercy—the Church’s astonishing physical care for the poor and afflicted. But what of Supernatural care? Think of the Sacraments alone—forgetting for a moment all the other prayers, devotions, healing relics, sacramentals, etc. How much more impossible it is to calculate the untold solace and moral uplift provided by these Sacraments! Yet those who judge themselves competent to judge Catholicism frequently have no idea what a Sacrament even is!

No matter to them. They are ready to judge things for which they possess not the least depth of knowledge. They are easily satisfied with images constructed from layer upon layer of media superficiality. These layers in their turn are usually based on secular ideologies constructed from Enlightenment philosophy—often half-digested and barely conscious at that.

### **The Secular Supposition of Original Innocence**

AS CHRISTIANS we must see this anger, even hatred, and try to understand. How many misconceptions surround the Church! Many are arrived at innocently. Some are generated with malice aforethought. Yet, taken by themselves, these are insufficient to explain the anger toward the Church.

For looking deeper, much of the anger toward the Church lies in the *collective denial of the Fall*. Such denial appears inevitable in a society gripped by Enlightenment currents. For the secular image of man in secular society is not based on Original Sin. Indeed, it seems to rest on an assumption, whether conscious or not, of something not unlike “Original Innocence.” How many of us imbibe a notion of an unspoiled, natural goodness, sans serious flaws, which purportedly exists prior to parental or societal conditioning. “We would be okay, if only society didn’t screw us up.” How many modern folk think like this!

Now, if you have an inherited belief system involving “Original Innocence”—even an unconscious belief system—it is *easy* to blame the Church. Because if you no longer allow for the Fall, which disfigures human nature from the outset, it is easy to conclude Christianity itself constitutes the problem! You may well fault Christianity or any other “type of cultural conditioning” to account for the darkness of the human heart. Yes, you may even imagine that an original, pure innocent human nature has been corrupted by religion! And so you single out the Church for blame.

There is a friend of mine. Let me call her Angilette. Hers was a childhood unusually horrific, terribly abused. Moreover, this abuse was not invisible to certain friends and neighbors of the family. I have heard Angilette express her agony and rage like this: “These people were Christians! Why did they do nothing?” How can those of us who have never known such abuse, even begin to comprehend Angilette’s betrayal? For “these people” may have been (hypocritical) Christians. But that is not all. They were fallen, as we all are fallen. Yet Angilette’s cry is not: “These were creatures of the Fall!” She does not blame the Fall. She blames Christianity.

Thus, if the emphasis is placed on Christianity—rather than the Fall—one may be unforgivably angry toward Christians forever. But things look different when the Fall is recognized as it affects everyone: Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, New Agers or members of the British Empire, the American Empire and so on—past, present, future. Neither should we forget here members of the great capitalist corporations of our times, who may be involved in third world sweatshops, the military-industrial complex, etc.

When I have spoken to people like Angilette of this, I do not want to exonerate Christians of their crimes. Rather, I think Angilette and others’ agony would be diminished with a deepened acceptance of the Fall. For a certain peace and sanity descend, when the reality of the Fall is acknowledged—and all that stems from it. We may better

understand all those who have ever hurt us and, indeed, all the great collectives—religious, national, economic, etc.—whose members have perpetuated evil.

But there are souls who writhe in anger, unable to accept the Fall. They appear possessed by a belief, not necessarily conscious, that human beings “aren’t supposed to be like that.” At any rate, one hears people amazed by human stupidity or cruelty. But what is this amazement? Why the *surprise*? It would seem they protest a reality, which was never communicated to them. Do we not see an angry sense of betrayal inside such people—like a child in a tantrum, stamping its foot and crying out: “Nobody told me! Nobody ever told me the human race was fallen!”?

Yes, everywhere one looks in our “enlightened” age, one meets this denial of the Fall. There is protest going on all the time, in all of us maybe. Perhaps the psychotherapists are right: There is a lingering anger that our parents were far from perfect. But from the Christian perspective, this is simply because our parents, too, were fallen, dark and broken in their hearts.

But it was not simply our parents, but their parents and theirs and theirs. The human race commits horror after horror. And it is all-too-conveniently forgotten that vast collective human enterprises everywhere have rivers of blood on their hands. The Roman Empire, the British Empire, the French Empire, the American Empire. Vast collectives such as these harbor great cruelty—*inevitably*. At least, that is what you will conclude, if you do not deny the Fall.

But in the realm of Secular Materialism, how often one hears that *religion* lies at the root of all the great wars. And how frequently it is forgotten religion had nothing to do with innumerable atrocities. How conveniently we forget that Europeans came to America and Australia in search of wealth and territory, killing the aboriginals, who stood inconveniently in their way. How easily it slips from recollection that, in the last century alone, neither world war had anything to do with

religion. And neither were the ambitions of Stalin or Mao religious—who exterminated tens of millions. The Twentieth Century was the *most genocidal* of all centuries—and yet at the same time, it was the *least religious* of all centuries.

Hatred of the Church is inextricably bound up with denial of the Fall. *Sober* understanding is lacking in regards to a Catholic community of *billions* of souls, spanning millennia. For sober understanding acknowledges that, given these circumstances, atrocities, however terrible, would seem inevitable. They are terribly inevitable, given the reality of the human condition, given the span of time involved, given the sheer numbers of Catholics who have lived and died, across nearly twenty centuries.

Yes, many hate the Catholic Church. But how many *hate* the French Republic—for example—even if its *ideals* of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were promoted through genocide? Certainly, many a Frenchman today detests the Church, whilst he celebrates *Bastille Day*.

Voilà. A few little snapshots of how we remained conditioned by ideology derived from the Enlightenment. Relatively few people know Rousseau's philosophy these days, but we remain profoundly influenced by Enlightenment figures like him—thinkers who held our original nature to be pure and uncorrupted. Earlier, I invoked my educated friend, Les, who was fascinated by the *novel* notion that human nature might be inherently flawed. And he had no idea this notion was once universally held in the West. And now I have invoked Angilette's anger toward her Christian neighbors. Neither Les nor Angilette realize how indebted they are to the Enlightenment, I think. But they represent multitudes, who, even if they have never heard of Rousseau, still receive his legacy, reiterated, as it is, in a massed array of magazines, newspapers, chat shows, blogs, pop tunes, tweets, and all the rest. They unconsciously affirm the articles of the Enlightenment simply because that is all, or nearly all, they have ever

been exposed to.

Now, long ago, one man spoke very clearly as to the sheer menace this endless reiteration of the Secular Creed poses to the Church. Unsurprisingly, he was frequently dismissed as a crank and polemicist. Yet, back in 1929, Hilaire Belloc was acutely awake, decades before the explosion of modern media:

The principle of blindly accepting . . . authority . . . runs through the whole base affair and binds it into one: Fashion, Print, Iteration, are the commanders abjectly obeyed and trusted. . . . This proceeds from *mere assertion based on something hurriedly read or heard*.

[With] the acceptance of false authority . . . the “Modern Mind” *takes for granted without examination* a number of first principles—as, for instance, that there is a regular progress from worse to better in the centuries of human experience, or that parliamentary oligarchies are democratic, or that democracy is obviously the best form of human government, or that the object of human effort is money and that the word “success” means the accumulation of wealth. Having taken these things for granted, without examination, it goes ahead cheerfully under the illusion that its opponents have the same ideas.

. . .

Why is this mood so dangerous to the Catholic Church? . . . It inhibits men *from so much as understanding what the Faith may be*, and bars the action of a true authority by the unquestioned acceptance of the false; we can see it doing that every day before our eyes.

. . .

There is *nothing more inimical to the Faith* than this abandonment of thought, this dependence upon . . . *mere printed affirmation, and . . . the brute effect of repetition.* [Italics mine]<sup>2</sup>

Here is grave danger to the Faith, amplified a thousandfold today. Belloc, moreover, talks of the modern mind “cheerfully under the illusion that its opponents have the same ideas.” The song remains the same, even now. Here is why Catholics must account for their deviations from what people cheerfully suppose to be a shared creed! “How do you defend the Church denying women priests or contraception? What about the Church’s homophobia?” *Ah Monsieur Belloc, cher ami de mon coeur, plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*

### **Buried by the New Age**

HERE is how attitudes and ideologies generalize across the world—at least, a world stripped of tradition and filled with soundbites. Much the same is true of the New Age, which so often moves in lockstep with modern liberal society. For New Age-ism tends very much to share the secular supposition of “Original Innocence.” And, like the secular world, it considers tradition and authority passé.

As we have seen, the New Age, like the formerly Protestant culture from which it stems, reflexively excludes Catholicism from its “universal” scope. Clearly, Protestantism has been working for centuries to bury the Catholic Mystery. And the New Age may continue in the same vein—for centuries perhaps. Who knows? Five hundred years from now, we may still be dealing with the descendants of Theosophy, in the same way we are still dealing with the

descendants of the Reformation today.

Unlike Protestantism, however, New Age obscurantism could menace the very future of Christianity. I say this, knowing firsthand what it means to be completely blinded to Christianity by the New Age. What would my former self think of me today? He would think I had gone mad.

Allow me, dear Lector, to insert a little flight of fancy at this point—*science-fiction*, even. Here I imagine I have travelled back through time to 1996. I have also found fantastic technology to utterly change my appearance. Perhaps rather than corpulent, I now appear rakishly thin and roguishly handsome! Thus, technologically disguised like this, *Roger Buck 2016* encounters *Roger Buck 1996* and engages him in dialogue. All the while, *Roger Buck 1996* is thinking: “Who is this crazy Catholic?” Still, he decides to give this poor, deluded soul his empathetic attention:

**RB 2016:** There is *more*, I tell you.

**RB 1996:** Of course, there is more. There is always growth, development, and evolution. There are further stages of psychological integration and even—in esoteric language—initiation.

**RB 2016:** What *more* there is, will not be found on these roads of psychotherapeutic integration and esoteric initiation—but in something else altogether different.

**RB 1996:** And where might this “more” be found, then?

**RB 2016:** It will be found in a direction deliberately *buried* by your so-called “holistic universality.” I speak of the Church—where you will not look.

**RB 1996:** And why should I look to the Church?

**RB 2016:** You are broken. Tiny and fallen, in ways you cannot credit. That so unfashionable thing called “sin” blackens your heart. You do not have the strength to bear this—so you deny it.

But there are the Sacraments—He *gave* us these.

**RB 1996:** *Sacraments?*

**RB 2016:** The Sacraments will not only give you strength, they will cleanse and liberate you.

**RB 1996:** These Sacraments—I suppose you will say they are dependent on an institution, hierarchy, or centralized, patriarchal system—full of dogma. It is high-time we moved beyond all that.

**RB 2016:** So speaks your own dogma. I cannot emphasize to you enough how much you *need* these Sacraments, nor how much I *need* them...

**RB 1996:** Are you not in danger of becoming attached, *dependent* on these Sacraments? What about some detachment, here?

**RB 2016:** But mine is not an *Eastern* way of detachment. This very question betrays the *deeply oriental* slant to your “universal spirituality”—whether you know it or not.

But I am not an oriental. I do not seek detachment! I am *attached* to Christ and to His Church—but not enough! Still not enough! Let me attach myself further!

Let me not *fear* to confess—I *need* thee Lord and Thy Church.

**RB 1996:** (suppresses an inner groan): I am not surprised you feel so needy with an outlook like this! It strikes me as pretty dour. Are you not in danger of becoming negative, with all your emphasis on sin?

**RB 2016:** Negative? But the Catholic Mystery has given me *joy* in confessing with *relief* that I am broken. And there is no need to pretend I am anything else.

How very often—if not always—New Age spirituality involves pretending we aren't fallen. What can come of this, save *pride*? You don't know it, friend—but you are aloof and arrogant. I see nothing, which can show you the way out, save what He gave us—the Sacraments of His Holy Church.

**RB 1996:** Please—give me a break!

**RB 2016:** The Sacraments give me the grace to confess my fallenness. The Church taught me how to *kneel*. There is a sacred place you do not know yet, called Paray-le-Monial. It is unlike anything you have ever seen, neither at Findhorn, nor Dornach, nor Glastonbury. People have the *humility* to kneel there.

**RB 1996:** And why do you *need* to tell me this? The modern world wearies of your proselytization. Perhaps the Church needed to proselytize in the past, but there is a New Age now.

**RB 2016:** Are you telling me there is no New Age

proselytization? That you New Agers do not proselytize—relentlessly? Didn't you just announce that we are in a New Age? Didn't you just assert your *belief* the Church belongs to an old era?

**RB 1996:** Go on...

**RB 2016:** Can anyone avoid proselytizing, I wonder? Does not capitalism proselytize that salvation is to be found in material satisfactions? Does not secular society proselytize its values: Abortion is fine, the hyper-sexualization of culture is fine, the elimination of traditional values is fine.

**RB 1996:** I will grant you this—I never looked at it quite like that before.

**RB 2016:** In time, you will. In time, you will.

But you have asked me another question: *why*. Why I need to tell you this? Here is my answer. The more I weep for the world, the more I see how the world *buries* what most is needed. I would speak to New Agers—because more than many people in the world today—they are less caught up in materialism. They sense a spiritual reality beyond this materialistic society.

Yet their conceptions of this spiritual reality are channeled, limited, and conditioned by *oriental, Theosophical thought-forms*—to put it in your esoteric language.

How would I have thought of my future self? I would have dismissed him as an outmoded relic of the Piscean Age. However, like other New Agers, my 1996 self is unconscious of his choice to

*exclude*. He neither realizes how tight and specific his New Age-ism is, nor how much he has rejected everything else beyond its confines. Now, one can certainly choose the New Age, if one wants to. One can even ridicule religious traditions with terms like “Old Age,” “antiquated,” or “medieval,” if one wishes. But one cannot then turn around and claim to be universal.

No, *a decision has been made*. It is a (usually unconscious) choice to say “yes” to one thing and “no” to another. We all make such decisions. And we all *include what we agree with*. And at the same time, we *dis-include what we do not agree with*.

Are teachers of New Age spirituality more holistic and inclusive than the Pope? If I took a straw poll at Findhorn asking this question, I guarantee the Pope would lose by a wide margin! Indeed, I suspect one would need to poll hundreds, if not thousands, of New Agers before the Holy Father received a single vote. But the New Age teacher is only inclusive in as much as he includes what he agrees with. And it is the same with the Holy Father.

However, there is a difference with the Holy Father. For generally speaking, recent Popes are far more respectful of different religious traditions than New Agers. Certainly, there are no modern Popes who criticize other religions the way New Agers criticize Christianity!

Yet the Catholic Mystery is increasingly buried by New Age aspirations to replace intolerant and judgmental “old-age” religions. Of course, so-called “old age” religion like Catholicism *is* intolerant of what it *does* judge to be morally evil. In my experience, the Catholic Church is far less tolerant than the New Age of unfettered global capitalism, for example. The Catholic Church is intolerant of things one ought not to tolerate.

But let us return to the sobering prospect I invoked earlier. There is no reason to suppose New Age ideology will prove ephemeral. Its pernicious effects may continue for centuries. The New Age phenomenon has grown enormously in the last three decades I have

known it. Whilst we lack scope to *document* this growth, sometimes even a single image can speak volumes. Some years ago, I visited the largest bookshop in Europe, *Waterstones* in Piccadilly, London. Here was a vast mainstream emporium, selling books on an unimaginable range of topics. Hence, it might be reasonably taken as a *mirror* of sorts for modern Britain.

In this mirror, I saw four *gigantic* bookshelves devoted to Christianity. Across the same room, however, I found and began to count, one, two, three... 30 *equally gigantic* bookshelves devoted to “Mind, Body and Spirit”—the literature of the New Age movement. This is a very personal and approximate image, but it nonetheless suggests a ratio of 30:4—30 to 4 seeking spiritual meaning through “New Age-ism” as opposed to Christianity.

Such things lead me to regard once-Protestant England as the leading New Age nation in the world. My personal experience of America and German-speaking countries likewise suggest these formerly Protestant nations might be “runners up” to Britain. But Britain deserves the “New Age crown.” From its stronghold in the world-dominant Anglosphere, New Age thinking has made enormous strides in recent decades. For I still recall the early days of the New Age subculture. Back in 1980, the movement was relatively invisible. For example, “holistic” literature was hardly found in mainstream bookshops, back then! Thirty-five years ago, I lived an hour outside London. In those days, it was necessary to visit specialist bookshops around London to find New Age texts. Outside the great metropolis, such books were scarce. No longer! A vast shift has occurred.

Some Christians—including many liberal Catholics—insist it is all fairly harmless. They argue one should be encouraged by at least some sort of religiosity in the New Age—which is preferable to rising agnosticism, atheism, and materialism. The argument is understandable. When I was still a liberal Catholic, I regularly argued the same thing myself. But my liberal Catholic heart was not as

pierced as it is today. It seems to me the liberal Catholic heart is often insufficiently pierced. For although it *is* pierced by social injustice, it seems scarcely bothered by the “holistic” negation of Christianity. Instead, what seems important to Liberal Catholicism is the same “tolerance” professed by Secular Materialism. This tolerance, however, often amounts to little more than a lazy attitude of “Can’t we all just get along together?” In other words, whilst Liberal Catholics are concerned by the *material suffering* engendered by global poverty, hunger, and injustice, frequently they seem barely awake to *spiritual suffering*. Yet profound spiritual suffering attends a world that is ever more stripped of Christ in His Sacraments. But, generally speaking, Liberal Catholicism hardly seems to care whether this sacramental encounter is preserved for future generations or not.

Catholics face a terrible challenge, if we *care* about our children. For if the New Age to Christian ratio in places like Britain has reached something like 30:4 in the last few decades, we might ask what that ratio might be in another few decades? 60 to 4?... 60 to 1?! Anglophone Britain is a bellwether for the West. Her influence has been enormous in recent centuries and may increase still further as English becomes ever more the world language.

### **Buried by a Protestant Legacy**

IF in the modern Anglosphere, Catholicism is submerged by Secular Materialism and New Age-ism, it was different in the past. Formerly, the Catholic Mystery was buried by Protestantism. At least, in those countries where Christianity was “reformed,” Catholicism became prey to countless stereotypes, active repression, and worse.

Nowadays, in nations like England, Protestantism appears to be rapidly dying-off. Still, an obscurantist Protestant legacy pervades the Anglosphere. This book, of course, rests on precisely this: how my own Anglo-American heritage utterly obscured the Catholic Mystery

for the first thirty-four years of my life! I am hardly alone. Countless English-speaking folk will never glimpse the Catholic Mystery, interred, as it is, by their culture—a culture shaped by the Reformation.

How clear this all became when I went to study theology in a Welsh Anglican college. By that time, I was a Catholic and had privately studied thousands of pages from Catholic texts. But in Wales, I experienced, once again, an acute *disjunction* of worlds. Marked disparity existed between the theology I knew from personal study and the theology at my college! For although my course claimed to teach Christianity, what was offered was not Christianity *per se*. It was only a Protestant version of Christianity—and with very little consciousness of the fact.

Thus, a lecturer once suggested that Christians (and not simply Protestants) held to salvation through faith alone. Or a Calvinistic tone became evident whilst the theology of the Fall was presented (as if Christianity itself held that human nature were completely corrupt—and not simply Jean Calvin!). Continually, then, I heard things to this effect: “Christianity holds X to be true,” or “According to theology, we see that Y means.” But how frequently X and Y were *not* common Christian theological understandings, they were simply Protestant understandings. The entire universe of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy had completely been forgotten!

Yet Catholicism and Orthodoxy span the globe from Tierra del Fuego to the vast steppes of Russia. Taken together, these Churches account for close to seventy percent of global Christianity. In other words, pre-Reformation traditions still represent the *dominant* form of Christianity on the planet—albeit not the Anglosphere. This was Britain, however, and a British “minority report” of Christianity was presented as though it were Christianity itself! My teachers frequently seemed entirely unaware they spoke for no more than thirty percent of global Christianity.

Their horizons, moreover, were not simply limited to Protestantism, but something even more restricted: *liberal Protestantism*. So it was that an Anglican professor dogmatically informed me my belief in the Virgin Birth was by no means essential to Christianity! This same professor laughed out-loud when an evangelical Protestant in my class suggested the devil existed and should be taken seriously! Evidently this professor represented a small, narrow stream of Christianity—one that excludes the Virgin Birth or Satan *a priori*. Whence, his evident *faith* that Satan's existence or the Virgin birth is unnecessary to Christianity? It would seem to be the *faith* of Bultmann, that liberal pioneer, who boldly declared Christianity must be “demythologized.”

Liberal visions of Christianity first arose in the Protestant sphere. Whilst preparing this book, I sought the exact definition of *liberalism*. The word's meaning has several—often confused—variants. Amongst several definitions my dictionary provided, I found this: “a movement in modern Protestantism.” Catholicism was not mentioned. Liberal “demythologized” theology has clear Protestant origins.

Whilst Catholics have now wretchedly imitated their Reformed predecessors, it nevertheless took generations before Catholicism finally succumbed to these temptations. Prior to Vatican II, the Catholic Mystery protected against the growing materialism of “demythologized” Christianity. Well into the Twentieth Century, Catholicism steadfastly refused liberal Protestant theology. But after the Catholic Church Herself began “protestantizing,” liberal Catholicism then took root everywhere.

The roots of liberal Christianity can be discerned in the Reformation's destruction of tradition. Our Lady, for example, was “demythologized” hundreds of years ago. And throughout the ensuing centuries, the work of stripping down Christianity never ceased—until rational and learned Protestants ended up with a “demythologized” Jesus who was little more than a “great moral teacher” (or even a

“non-historical Jesus,” who never existed)!

Here reductionism reaches the final stage: it becomes *negation*. Today’s negation of Christianity began with the reductionism of the Sixteenth Century. For the Reformation reduced the whole of Christianity to *sola scriptura*. But the process did not stop there. In so much academia today, Christianity is reduced to the faith of Bultmann. That is to say, not simply *sola scriptura*—but *sola scientia*. The Gospel is interpreted in the light of “science alone.” Here is why miracles like the Virgin Birth must be eliminated.

Thus in Britain, Germany, America, and elsewhere, theology students are no longer taught Christianity. They are only given a provincial interpretation of Christianity—provincial in time as well as culture. Everything beyond the last few decades of academic liberal Protestantism is unconsciously factored out. And teachers like mine are teaching the next generation of teachers! They were, in their turn, of course, taught by previous generations with the same blinkered mentality. Thus, the blinkers are perpetuated, generation upon generation.

This is not to say the reverse would not be found in Catholic cultures. Had I been taught theology in Madrid, for instance, I might have found little comprehension of Protestant Christianity. However, I am not addressing this to the good people in Madrid, but mainly my fellow Anglophones to say: Let us beware of being culture-bound!

Throughout the English-speaking world, we are blinded to *global* Christianity. One finds indications of this everywhere in Anglosphere media, such as this telling sentence I once found in *Wikipedia*: “As with all ancient Anglican churches, the diocese was once . . . part of the then mainstream of western Christian tradition, the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>3</sup>

But is not the Catholic Church *still* the mainstream of Western Christianity—indeed Christianity itself? Did it ever cease being the mainstream? No, it did not, at least if one’s perspective is global

rather than provincial. But we Anglophones remain marinated in centuries of Protestantism and so we forget. But enough of this heartbreak for now, which remains external to the Catholic Church. Because now, it is my sorrowful duty to turn to the sorry state of affairs *within* the Church Herself

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<sup>1</sup> Luigi Accattoli and Jordan Aumann, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpa's of John Paul II* (New York: Alba House, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals*, 109–11.

<sup>3</sup> “Culture of the Isle of Man,” accessed May 31, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture\\_of\\_the\\_Isle\\_of\\_Man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_Isle_of_Man).

## XVI

### The Catholic Mystery: Betrayed from Within

*One of us is embarrassed to be a Catholic.*

*One of us approaches the Altar of God to the strains of  
Pink Floyd.*

*One of us disobeys the Holy Father in sheer horror of  
these things.*

**A** GRAND AMBITION would appear to be at work in the modern era. It aims to draw the final curtain down on the Catholic Mystery. It longs to either efface the Catholic Church from the world or at least render Her so anodyne as to be scarcely recognizable as Catholic. For if one studies the history, particularly the hidden history, of the last centuries—particularly since 1789—one plainly sees relentless effort toward a goal. That goal entails burying, obscuring, and diminishing the Church—at every turn.

At least, anyone studying Western history since the French Revolution can clearly see the Church's authority growing weaker with every passing decade. Now, if you remain within the confines of liberal academia, dear Lector, you will find all kinds of “natural” explanations for this mounting secularization. You will read much about the Age of Reason, Globalization, multiculturalism, and the liberation of innumerable new perspectives. You will hear how this created “breathing space” for the theories of Freud, Kant, Darwin, and all the rest. There is no denying the truth in these things and I have evoked

many of them myself

But is it sufficient to confine oneself to liberal academia? I can only say that, for myself it seems hardly sufficient at all. And if you dare to go beyond these confines, you can find ample evidence of occluded forces that have worked for two centuries toward precisely this: a Church rendered impotent. Indeed, you can even read it in old Papal encyclicals, where Popes, like Leo XIII, openly warned of Masonic forces destroying the Catholic faith.<sup>1</sup> Here we can do no more than hint, having no scope for this tortured topic. Yet sometimes it is important to hint.

Yet, in recent decades, a more tragic process can be discerned: perfidy within the Church Herself. The burying of the Catholic Mystery is now abetted from inside. Terrible division in the Church has resulted, which one is tempted to call a war between those wanting preserve the traditional faith versus those who wanted to remake the Church into a piece of the modern world.

### **In the Wake of Vatican II**

TO UNDERSTAND this, we must now turn in-depth to the matter of the Second Vatican Council. For the Church's present turmoil erupted only after Vatican II. None of this means to lay the blame at the foot of the Council. The roots certainly run deeper. They lie within the liberal, iconoclastic trajectories we have repeatedly considered here, from the Reformation and the Enlightenment onwards. They are the selfsame sclerotic sources of Secular Materialism.

For, as we have noted repeatedly, materialism and liberalism are inextricably intertwined. Liberalism emerged from the Enlightenment, creating new priorities: reason took precedence over revelation, empiricism over faith, equality over hierarchy, liberty over duty toward God. Speaking symbolically, one might style these things as *the prioritization of the horizontal*. Here the vertical—the transcendent—

becomes diminished (or even eliminated) in favor of that which is *flattened*: horizontal and plain for all to see.

For what is science without aspiration toward that which *transcends* science? It is the horizontal stripped of the vertical. What is equality without respecting those who exceed us or set higher cultural standards? It is the horizontal stripped of the vertical. What is liberal license but to say and do anything and everything, sans reverence for God's Law? It is the same.

But the Cross does not prioritize the horizontal above the vertical. *It unites them both*. In the Christian ideal, science and faith coexist; equality and hierarchy coexist; liberty and duty toward God likewise coexist. But the Cross—the coexistence of the horizontal and the vertical—has been tossed aside by the “enlightened” liberalism of recent centuries. This liberalism has, moreover, discarded the Judeo-Christian understanding of Original Sin. It holds forth, instead, a bright, sunlit optimism in humanistic progress, sans need of Grace from above. All this forms the “building blocks” of the new world materialism.

But starting in the Nineteenth Century, materialistic liberalism began to invade Christianity itself. We have already mentioned Bultmann, who could not conceive of the miraculous and spared no effort to “demythologize” Christianity. Men like Bultmann begat the liberal Protestantism that has since gripped contemporary academia. In time, liberal Protestants were followed by a new breed of liberal Catholics. Few of these were as radical as Bultmann or quite so beholden to scientific materialism. Still, a new spirit of liberal Catholic theology emerged during the Twentieth Century. This new spirit proceeded slowly at first, invisible to the great majority of Catholics. Nonetheless, it began to exert a stultifying grip in Catholic academia.

By the 1950s, new theologians began to publicly call Catholic tradition into question. Some of these became guiding forces at Vatican

II—men like Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Karl Rahner. Such men not only busied themselves with demythologization, they also proclaimed a new spirit of acquiescing to the modern world. Accommodating modernity started to replace the old Tridentine counter-culturalism.

Here, I can do no better than return to Valentin Tomberg. To my mind, few people have ever penetrated the contemporary crisis in the Church as presciently as he did, writing in the 1960s. We have already proffered Tomberg's reflections concerning the "Judas Kiss" of demythologization. Tomberg saw the danger of the new liberal theology in a prophetic way. And he had more to say regarding the "kiss of Judas" at Vatican II:

It happened that the "second Pentecostal miracle" hoped for and prayed for by the Holy Father—the proclamation by the World Council of a deepened, elevated and expanded treasure of Church revelation—was replaced by a policy of "keeping in step with the times." The Council did not reflect the timeless inspirations of heaven, but rather *the earthly needs, complaints, wishes and demands of the age* [Italics mine]. It became a sort of religious parliament with a "progressive left," a "conservative right" and a "moderate center." Thus people spoke of a "democratization" of the Church, now breaking through. The "world" remarked with satisfaction: the Catholic Church is moving closer to us; yes, just a little while and it will be part of us—the Council exudes a "fresh wind," the wind of a free and modern spirit!". . . A fresh wind did indeed blow from the Council. It blew up such problems as the abolition of the celibacy of Priests suddenly become pressing; the problem of mixed marriages with those another faith; the problem of acceptability of the "pill" and

other methods of contraception; the problem of “demythologization” of the Holy Scripture and of tradition; the problem of the Mass, in the sense of abolishing Latin as the liturgical and Sacred language and the substitution for it of many other languages and many other problems associated with conforming to the spirit of the age.

. . .

The “fresh wind” of the council was not the wind of the Pentecost miracle in the Church but a wind blowing out of the “world” into the Church—through a portal which had now been opened. It was not the effect of the Church on the world, but the effect of the world on the Church. Against the will and hope of the now deceased Pope John XXIII and of his successor, Paul VI, it happened that the Second Vatican Council became a door which opened to the world, but in such a way that the “world’s wind” blew into the Church. The Council for which Pope John XXIII prayed did in fact fail; it failed . . . to guard the “portal” where the way begins which leads to degeneration, to exhaustion, and to death (*hades*)—the “way of the world.” This failure to guard the threshold the portal opening up to the “way of the world” . . . is nothing else and can be nothing else but the way to death.”<sup>2</sup>

Yes, Tomberg sounded the alarm, early on, during a time when the vast majority of Catholics rejoiced in the Council. Such Catholics included, for example, Joseph Ratzinger—one of Vatican II’s liberal pioneers. But as time passed, many started questioning their initial jubilation. Increasingly, they echoed Tomberg’s grave concerns regarding the Council’s fruit. Thus, twenty years after the Council,

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger would declare:

What the Popes and Council Fathers were expecting was a new Catholic unity, and instead one has encountered a dissension which—to use the words of Paul VI—seems to have passed over from self-criticism to *self-destruction*. There had been the expectation of a new enthusiasm, and instead too often it has ended in boredom and discouragement.

There had been the expectation of a step forward and instead one found oneself facing a *progressive process of decadence*, that to a large measure has been unfolding under the sign of a summons to the presumed “spirit of the Council.”

. . .

Real reform of the Church presupposes an unequivocal turning away from *the erroneous paths whose catastrophic consequences are already incontestable*. [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

In hindsight, Tomberg’s voice seems prophetic to many Catholics today, who likewise recognize the wind of the world blowing through the Council. Sometimes, this wind has been simplistically identified as “The Spirit of Vatican II.” That is what Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger means by the “presumed ‘spirit of the Council.’” Such catchy phrases are simplistic, however, inasmuch as they fail to represent the Council Fathers’ consensus. For example, it is commonly mooted that dropping Latin for the vernacular in the Mass was mandated by Vatican II. Yet the Council document on the liturgy actually calls for the preservation of Latin!

Rivers of ink have spilled out in the controversy as to how much Vatican II endorsed the innovations that followed it (e.g., the New Mass or *Novus Ordo*) and how much the innovators claimed support from a purported “spirit” of the Council. Here is yet another battlefield in the great war that bitterly divides Catholics today. Great indeed has been the commotion. For decades now, vast amounts of Papal effort has been consumed simply in “damage control.” We cannot enter into exhaustive exegesis of the controversy here, Lector. Yet Tomberg’s image of an ill-wind dovetails neatly with another report from Father Malachi Martin. For many years later, Father Martin called this wind a *hurricane*, leaving an immense trail of destruction in its wake. Moreover, Father Martin identifies not one wind, but rather *two*, the second of which produced an eerie ecstasy amidst the wreckage:

Put yourself in the position of a born-and-bred city dweller setting out for work on the route you have used every morning for . . . years. . . . All is so unexpected, so predictable, so reassuring, that no matter what the noise . . . all of it ensures your peace of mind. Around that well-known corner, it will be the same as it always was. This is what you assume unconsciously.

. . .

But picture yourself turning that corner and being suddenly seized from behind by a blasting high wind that comes from seeming nowhere and in its hurricane passage shatters buildings, leveling some of them, throwing people about, littering pavements, uprooting trees. . . . This is a change so total, so abrupt, so irresistible in fact, that you no longer know where you are, where you’re going, what is happening.

[Then] another high wind interlacing with the first

comes screaming incoherently around your ears and . . . seems to affect most people around you with a sort of ecstatic joy. . . . So eerie is the effect of the second blast that even in all the violence and turmoil, the most disorienting thing of all for you is the strange euphoria of expectation.

. . .

A bizarre element of this disturbing euphoria is the way that people begin to talk, whether amongst themselves or to God. They seem in an instant to have learned a new language . . . with pop-up, pre-fab concepts: “Don’t worship vertically! Worship horizontally!” “Whatever helps creative growth toward integration!”

. . .

Wild questions assault you. . . . Why was there no warning? . . . Why is everyone so euphorically confident about the future? Is their joyous leap forward into darkness . . . informed by their instinct for the divine? Such a scenario wild and surreal as it seems is barely enough to convey the completeness and the suddenness of the change and the strange euphoria that overpowered Roman Catholics.

. . .

For an entire traditional way of religious life and practice was seemingly killed off that suddenly without warning. A centuries-old mentality was flushed out in a hurricane of change. In one sense, a certain world of thought, feeling, attitude, ceased to exist—the old Catholic world centered

on the authority of the Roman Pontiff . . . the frequentation of Mass, Confession, Holy Communion; the Rosary and the various pieties and devotions of parish life; the militancy of the Roman Catholic laity in defence of traditional Catholic values. That entire world was swept away, as it were, overnight.

. . .

Suddenly the universal Latin of the Mass was gone. Stranger still: The Roman Mass itself was gone. In its place, there was a new rite . . . said in a babel of languages, each one saying different things. Things that sounded un-Catholic. . . . That the new rite was a community supper, not an enactment of Christ's death on the Cross; and that Priests were no longer Priests of sacrifice, but ministers at table serving guests at a common meal of fellowship.

. . .

[With] the blast of euphoria, there arose [the] idea that the future of Catholicism . . . was now somehow brighter than ever before. What seemed a shambles was really a vast pentecostal renewal under way; the real Church of Christ was about to emerge in all its beauty and truth.<sup>4</sup>

Martin makes clear, however, that the truth was the precise opposite. For he reports how Mass attendance entered freefall, plummeting by 30 percent in the United States in ten years, 50 percent in Italy and 60 percent in Holland and France. Within the next ten years, 85 percent of Catholics in Holland, France, Italy, and Spain no longer heard Mass. The number of seminarians collapsed. In the small

country of the Netherlands alone, 2000 Priests and 5000 Religious left their posts. During a twelve year period from 1965–1977, between twelve and fourteen thousand Priests across the world requested to be released from their vows or merely abandoned them. From 1966 to 1983, sixty thousand religious sisters abandoned their convents. Catholic conversions, according to Martin, were reduced by two-thirds.<sup>5</sup>

Something Martin does not cite is the falling rate of confessions. It is widely recognized, however, that, after Vatican II, individual confessions fell—*precipitously*. In many parishes today, regular confession is scarcely known at all. This is grave, for the cleansing purification of absolution was undoubtedly a *key* factor in the dynamism of the pre-Vatican II church. But let us return to Father Martin:

A clamor arose in favor of the use of contraceptives . . . of divorce and remarriage within the Church, of a married clergy, of women's Ordination, of a quick patchwork union with Protestant churches, of Communist revolution as a means not only of solving endemic poverty but of defining Faith itself

. . .

A flood of publications—books, magazines articles, bulletins, newsletters, plans, programs, and outlines—inundated the popular Catholic market. The experts questioned and reinterpreted every dogma and belief traditionally and universally held by Catholics. Everything, in fact, and especially all the hard things in Roman Catholic belief—penance, chastity, fasting, obedience, submission—were subjected to violent, overnight change.<sup>6</sup>

Let us add that even church buildings transformed. For now the Sanctuary was no longer reserved for the Priests, now that kneeling was discouraged, now that the old altars and altar rails were repudiated, another trend emerged—toward wrecking churches. Statues were cast out and destroyed—like a new Reformation. Tabernacles were relocated from their central positions to less noticeable corners. And when new churches were erected, traditional styles were eschewed. In a penetrating book, *Ugly as Sin*, Michael S. Rose explores how *embarrassment* crept into constructing new churches—lest they appear “too Catholic” or insufficiently ecumenical and “inoffensive” to the modern world. Thus, Rose tells of the rise of an anodyne round window, subdivided by an equal armed cross. Such windows—it could be claimed—still featured a cross. Yet it was not *the* Cross: i.e., distinctly, identifiably Christian.<sup>7</sup> Instead, it appeared no more “offensive” than a simple *plus sign*.

### **Toward Becoming a Clone**

MICHAEL S. ROSE is right. Suddenly Catholics seemed embarrassed to be Catholic, different from the world. During the 1960s, immense destructive ambition was unleashed, which aimed to eradicate everything setting the faith distinctively apart from secular society.

Thus, the attitude became prevalent that the “problem” with Catholicism was that it was too closed-off or even hostile to modernity. The Church, it was said, had developed an overwrought “fortress mentality” in recent centuries: like a castle under siege against reformation and revolution. But there was no need to be defensive. Was it not clear modernity had been right all along in its bright, optimistic regard to humanity? Was it not clear people could find their own way now—if only they were liberated from “unnecessary legalism”? Was it not high-time that the Church surrender its antiquated “medieval prattle” regarding such “unedifying

matters” as Original Sin, Satan, and the frightening reality of hell? In short, were the 1960s not a new *springtime*?

Father Malachi Martin is right: A “strange euphoria” gripped the Church in the 1960s—as it gripped much else in the West during that peculiar era. Benedict XVI recalled something of the same on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican II:

We were happy—I would say—and full of enthusiasm. The great Ecumenical Council had begun; we were sure that a new spring of the Church was in sight, a new Pentecost with a new, strong presence of the freeing grace of the Gospel.

We are also happy today, we hold joy in our hearts but I would say it is perhaps a more measured joy, a humble joy. In these 50 years we have learned and experienced that original sin exists and that it can be evermore expressed as personal sins which can become structures of sin. We have seen that in the field of the Lord there are always tares. We have seen that even in Peter’s net there were bad fish. We have seen that human frailty is present in the Church, that the barque of the Church is even sailing against the wind in storms that threaten the ship.<sup>8</sup>

“We have learned that Original Sin exists.” But there is only one way Christians can *learn* Original Sin exists—and that is if they first *forget* Original Sin exists! But when even Christians forget the human heart is corrupted by sin, the consequences are not hard to predict.

Such Christians will see little danger in liberal emancipation from “useless” old conventions, laws, and taboos. They forget those conventions, laws, and taboos were established in an altogether different context from their bright, Enlightenment optimism. They

were forged in a world that still apprehended the Fall. A world that still apprehends the Fall is a world that still appreciates the need for traditional safeguards. But liberal euphoria no longer appreciates such things. And there is something else it fails to appreciate. Benedict XVI identifies it clearly above: “The Church is even sailing against the wind in storms that threaten the ship.” But liberals seldom regard the threats to the Church from the wind of the world.

Excess of optimism is key to understanding the 1960s reforms. And excess of self-satisfaction must be recognized as well—because for two thousand years, Christian saints and geniuses saw Original Sin running through the dark recesses of the human heart. They recognized the legions of evil at work in the world. They recognized *temptation*.

From all this, Christian tradition forged effective guardrails, preventatives and warnings. But then came “the spring of 1968” and people “knew better” now. “Knowing better,” they no longer required “antediluvian” safeguards like frequent Mass or Confession. They no longer needed warning about perdition. They no longer yearned for the manifold Catholic prayers and devotions that preserved the human heart from corruption. Thus, it became “obligatory” to abandon not only “outdated” concepts of sin—but also the “siege” mentality, which separated the Church from the world. At least, many people took St. John XXIII’s *aggiornamento*—Italian meaning literally “bringing up to date”—to indicate such a course.

In practice, this meant the Church should become rather less like Herself and rather more like other modern institutions. This attitude was clearly noticeable regarding Protestantism. For example, bitter conflict raged around the matter of the Blessed Virgin. Karl Rahner led something of a crusade against traditional emphasis of Our Lady at the Council—for the very reason that it would prove unpopular with Protestants. How often since the Council has devotion to Our Lady been scorned for reasons of “ecumenical sensitivity”!

However, this is hardly the only way the Sixties’ Catholic

Church “protestantized” Herself Clearly, the *Novus Ordo* owes much to Protestant influences. The new orientation of the Priest facing the people and speaking in the vernacular is self-evidently closer to Protestant worship than the Catholic practice of centuries. And the *Pater Noster* now concludes with the doxology: “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.” Whilst this doxology is admittedly ancient, its sudden injection into the Catholic Mass was undoubtedly influenced by wishes to reflect Protestantism. And, as we will continue to see, there is much more to suggest that Michael Davies was entirely right in saying: “The intention of Pope Paul VI in compiling his *new* missal appears to have been to *conciliate* Protestants.”<sup>9</sup>

It might be added the chief architect of the *Novus Ordo* was a certain Archbishop Bugnini—a man later surrounded in allegations of Freemasonry—who was mysteriously, radically demoted by Paul VI in 1976. Bugnini spoke openly of “sacrificing terms and concepts” in the new liturgy for the purpose of aiding “in any way the road to union of the separated brethren, by removing *every stone that could even remotely constitute* an obstacle or difficulty” [italics mine].<sup>10</sup> It is not without reason, then, that Joseph Ratzinger, the man who became Benedict XVI, once expressed concern, lest the Catholic Church become a *clone* of Protestantism.<sup>11</sup>

But liberal Catholicism does not stop at cloning Protestantism. Clearly, a great liberal ambition exists to clone secular institutions as well: more democratic, more decentralized, more populist, and decidedly less hierarchical. Hans Küng has even opined that the Church might emulate England’s so-called “glorious revolution” of 1688 whereby the (Catholic) king of England, James II, was deposed in favor of an anti-Catholic constitutional monarch. Küng has indicated the Pope might thereby be retained as a mere figurehead in the Church, the way the English monarch is a figurehead today. Not everyone is as radical as Küng—although many are (whether they say so openly or

not). Yet a clear ambition to remake the Church into another manifestation of Secular Materialism remains woefully apparent.

### **From the Mystery to the Mundane**

WHILST subtle materialism gains ever-greater credence in the Church, so much that is distinctly Catholic becomes sidelined. Nowhere is the situation graver than in the attitudes toward the Eucharist. Following the Vatican Council, there was a widespread tendency—again, in ecumenical deference to Protestantism—to recast the Mass as a happy communal gathering, rather than the unbloody Sacrifice of Our Lord. Yet the Last Supper is hardly a simple happy affair. It is a scene of cosmic tragedy: the Son of Man betrayed by a kiss. That tragedy leads directly to the Sacrifice of the Crucifixion. Prior to Vatican II, the Church was united in its understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice. No one disputed that the Mystery of the Mass lay in this: that in a non-bloody way, Jesus Christ still sacrifices Himself to feed us His Body and His Blood.

In the past, the Church was *undivided* in proclaiming Her central Mystery. Today's Church is far from united in such proclamation! Following the Sixties' reforms, the concept of the Holy Mass became exchanged—in many people's minds at least—for something banal indeed compared to the ongoing cosmic sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In other words: The Eucharist became *trivialized*.

Feeling the horror of this, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre established his Society of St. Pius X. Our intent here is not to justify or condone everything Marcel Lefebvre did. But let us be clear: Archbishop Lefebvre acted as he did, because his heart was broken—broken by the innumerable abuses he witnessed. Whilst traveling in Chile, for example, a Bishop came to Lefebvre's attention, who smoked a cigarette whilst celebrating Mass—because if the Mass is now a happy family meal, why should one not relax and have a smoke? The Bishop

moreover celebrated Mass like this on television for everyone to see and emulate.

Such travesties, however, are hardly confined to Latin America—they are found everywhere! How I suffered in Spain, whilst the *Sanctus* was sung to the tune of the Beatles' *Help*. And in France, I witnessed *Pink Floyd* played for the Communion antiphon. But even sans glaringly inappropriate pop music, how frequently the new hymns are dissonant with the Supernatural Mystery happening at the altar. Many such hymns evolved in a Protestant complex. They were then adopted by Catholics, as the Church attempted to reconcile Herself to the Protestant communities. In a low Protestant context, these hymns may be entirely appropriate. But the Catholic Mass is not such a context. It is the ongoing cosmic sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### **Liturgical Abuse: Dissonance becomes Hypocrisy**

HENCE, dissonance exists. There is discord between what the words of the Mass mean and the manner in which they are celebrated. This is because the words of the Holy Mass are *prayers*. But so often, the modern Mass is far—very far—from being prayerful. In catechesis (or what passes for it) the dogmas may be acknowledged in a cursory fashion, but frequently they are not taken seriously.

Put another way, the modern Church *says* one thing—but *does* another. In the contemporary vernacular, the Church does not “walk the talk.” For if you read the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Lector, you will certainly find that the Mystery of the Church remains present there (even if you think its language tends toward an ambiguity that is less clear and direct than in the past). But at the grassroots level, what dissonance exists! At the local celebration of the Holy Mass, you will frequently find little or nothing to indicate the Catholic Mystery is recognized at all—let alone venerated!

There is terrible discord, dissonance, and disparity. What is it *to*

*say one thing and do another?* It is *hypocrisy*—at least when it is conscious. But, to be charitable, in many cases, there appears little awareness indeed. No clear intention exists to betray the Mystery of the Church. All this frequently happens quite unconsciously. There are sincere Christians aplenty, who do not consciously seek to make a mockery of their Faith. Still, they frequently tolerate the dissonance between the Mystery and a mundane mockery of the Mystery. That dissonance is *not without effect*. The effect is to lose credibility. Because people—whether individually or collectively—who say one thing and do another are not credible.

As common as liturgical abuse is, the situation is not omnipresent. Across the world, innumerable sincere Priests work in fine parishes, which are not at all hives of subversive activity. A world of gratitude is owed to these Priests who celebrate the modern Mass with reverence and dignity.

Indeed, I risk injustice to many good Priests and laity, for I highlight the worst abuses. I focus on a very concerted, liberal faction of the Church, which carries on conscious, yet undeclared, warfare with those who upholding Catholic tradition. Between the two groups, however, exists a large grouping of sincere Christians, who—alas!—are less than awake to what is at stake.

Sadly, my travels across Europe (and America) have confirmed that liturgical abuse is far more widespread than many souls readily appreciate. Dear Lector, if your God-given lot has been the happy fortune of spending long years in a single, sincere parish with a reverent Priest of the *Novus Ordo*, you may not even realize just how bad things truly are in the wider Church. You may even ask: Why all this fuss?

My own God-given lot has been different. This lot has been to travel, from one country to the next, from one parish to the next, seeking out daily Mass. Years of daily Mass in innumerable settings have yielded the often-sorry experience of thousands of Masses in

English, French, Spanish, German, and further languages besides. All this has been wretchedly instructive. It becomes all-too-clear how the *Novus Ordo* readily facilitates liturgical abuse.

### Zany Catholicism—and Worse

FOR centuries, both Priest and congregation faced the same direction at Mass *ad orientem* (to the East) to welcome Our Lord's arrival on the altar, like the rising of the sun. No doubt the Priest's direction enabled him to pray all the more intensively. Now, facing an "audience" it is far easier to become distracted from prayer. Temptation frequently becomes all-too-great. Now, the "audience" must be *entertained*. The Priest *ad-libs* or even feels he needs to play comedian. Jokes must be cracked. Holy Mass must be made accessible to the world. Modern music must replace Gregorian, Baroque, or humble, pious hymns. Out come the electric guitars! Let us harken to the strains of *Pink Floyd*, as we approach the altar of His Sacrifice.

A profound disjunction—no, an abyss!—opens out between the true, holy meaning of the Mass and the way that Mass is celebrated.

How many abuses can be witnessed when one travels, going daily to Mass in many parishes. Priests as stand-up comics; Priests who seek to be the star of the show; Priests who can barely conceal their trivialization—even active disdain of the Sacrament. In Switzerland, I heard of a Priest recommending prolonged "Eucharistic *fasting*" to his flock! In France, I have assisted at Mass seated around something that looked like a large boardroom table. And the Mass was said in like fashion. The Priest kept asking questions, as though it were necessary to consult the fellow members of the board. And a *Bishop* of France grinned inanely during the Mass, whilst tapping his *crozier* to a rock beat.

And I have witnessed even worse. I recall one unhappy parish, where a newly-appointed Priest initiated open warfare with his

sacristan. The sacristan and her old friends in the parish tried valiantly to maintain their traditions. But their new, ultra-liberal Priest played one dirty trick after another to undermine them. The sacristan was dedicated to the Divine Mercy devotion and the new Priest openly confessed to me his utter revulsion for St. Faustina's spirituality. In his eyes, it represented an appalling return to the past. He even tore up the sacristan's literature before her eyes. Eventually, the sacristan abandoned her parish, broken-hearted, and found a Latin Mass community instead.

All this is just one man's own personal experience! Surfing the Internet one finds untold further reports of things like: "Clown Masses" (with the Priest dressed as a clown); an Easter bunny Mass (the Priest concelebrates with the Easter bunny, who hands out chocolate); a *Doritos* Mass (the Priest attempts to consecrate tortilla chips instead of bread); coffee, *Mountain Dew* and *Kool-aid* Masses (the Priest attempts to consecrate beverages other than wine); a *SpongeBob* Mass (where a figure of *SpongeBob Squarepants* looms prominently in the sanctuary during Mass); a ventriloquist Mass (the Priest celebrates the Mass with a ventriloquist dummy) and a cheesehead Mass (the Priest wears what appears to be a block of cheese on his head). Can these reports be really true? Tragically, I find no reason to doubt them, Lector, and I have seen photographs of every one of them on the Internet—with dates and locations provided. Something is terribly, terribly wrong in the post-Conciliar Church.

Many who speak of liturgical abuse fall into abusive language themselves. The temptation is understandable. One must be careful, because ranting will never help anyone. But having the courage to mourn aloud may yet help. Thus, I share my tears with you, Lector. As Catholics, we witness immense tragedy in the Church. For the sacramental rivers of Grace that might sustain humanity in our arid, secular time have become buried. They have not run dry—but expertly concealed from parched souls whose thirst might otherwise be

quenched. No, the Catholic Mystery is not gone. It remains. It is there and yet hidden beneath layer upon layer of zany mediocrity. Once the Mystery was signaled by the reverence of the Priests, by the solemn beauty of the liturgy, by gestures of devotion and piety. Now, one is now obliged to hunt and search for it. It should surprise nobody that countless souls give up the hunt early—or never even think to search—because for decades now, Catholics have seen people standing rather than kneeling to receive Holy Communion; they have heard mediocre muzak rather than Sacred music; they have listened to bland sermons by Priests who were frequently embarrassed to appear fully Catholic for fear of appearing ecumenically insensitive or politically incorrect.

### **A House Divided Against Itself**

AGAIN, a clear *disjunction* can be found everywhere there is contemporary Catholicism. Dissonance exists between the desire to resemble the world and desire for the Catholic Mystery. What matters is not only how this disjunction expresses itself (e.g., sacred versus secular music or a reverent theology versus a ridiculing one) but also that *the Church is being torn in two*. What can be expected of a house so divided? Has not Our Lord Himself already answered this question, clearly?

If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. . . . No man can enter into the house of a strong man and rob him of his goods, unless he first bind the strong man, and then shall he plunder his house. (Mark 3:24–25, 27)

*A strong man.* Once the Church was a house of strength—the strength that comes with *united* conviction. And *this* Church was filled with treasure, which included its liturgy, dogmas, traditions,

prayers devotions, and sacramentals—and all the piety these evoked in faithful hearts. Today, that house is divided and enfeebled.

The demand went out: The Catholic Church must become more like us. And as the Church succumbed to this temptation, the strong tradition of the pre-Vatican II Church was arrested, bound, and fettered. As a result, the Catholic house has been plundered. In the aftermath of the Sixties' revolt, all manner of treasure vanished from the Church—quite literally. For old artwork, altars, statues, and more, which were deemed too traditional, were cast out from the Sanctuary. One finds them now on eBay.

None of this has done anything in fifty years to resolve the Church's problems. The Church remains weak, very weak, and will continue to remain weak, whilst She is divided against herself. And there is no guarantee She can continue to stand in the world, debilitated as She is, by the ongoing quasi-schism within Her bosom.

But this tragic set of affairs should make one thing evident, at least. If the Church has become enervated through division and dissolution, then the solution requires concord and unity. But *which* kind of concord and unity? For liberal Catholics likewise hope for a united Church. They want to see the present conflict ended with a new, transformed Church, which would “complete the work of the Council.” For they believe the problem lies in this: The “spirit of Vatican II” is not yet fully implemented. Whilst I was still liberally-minded myself, I visited an enclave of “progressive” Catholics in Ireland, who expressed their hope for future reform. At Vatican III, it was said, there will be married Bishops; at Vatican IV, married Bishops—with their husbands. This was said with the air of jest, but it expressed the clear aspiration of liberal Catholics for a united Church—united around *their* consensus: If only the Church could fully adapt Herself to modern secularism, casting off Her “archaic embarrassments,” then what good She might do for the world!

All this, of course, begs numerous questions. Throughout this

book, we argue secular currents foster and sustain contemporary materialism. Can a Church that uncritically adheres to the same values that have led to the present materialistic impasse ever hope to be a force for good? Moreover, can such a Church be truly *Catholic*? And could it ever *unite* around values, which have always been alien to Her fundamental nature?

The answer is *no*. For the so-called “spirit of Vatican II” tried to inject Enlightenment values into the Church. And the Enlightenment—whatever virtues it may have exhibited—remains inextricably entangled with a rationalism, reductionism, and empiricism, hostile to Christian revelation.

The result is that the Church now suffers from something analogous to *diplopia*. Diplopia is an optical defect in the eyes, where the images formed on the two retinas are so dissimilar that the eyes cannot coordinate them. What results is *double vision*. For the Church now suffers *two competing visions*, where previously it saw only one. Now, there is low Christology versus high Christology. Now, there is demythologized Christianity versus Supernatural Revelation. Now, there is the vision of a new, liberal, worldly, democratic Church versus the Church of tradition, authority, and hierarchy. The list goes on...

The liberal Catholic who has studied the last fifty years must admit—if he is honest—that the attempt to adapt Catholicism to liberalism has divided the Church. Can the *honest* liberal Catholic really hope to establish Catholic unity by demanding the Church further abandon Her roots—indeed her essential nature?!

After half a century of conflict, any honest analysis must conclude that unity cannot be achieved this way. In the 1960s, it was different. Back then, no doubt many souls believed accommodation was possible between the traditional and liberal elements within the Church. Many no doubt felt the cataclysmic changes then would be sufficient to appease those of a modern persuasion. Many no doubt hoped that, through compromise, liberals and conservatives might

become united. For the conservatives in the Church did indeed take *immense steps* toward meeting the liberals. The Catholic Church transformed Herself almost overnight in a fashion completely unprecedented in two millennia of history!

But has this mighty transformation proved sufficient for a reconciliation? No. How I recall a liberal Catholic friend telling me the so-called “spirit of Vatican II” would need to be a “hundred times” stronger in order to render the Church acceptable to him. Such an attitude is hardly unique. No, the Church is still not sufficiently liberal for the modernizers. They feel that further compromise, further concessions are urgently required. Here is the cry of so-called “progressives” everywhere. Modernity demands ever more from the Church: less hierarchy, more democracy, women priests, ever-fewer restrictions on sexual behavior, and more. The Church must jive to the modern beat and accept divorce, contraception—even abortion and a non-celibate gay clergy. All this is deemed simply necessary now. The post-60’s *Zeitgeist dictates* that the traditional wisdom of centuries is *passé* at best. At worst, it is considered unjust, repressive, psychologically damaging, and things still more heinous.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., *Humanum Genus*, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, 123–24.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 29–30.

<sup>4</sup> Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Linden Press, Simon and Schuster, 1987), 244–47, 249.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 247–48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>7</sup> Michael S. Rose, *Ugly as Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces and How We Can Change Them*

*Back Again* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001), 100.

<sup>8</sup> “Benediction Bestowed By His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Upon Participants In The Candlelight Procession Organized By The Italian Catholic Action,” accessed May 31, 2016, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2012/october/d\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20121011\\_fiaccolata\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2012/october/d_xvi_spe_20121011_fiaccolata_en.html).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Davies, *Liturgical Shipwreck: 25 Years of the New Mass: 1969–1994* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1995), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Jason A. Roberts, *Reasons for Resistance: The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church Speaks on the Post-Vatican II Crisis* (Jacksonville, FL: Queen of Martyrs Press, 2013), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 182, 211.

## Seeds of Hope

*One us seeks to be faithful.*

*One of us seeks to be mindful.*

*One of us seeks mystagogia.*

**W**E WOULD SEEM to sketch a bleak trajectory in this book. For we have taken a course of centuries, whereby the world fell deeper and ever deeper into sclerotic materialism. Today, the Christic Mystery has become so darkened that many people's only hope of respite from soulless modernity lies within New Age neo-paganism. And now the disease in the soul of the world is registered in her biosphere—the body of the world. And yet the calcifying processes of Secular Materialism only continue to accelerate.

What hope is there? The only hope I have, dear Lector, lies with the Holy Church. But in the last chapter, I have presented a bleak picture of the Church—one where She appears not only terribly divided and weakened, but also marginalized and incapable of creatively engaging Western civilization.

Alas, the Church has not known such abject division since the Reformation. Perhaps one must go back further to the even-more fundamental Arian crisis in the Fourth Century to witness something comparable to the present trauma. The Church was likewise, then, torn asunder by two opposed visions. On the one side, the Arians held that Our Lord was simply a creature—made by the Father, but neither equal to Him, nor One with Him. On the other side, there were those who recognized the Word was not created, but rather consubstantial

with the Father. Appalling division raged for decades. However, the Church eventually united, proclaiming that the Word of God was *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero* (God from God, light from light, true God from true God).

We see, then, the Church has been weak and divided before—and *She has recovered*. Indeed, She has not only recovered, but *rebounded*. When the Church re-united following the Arian Crisis, She spread out across the face of Europe—from the Sierra Nevada to the Urals. A thousand years later, the Church—ruptured by the Reformation—appeared on the verge of disintegrating, She rebounded once again. For the mighty Counter Reformation impulses of the Jesuits, amongst others, fostered a renewed zeal, strength, and unity within the Church, which carried Her to the far corners of the earth.

The Church faces a dark crisis in our days. It appears, at least, that She has become ever more de-sacralized. And for many, She appears as irrelevant as the dodo. But God sent great saints in the past to restore His Church. St. Athanasius and St. Anthony of the desert came at the time of the Arian crisis. St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Margaret Mary Alacoque were sent by God to heal the Church from the wounds inflicted by the Reformation. The Church has weathered mighty storms indeed. But after two thousand years, She is still standing, because God has never abandoned Her and never will.

All this should furnish us with hope for the future. Even so, what we say remains cursory. To find greater hope, one would need to enter into the history of the Church in a manner much more intensive and profound. Now, I frankly confess that such a task is beyond me at this point. However, one man, it seems to me, did indeed enter into these matters with tremendous intensity—and he has left us a luminous passage, which has long yielded me light and hope in the darkness. Thus, I would like to quote this passage at considerable length. For if you are like myself, dear Lector, and you suffer daily the tragedy of the Church, you will find yourself in need of hope and courage. And, in

terms of this tragedy, nothing I have ever read has helped me as much as the following words, wherein Valentin Tomberg ponders both the degeneration and regeneration of Christianity:

The natural operation of the degeneration process is from time to time interpenetrated by supernatural impulses of regeneration. The operation of degeneration . . . can be made clear with the help of the following example from physics:

Imagine an impulse of energy which causes a kind of swinging motion. This movement will sooner or later deplete itself, that is, it will of necessity gradually lose pace and come to rest, unless brought into movement again by a second impulse of energy. The system of repeaters operating in long distance telephone connections serves precisely the task of bringing the decreasing strength of the vibrations up to its original level. In this manner the audibility of the human voice is carried on over thousands of miles. Analogous to this is the law which governs every movement set going by an impulse—every movement which we call “*fashion*,” every movement in politics or in the sphere of world-conceptions. All movements of a social, political, artistic, intellectual, and religious kind may indeed have different speeds of devolution, but one thing they have in common: if no reinforcing impulse is given after a certain time, they will inevitably exhaust themselves. A thing of motion or of life becomes a corpse unless “*reawakening impulses*” intervene. Impulses of regeneration, however, do actually intervene.

. . .

Thus, it was the spoken word of Jesus Christ heard by his disciples, it was his miracles which they witnessed, it was his Passion and Resurrection at which they were present, which made them into his disciples. However, it needed the event of Whitsun (the pouring out of the Holy Spirit) to make them into apostles. The event of Whitsun was the first reinforcing impulse, or we should rather say “reawakening impulse,” which turned Christianity from a local happening in Palestine into a worldwide human concern of the first order. What economic, political, social, national, or psychological causes . . . could cause and “explain” the Whitsun event? From which source in the visible world did the power stream which transformed a handful of men belonging to a Jewish sect into a spiritual world-conquering movement? Whence their sureness, their energy, their success? The event of Whitsun was the intervention of an impulse which brought Christianity onto the level of the original impulse of the Son of God becoming man. It was the first renewal impulse or “reawakening” . . . of Christianity.

. . .

The event of Whitsun was the first of a sequence of reawakening impulses which has kept Christianity alive through nineteen centuries. For example, let us consider what happened in the Fourth Century at the time when the Church entered into an alliance with the Roman Empire and the influence of the latter became paramount. It was as if a dark cloud covered the sky. It even came to a point when the center of Christianity itself—Christ himself as the Son of God made flesh—was to a large extent veiled,

and Arianism for a time achieved almost complete dominance. Then a strong fresh wind scattered the clouds and the sun of Christ as the Son of God shone forth again in the heavens as faith. Not only a Pleiad of great believers (with St. Athanasius at their head), and holy hermits such as St. Anthony of Thebes (the friend of St. Athanasius), and great Priests such as St. Ambrosius and St. Augustine, were the fruit of this spiritual wind, but also—and especially—the Council of Nicaea with its wonderful creation of the Nicæan Creed.

...

Further interventions of reawakening impulses out of the [supernatural] sphere . . . were brought by spiritual movements which culminated in widespread religious orders, or in their renewal. The impetus which underlay the great millennial-old mission of the Benedictine Order was the third intervention of reawakening after the Whitsun event. It was the Benedictine Order which fashioned the bridge from the Christian culture of antiquity across the barbaric floods of the folk migrations to the epoch of the great cathedrals and the great thought-constructions of Scholasticism. The Benedictine Order was the “Noah’s Ark” which rescued Christian culture together with the culture of antiquity, insofar as the latter had become taken up by Christianity—from the “flood” of the great folk migrations.

A further impulse of reawakening took place in the thirteenth century. There arose two great Orders—the Dominicans and the Franciscans—which brought with them a mighty impetus for fostering Christian thinking

and the Christian feeling-life. A new springtime blossomed forth for Christianity. A renewed enthusiasm for a radical living of Christianity, inspired by St. Francis, and for a philosophically founded Christianity enlightened by thinking thought through to the last detail, inspired by St. Dominic, suddenly became active and took hold of the noblest hearts and minds of the time.

And yet the merciless, crippling influence of . . . degeneration asserted itself, and during the course of the following centuries this enthusiasm gradually dried up. Then again there took place a streaming in of reawakening impulses in the sixteenth century. This expressed itself in a great movement of interiorisation connected with the bringing into existence of the Jesuit Order through St. Ignatius of Loyola and his comrades, and also in the reformation of the Carmelite Order through St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. There arose at that time a deep yearning for inwardness—for experience and understanding of Christianity at first hand. This yearning underlay a widespread meditation movement which then arose. Already during the lifetime of St. Ignatius hundreds of thousands of people practised his spiritual exercises (*exercitia spiritualia*). It was a matter in this spiritual training of awakening the whole human being to the reality of Christianity through inner experience. Through the meditative training people became more than pious; they became witnesses to the truth of Christianity, just as Paul, for instance, through his experience on the way to Damascus, became a witness to the Resurrected One. The constructive effect of pious devotion was not supplanted—rather, it became supplemented by an inner dramatic transmutation, or even complete transposition, of

thinking, feeling, and the will through the practice of the spiritual exercises. Human beings emerged from the meditation training of the spiritual exercises to wholly devote themselves, out of their own deepest knowledge and conscience, to the redemptive truths of Christianity.

. . . .

The epoch of operation of the fourth reawakening impulse after the event of Whitsun is ordinarily designated as that of the Counter Reformation. Actually, this should not be understood as anti-reformatory, but as a true reformation. For the movement toward interiorisation and spiritualisation which arose then in the Church was indeed in a real sense reformation, and in no sense a process of outer revolt—destroying images and annihilating Church hierarchy, and doing away with spiritual orders and the three vows. A monastery, for instance, is not reformed by chasing out the monks, but by bringing in a more interiorised spiritual life—as was the case, for example, in the reformation of monastic life in the Carmelite Order proceeding from St. Teresa of Avila. The so-called Counter-Reformation and the so-called Reformation stand in the same relationship to one another as the spiritualisation of monasteries stands in relation to their dissolution. The first was an impulse toward inner transformation; the second signified rebellion and “purge.” The one meant “evolution,” the other signified “revolution.” It was the impulse toward inwardness of a Christianity reawakened through meditation which rescued the Church from the storms of the so-called “Reformation,” just as it was rescued by the Benedictine

impulse from the storms of barbarism of the folk migrations, and just as the Nicean reawakening impulse saved it from the earlier storms of the Arian “reformation.”<sup>1</sup>

At this point, something must be added that is germane to the very core of this book. For another key factor in the Jesuit regeneration of the Church lay in devotion to His Sacred Heart. As we shall see, after the passing of St. Ignatius, the Jesuits became enflamed with passion for the Heart of Jesus! Thus, Protestant demolition of Christian tradition was not only combatted by the spiritual exercises, but also by a fiery new impulse to attach human hearts to the Heart of Jesus. We shall shortly explore this. But for the moment, let us simply note that passion for the Sacred Heart has decayed over recent generations and a process of degeneration again appears all-too-obvious. As Tomberg continues:

The intensity of meditative Christianity gradually lessened and what originally meant a dramatic transformation of the whole human being—of his thinking, feeling, and striving—ultimately developed into weekend retreats for the youth, for nurses, teachers, parents, and doctors . . . where lectures were held on moral and theological themes. Although in itself a good thing, this has little in common with the meditative training of an Ignatius of Loyola or a Teresa of Avila.

The ebb, however, goes before the flow. It would be highly tempting to characterize the preliminary signs and particular characteristics of a new impulse of reawakening in our time, but we must hold back in this respect. For, far too many people have definite views about it, and it is only right to leave them time, until actual events will

themselves speak the last word on the subject, so that the various opinions will prove themselves to be either correct or false.<sup>2</sup>

### The Temptation on the Mountain-Top

NEARLY fifty years after these last words, what can we say? Perhaps it would be wise to hold our tongues still, as Tomberg did then. But I see a need, dear Lector, to speak of *hope*. Too many souls feel discouraged and yet, today, one can detect seeds of hope for a renewed Church—and it is time that we consider these.

For today, a growing number of faithful readily appreciate the way forward for the Church does not lie in further “rebellion, purge, and revolution.” They see that liberal Catholicism has only brought dissolution. Yet, sadly, these Catholics are often divided amidst different “camps.” Some may be deeply traditional enthusiasts for the Latin Mass, others may belong to new movements such as Opus Dei or Communion and Liberation, whilst others may even possess a somewhat charismatic orientation. Dispersed as they are, they are united by at least this: They have little tolerance for the subversive factions of the Church. They know a Church that aspires to an anodyne, liberal creed must remain forever bland, feeble, and divisive.

Yes, mounting numbers recognize what has been lost and what must be restored—even if it means alienating those of modern persuasion. For here is the accusation made by Liberal Catholicism still: “You will estrange the modern world! You will never appeal to modern humanity with your obsolete anachronisms! If you will not conform to the *Zeitgeist*, you will no longer curry favor!” But hark! Is there not a clear parallel here with the temptation on the mountain?

The devil took him up into a very high mountain, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory

of them, and said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus saith to him: Begone, Satan: for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left him; and behold Angels came and ministered to Him. (Matthew 4:8–11)

Yes, the cry of liberal Christianity would seem to be the selfsame temptation—if the Church will only fall down and adore modernity, it will surely gain prestige, popularity, and power. All the kingdoms of the world will then join Her side. But, if not, the Church will lose all credibility with the kingdoms of this world.

However, liberal Catholics, it needs to be said, are not deceived regarding certain *facts* here. Catholics in the West *do* inhabit a vast, hostile, secular milieu, which will certainly object if the Church dares to stand for her spiritual and moral patrimony. Our culture is shaped by media elites, who will no doubt scream from a thousand media pulpits that Catholicism must give to the modern beat—or die.

Generally speaking, liberal Catholics are well aware of the *facts* of the modern world. And they take these *facts* very seriously. However, the world of facts is not the only world that exists. Sadly, many liberal Catholics hardly account for the world *beyond* the world of plain, empirical facts. Many, for example, do not take the power of *Angels* seriously at all. But the Gospel is clear: Once the temptation on the mountain-top was refused, “Angels came and ministered to Him.”

Now, Angels belong to the universe of unfathomable Grace that exists beyond the realm of empirical fact. And the Grace of the Angels is only a single expression of God’s mercy, whose plenitude lies utterly beyond the empirical realm. But Catholics of Faith are confident Jesus Christ and His Angels will never ignore those who remain faithful to His Church.

Still, the risk of a diminished Church remains very real—at least

in the near future. For the power of secular elites remains also very real. Many fall beneath their spell. And spellbound, they will no doubt reject any Church that dares defy the liberal *Zeitgeist*. However, it must be said a diminished Church is *not* a foregone conclusion. For the entire universe of God and His Angels cannot be counted for nothing! Neither God, nor His Angels will forget the Church, if the Church refuses to fall down and adore the world.

Moreover, there remain still further grounds for hope. This is because a true, strong, undivided Church would prove to be an *attractive* Church. The enfeebled, confused Church of recent decades has never been particularly inviting, but this stands in sharp contrast to the Church prior to the Council. For Malachi Martin is correct. It was only *after* Vatican II that Catholicism began collapsing. Only then came the mass exodus of Priests, religious, and laity alike; only then vocations plummeted—along with conversions, baptisms, and confirmations. There is also the terrible blight of ignoring the Sacrament of penance, of which the consequences are undoubtedly far graver than is commonly appreciated. For Catholics who have been absolved are very different from those who are *not* absolved.

But what of the period before the Church began flirting with desecralization? Before the Council, the Church was *robust* in ways often forgotten today. Now, it is true that, in certain parts of the world, the Church was in decline before Vatican II. In France, certainly there was decline. But as we shall see later, France was a special—and truly ugly—case: French Catholicism had been persecuted for generations. Elsewhere, the situation was very different. In places like Ireland, Poland, and Italy, the Church was vigorous—not to mention Latin America, Africa, and other parts of the planet that still benefitted from the intense missionary zeal that existed prior to Vatican II.

But most remarkably, it was in the Anglo-American world, where Catholicism had been weak, that the faith was growing—that is, until the Council. Thus, 1959 represented the high-point for English

conversions.<sup>3</sup> And 1960 has been commonly regarded as the zenith of American Catholicism. For in 1960, the unthinkable happened in America. Prior to then, it was “received wisdom” Americans would never accept a Catholic president. But that November, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was narrowly elected. As Charles R. Morris points out, Kennedy’s election manifested the growing Catholicization of the United States, which proceeded right up till the 1960s. According to Morris, the trend was so noticeable as to alarm the Protestant majority, which expressed noticeable fear regarding Catholic progress.<sup>4</sup> Then, the Council came and afterwards the Church began rapidly losing ground in American life.

Clearly, the pre-Vatican II Church was attractive to folk in the Anglosphere. Growing numbers of people converted. Presumably, they converted because *they liked what they saw*. And a re-sacralized Church might yet prove far more attractive than liberal gainsayers readily concede.

There is a recent popular account of American Christianity called *Exodus* by David Shiflett. Shiflett’s book bears a surprising subtitle: *Why Americans Are Fleeing Liberal Churches for Conservative Christianity*. It addresses the remarkable decline of liberal Christianity, particularly in the mainline Protestant congregations, which are rapidly collapsing. For, as Shiflett makes plain, innumerable Americans *hunger* for alternatives to mainstream, secular culture. Yet their liberal congregations only yield the selfsame menu served up by the secular culture. Their sermons seem little different from political speeches. Flight from liberal Christianity is the result—as well as rising numbers joining more conservative Protestant bodies or converting to Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. (That being said, Shiflett’s subtitle remains debatable. For whilst the exodus from liberal Christianity is manifest, many simply abandon Christianity altogether. I suspect a more accurate—albeit clumsier—subtitle might run: *Why Americans Are Fleeing Liberal Churches, turning secular or New Age instead,*

*whilst the few remaining Christians become conservative.)*

My point here is that liberal Christianity has not proved attractive. Americans *are* indeed fleeing from liberal churches in droves and similar patterns are easily detected in Europe. Here one might think in terms of *high-tension* versus *low-tension* religion. High-tension describes a faith that manifests in a relatively high state of contrast with the surrounding culture. Low-tension means the opposite: liberal religion. In contemporary America, Mormonism is an outstanding example of high-tension religion—its aspirations (e.g., complete abstinence from alcohol) differ markedly from prevailing secular norms. And, according to Shiflett, the Mormons are amongst the religious groups making the most dramatic gains.

There would seem to be a limited parallel to pre-Sixties Catholicism. For back then, Catholicism also *exhibited explicit tension* with the world-at-large. Catholics were obviously *different* then—they heard the Latin Mass, ate fish on Fridays, and respected religious leaders, both Priests and nuns, who not only dressed unusually, but deliberately set themselves apart from the world. Clearly, the traditional Catholicism of the pre-Vatican II era was more compelling than the Church today.

The conspicuous failure of low-tension, liberal Christianity not only reveals its distinctly unalluring nature, it also confirms the terrible hunger for alternatives to Secular Materialism. And demythologized, liberal Christianity only continues to ape secularism. It offers no satisfaction to yearnings for the Supernatural Mystery beyond this world. Here is why a Catholic Church, which stood unapologetically for Her central Sacramental Mystery might prove mysteriously attractive to New Agers. For the growing New Age movement likewise demonstrates terrible yearning for alternatives to materialism. Yet neither liberal nor conservative Protestantism is generally attractive to New Agers. However, New Agers have rarely, if ever, experienced a deeply traditional Catholicism, unashamedly filled

with the Catholic Mystery.

## Orthodoxy Renewed

WE speak of hope that the Church might cease being ripped apart and recover the authority to unashamedly proclaim the Catholic Mystery. But how realistic is this?

There are promising signs, at least, that growing numbers of Catholics recognize the failures of de-sacralized Catholicism. Certainly, in the highest echelons of the Church, there has been mounting recognition the Church must resist the temptation to be as bland and inoffensive as possible. Over the last decades, we have witnessed a Vatican more willing to be disliked. For in 1978, Karol Wojtyla became John Paul II and began to curb the worst excesses of the previous decade, charting a course back to orthodoxy. Laicization of Priests begun under Bl. Paul VI leading to a massive hemorrhage was now abruptly halted. Dissident theologians like Küng, Schillebeeckx, and Leonardo Boff were now reined in, instead of being allowed to wreak havoc. Conservative groups like Opus Dei were empowered and more conservative Bishops steadily appointed. By all this and much more, St. John Paul II would prove to be a very different Pope than his immediate predecessors.

The process was slow, however. For in the early years of his papacy, St. John Paul II's heart was preoccupied by the immense tragedy of Communism, as it then existed across Eastern Europe and Russia. Now, there are certain Catholic traditionalists who criticize St. John Paul II for not doing more to correct the rot inside the Church—whilst failing to recognize how indebted we are to this saint for the fact that atheistic ideology is no longer savagely imposed on millions in the former Soviet bloc!

Yet, after the Wall fell in 1989, St. John Paul II began to more actively address the ruinous state of the Church. Here we may note

another great achievement of St. John Paul II—in 1981 he elevated Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger to head the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith—who was thereby positioned to become his successor. And with Ratzinger’s help, greater measures were taken to restore orthodoxy including the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Another example, already mentioned, was the conscious “ecumenical trainwreck” of *Dominus Jesus*, whereby Ratzinger—as the Pope’s “right-hand Cardinal”—definitively stated that Protestant institutions could not be deemed “churches” in the true sacramental sense of that word. *Dominus Jesus* thus represented a decisive break from earlier attempts at ecumenism, where differences had been minimalized—such as “downplaying” the Blessed Virgin Mary or structuring the Holy Mass to resemble Protestant services.

St. John Paul II and his successor Benedict XVI recognized the Catholic Mystery must not be *flattened*. Thus, the later years of St. John Paul II’s pontificate witnessed contentious and courageous moves, including papal orders such as *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, which attempted to curb liturgical abuse or *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, addressing theological abuses in Catholic universities.

Yet, since Joseph Ratzinger became Benedict XVI in 2005, we have witnessed further daring, unpopular moves toward re-sacralizing the Church. How much outcry attended that great Pope’s endeavor toward restoring the Latin Mass! Moreover, his courageous efforts to reconcile the Society of St. Pius X (a subject we address shortly) only brought the scorn of the world crashing down upon his weary, lonely shoulders. Even his relatively modest efforts in the Anglosphere to restore a more faithful translation of the new Mass sparked howls of protest.

This last case is particularly revealing. In 2011, a new translation of the English liturgy was introduced from Rome, aiming to reflect the original Latin text more accurately. Having returned from Southern Catholic Europe to the Anglosphere in 2010, I witnessed the new

translation's reception. Attending daily Masses in numerous parts of Britain, I studied the situation. In one parish, the Priest appeared to quiver in fear of introducing the new translation. I even heard of pathetic instances of Priests actually fomenting rebellion. However, most folk barely seemed to notice. It was mainly liberal Priests who loathed it—and looked overly anxious to make sure their congregations felt the same as they did. I also saw instances where the change was welcomed, even enthusiastically received. Still, my time in Britain made all-too-plain what is still likewise clear from the Internet: damaging, ruinous warfare persists everywhere in the Church of the West.

Yes, from 1978 to 2013, the combined endeavor of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI was regularly thwarted by renegade Catholic factions. However, their 35-year effort was not without considerable fruit—as we shall examine momentarily.

Here one may naturally enquire of Pope Francis. As noted earlier, we hardly treat of the current papacy in this book, which was largely completed by the time the current Francis revolution began in earnest. What can I now insert in a very brief space? Francis has certainly set the world alight—at least, the world fueled by the secular media. This media displays nothing but enthusiasm for Francis, whilst showing little but contempt for the Wotyła-Ratzinger reign. Now, this pronouncedly different attitude toward Pope Francis speaks *volumes* in itself. To my mind, it amply demonstrates both the mendacity of the media and the fact the new Pope is charting a course very different from both Ratzinger *and* Wojtyła. Thus, it incurs grave concern in many souls who appreciate what St. John Paul II and his heir started to achieve: will Pope Francis succeed in reversing the advances of the previous 35 years?

Yet, at this point in time, Lector, I refuse to pass further comment on the new Pope, except to say he appears possessed of numerous noble qualities, including the courage to challenge certain great evils,

including the scourge of liberal economics. However, even if Francis or a future pontiff *were* determined to overturn the combined legacy of Wojtyla and Ratzinger, it remains doubtful he would succeed.

### **Vital New Shoots**

I SAY THIS because the previous 35 years of the Papacy have yielded a considerable harvest. Whilst subversion does persist, the situation is nowhere near as dire as the darkest days of the 1960s and 70s. For a new climate was actively fostered by St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In that climate, real fruit began ripening on the new and tender branches of the Church.

Perhaps few things indicate this new growth as much as a derisory term coined by Fr. Andrew Greeley: *Young Fogeys*. For Greeley was not only a liberal Catholic Priest, but also a skilled sociologist studying trends in the modern Church. And what he saw clearly troubled him:

For more than three decades now, as a sociologist and a priest, I have been tracking the evolution of the beliefs and practices of the Catholic clergy and laity in the United States. My most recent analysis, based on survey data that I and others have gathered periodically since Vatican II, reveals a striking trend: a generation of conservative young priests is on the rise in the U.S. Church. These are newly ordained men who seem in many ways intent on restoring the pre-Vatican II Church, and who, reversing the classic generational roles, define themselves in direct opposition to the liberal priests who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s.

...

Who are these young counter-revolutionaries? Several studies are helpful in answering this question: a 1970 National Opinion Research Center study (with which I was involved); two studies released by the Los Angeles Times, in 1994 and 2002; and a 2002 study by the sociologist Dean R. Hoge. Hoge's *The First Five Years of the Priesthood: A Study of Newly Ordained Catholic Priesthood* is particularly useful. Hoge reports that half the newly ordained priests he encountered believe that a priest is fundamentally different from a layperson—that he is literally a man apart. Hoge also reports that almost a third of these priests feel that the laity need to be “better educated to respect the authority of the priest’s word.” These beliefs are strikingly at odds with those of the predominantly liberal generation of new priests studied in the 1970 NORC survey. Today’s young priests tend to want to restore the power that the clergy held not only before Vatican II but also before a large educated Catholic laity emerged as a powerful force in the Church after World War II. Older priests today often complain that their younger colleagues are arrogant, pompous, and rigid, and that they love to parade around in clerical dress.

Greeley is right. Many a Priest now remembers he is “literally a man apart”—for the Sacrament of Ordination has transformed his soul forever. These Priests understand that *the Priesthood matters*. Correspondingly, there is renewed recognition that the laity should not be allowed to run riot—given they are *not* ordained and they do *not* possess the same intensive training as Priests.

Such things are enough to drive liberals, like Greeley, to despair—hence the mocking epithet, “Young Fogey.” Yet it was not in despair, but rather celebration, that Colleen Carroll dedicated an entire

book, *The New Faithful*, to this new generation. In *The New Faithful*, Carroll reflects on contemporary American youth and reports a startling return to traditional doctrine and devotion. She speaks, for example, of increased Eucharistic Adoration and Confession by young Catholics.

All this echoes Shiflett's findings. Not only is liberal Christianity, including liberal Catholicism, slowly being deserted—but, moreover, a new Christian conservatism is obvious amidst the young. For whilst liberalism remains strong in the Vatican II cohort, young Catholics are different. One observation that Carroll, amongst others, makes is that—unlike the Vatican II generation—today's youth is alienated by having grown up in a rootless and thoroughly de-traditionalized secular society. Their souls are *parched*.

Here we might also mention *American Church* by Russell Shaw, which describes the phenomenon of renewed orthodoxy in an admirable way. Shaw describes an emerging Catholic subculture within contemporary secular America, which (albeit in a limited fashion) resembles the intensely Catholic “ghetto” subculture of the old, pre-Sixties Protestant America. Yet unlike that “ghetto” subculture—which was introverted and defensive—Shaw sees the new subculture as evangelical and outgoing. However, a common element characterizes both subcultures, whether introvert or extravert. That common feature is *a heightened sense of Catholic identity*. As Russell says:

Signs of an emerging Catholic subculture . . . include . . . proudly orthodox new Catholic colleges and universities (and a few that are not new but have taken serious steps to refurbish their Catholic identity); new, similarly orthodox religious communities; media ventures like EWTN and Catholic radio, along with a growing number of websites . . . periodicals and publishing houses; professional organizations (e.g., the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars,

the Society of Catholic Social Scientists) and some oldline general membership groups (e.g., the Knights of Columbus which remains by far the largest Catholic organization in America); and groups and movements committed to promoting an authentic Catholic spirituality for lay women and laymen living and working in the secular world. Side by side with these are individual parishes and even whole dioceses that have taken the same message to heart. Highly encouraging, too, is the appearance on the scene of a new generation of Bishops and Priests, traditional minded but up-to-date in style who take a realistic view of the present situation of America Catholicism.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, Carroll and Shaw echo Greeley's sociological findings of the Young Fogey's. For what little it is worth, all this accords with my own observations of the Church over the last seventeen years. At first, I wondered whether claims like Colleen Carroll's were exaggerated. Whilst it was obvious Carroll witnessed a genuine phenomenon—it seemed to me that phenomenon might be quite limited and largely restricted to America. But today, more than ten years after I first read *The New Faithful*, I see evidence of Young Fogey's everywhere, including in Europe. There are countless small, but unmistakable, signs of restored tradition—whether these are a return to receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, more traditional decor in Catholic institutions, or indications of a far more reverent Christology and ecclesiology—as well as a staunch refusal to kowtow to secular idols.

All this confirms that Wojtyla and Ratzinger's thirty-five year endeavor *was not in vain*. Few people in the 1970s would have dared to imagine the new orthodoxy possible. Whatever course the current pontificate takes, the power of a new generation of orthodox Catholics can be plainly seen and felt.

## On Catholic Traditionalism

THUS far we have largely been considering American developments. However, there is a small, yet critical phenomenon, unmentioned by the American authors above, which is relevant here—and it emerged principally from Europe, France above all. It is the Catholic traditionalist movement, whose concerns are wide-ranging, but who are best known for their remarkable solicitude for the Latin Mass.

The Latin Mass! How I recall my first encounter with the Tridentine Liturgy. I was astonished. There was a Priest and servers at the altar, with their backs turned to me. And I could hardly hear a word they said. My mind was skeptical—rife with impious, suspicious thoughts. What is all that muttering up there, in this barely audible dead language? May God forgive my cynical *mind*. Because, for my *heart*, it was entirely different. My heart responded. Over a decade later, I have never been able to erase that first Tridentine Mass from my heart. Whilst a thousand other Masses slip from memory, this one remains indelibly stamped on my soul.

Clearly, I am not alone. Much else testifies to the power of this Mass. This testimony emerges not only from those who, like myself, find it overwhelmingly preferable to the *Novus Ordo*, but also—paradoxically—from those who actively loathe it. For when Benedict XVI issued *Summorum Pontificum*—the *motu proprio* of 2007 to liberate the Tridentine Mass—the controversy it produced in so-called “progressive” Catholic circles was astounding! Despite the fact liberal Catholicism prides itself for honoring diversity and pluralism, liberal resistance and outright hostility could be felt everywhere.

But the reason for this outcry against the old Mass is difficult to fathom. It is as mysterious as it is irrational, for there is nothing “politically incorrect” about the old liturgy. It does not trample on the entrenched dogmas of Secular Materialism (apart from being unashamedly supernatural, that is). Still, the outrage became almost

deafening in certain quarters, drowning out all other voices.

This, alone, gives rise to sobering reflection. For if there are no clear, rational reasons why the Latin Mass should provoke such hostility, one may legitimately ask whether *its mysterious power is plainly sensed by its opponents*. For if the old liturgy possessed no power—perceived as harmless or anodyne—it would provoke no concern. But the traditional Mass was nearly destroyed in the aftermath of Vatican II. Clearly, many hoped to kill it outright. And the same remains true today. The Tridentine Mass obviously *threatens* certain people in the Church—for no obvious or rational reason. One needs to ask, *why?*

Likewise, one may note the mysterious resilience and intensity of the traditionalist movement in the Church—for whom the Latin Mass remains unforgettable. Whilst we have noted the resurgent new orthodoxy, the Catholic traditionalist movement distinguishes itself from these “new conservatives” inasmuch as they represent *those who never abandoned orthodoxy*. For those who clung tenaciously to orthodoxy during the 1960s were a rare breed. Back in the “spring of 1968” there were very, very few “Young Fogey” who suspected anything amiss. Put differently, Catholic traditionalists are the forerunners of the “Young Fogey.” They are the people who, like Valentin Tomberg and Malachi Martin, recognized early on, that something had gone terribly wrong. In an era when nearly everyone—right, left, and center—cheerfully chucked tradition aside, these original fogey, whether young or old, *remembered*. It is thanks to them that the Latin Mass (and much else) has been preserved.

What is this power of the old Mass? Why does it provoke this intensity of emotion, such that people either love it or loathe it? We cannot fully engage this question, but let us consider, once more, the *ad orientem* position of the Priest stemming from the origins of Christianity. One knows profound wisdom informed the earliest sources of the liturgy—and contemporary experience makes it

abundantly clear how much that original wisdom was correct. For whilst certain Priests can remain intensely prayerful facing the people, many others (understandably) cannot. We have already mentioned “ad libs” by the Priest. Of course, “ad-libbing” is a minor sin, compared to inserting *Pink Floyd*, *SpongeBob Squarepants*, and ventriloquist dummies into the Holy Mass. Yet even innocent, well-intended improvisation is perilous to the liturgy. Here, again, I can do no better than return to Valentin Tomberg. Although writing at a time when the Latin Mass remained universal, Tomberg deplored liturgical improvisation, as it then existed only in Protestantism:

Each phrase of the Roman Catholic Mass or Greek Orthodox Liturgy, for example, is a formula of divine Sacred magic. There is nothing astonishing about this, since the Mass and the Liturgy consist only of the prayers of prophets, saints and Jesus Christ himself. But what is truly astonishing is that there are [those] who improvise cults, prayer-formulae, new “man-trams,” etc., as if something is gained through novelty! Perhaps they believe that the formulae taken from Holy Scripture or given by the saints are used up through usage and have lost their virtue? This would be a radical misunderstanding. Because usage does not at all deplete a prayer-formula, but rather, on the contrary, it adds to its virtue. For this reason it is also deplorable that certain Protestant churches have the custom of the minister or preacher improvising prayers in their divine service—probably believing that it is the personal which is more effective and not the common and collective tradition.<sup>6</sup>

But “ad-libbing” in the *Novus Ordo* is simply the beginning of further woes. The new Mass, of course, dispensed with much more than

merely the *ad orientem* position. It discarded numerous prayers of preparation and purification for the Priest that he might worthily consecrate the species. Likewise gone were ancient supplications to heaven, signs of the cross, and other ritual gestures and rubrics, which undoubtedly possessed both a sacred origin and a sacred purpose. Here were holy things, casually thrown to the scrapheap, but which arose from ancient wells of wisdom—all of which served to make the Latin Mass something supremely different from today’s average *Novus Ordo*.

Now, I cannot hope to do full justice to this matter. Not only do we lack scope, but frankly, dear Lector, I lack competence. For I suspect the only person truly competent to speak here is the Priest who celebrates the Latin Mass and knows it in a way that laity, such as myself, can never do. With this in mind, I turn to just such a Priest. He was trained decades ago, solely in the *Novus Ordo*. Only after *Summorum Pontificum* in 2007 did he learn the Tridentine liturgy and begin celebrating it regularly. And, whilst writing this book, I received a telling piece of mail from him:

These Masses are special to me, and so great a privilege to be united with Christ as His Priest, and offer with Him the sacrifice of Calvary, for the living and the dead. *It is through using the Tridentine form* that I have come to appreciate something of the great significance of what I am doing each morning. Can there be anything more important than this? [Italics mine]

How this honest admission strikes my heart—that only by discovering the Tridentine form did this anonymous Priest, after decades of the *Novus Ordo*, come “to appreciate something of the great significance” of the Mass! What astounds me here is not what this says of this Priest personally, but, rather, its *global implications*. For it would seem it was ONLY through the Latin Mass that he became

really awake to the true meaning of the Mass! Given that I find this Priest anything but dull-witted, I cannot help but suspect the same is likely true for innumerable Priests and prelates, who have only ever used the Novus Ordo and who may not be awake.

Certainly, the majority of Priests I have witnessed at the Altar do not appear sufficiently wakeful. What is it to be awake? All our lives, we know the certainty of death. But are we really awake to the fact we are really going to die? Often, one knows it in theory, but only truly knows it if one has a brush with mortality. Just as, in theory, one knows that children across the world are dying of disease and starvation, but this is hardly the same as if one held an emaciated child in one's arms, shortly about to die.

Similarly, many of us know in faith, that Jesus Christ becomes present in the Holy Mass. But how many of us really know it? How many are really awake to the staggering reality of the Mass? The answer, it would seem, is few indeed and they constitute an endangered species. For since Priests became more like Protestant ministers entertaining an audience—rather than Priests—Catholics have gone to sleep to the miraculous nature of the Holy Sacraments. We are now falling asleep as Protestants, likewise, fell asleep in the Sixteenth Century.

All this evokes grave questions: To what extent is the decline in the Church—as well belief in His Real Presence—directly related to the loss of the *ad orientem* traditional liturgy? To what extent has depriving people of this Mass yielded the Catholic lethargy today? I raise this, precisely because, prior to the new liturgy, Catholics were generally not lethargic—but far more brimming with missionary zeal! Also, now that Priests are re-discovering the Latin Mass, what does one make of the fact that a correspondent new awakening appears to be replacing the sleepy malaise?

Moreover, is the violent reaction to the Latin Mass due to those who apprehend (even unconsciously) the awakening power of this

Mass—and would very much prefer that Catholics did not wake up?! Do liberals loathe this Mass precisely because they unconsciously realize this Mass possesses *real, transformative power*—real and transformative, that is, in terms of a direction they do not wish to take?

Such questions weigh daily on my soul. Thus, I was grateful to hear more from the aforementioned Priest—because a Priest who has made the transition from the Novus Ordo to the Latin Mass has a rare perspective that few others (whether laity or other Novus Ordo Priests) possess:

Unlike the Mass of Vatican II in which a dialogue between celebrant and congregation carries most of the ritual, the prayers and rituals of the Tridentine form demand that the celebrant be *continually attentive* to the rites he is enacting.

His voice varies from being audible to a quiet whisper; his eyes regularly turn to the crucifix; *the movements of his hands are conscious and deliberate*. Even when he turns to the congregation the greetings are brief, his glance downward, *his gestures precise*. The Priest is servant of the ritual, and the rubrics foster *a mindfulness and self-awareness which not only focus his own attention, but also that of the faithful*, as they kneel once more at the foot of the cross of Calvary.

Each time before he turns to the congregation the Priest kisses the altar. Priest, altar and sacrifice are at the core of Catholic worship. When he is at the altar offering the sacrifice a Priest's ministry finds its most sublime expression. His kiss of the altar is not only a sign of honor and respect for the source of his identity, but also an expression of his own affective attachment to his vocation.

. . . .  
The inner offering of Son to Father, although enacted within human history, has an eternal dimension, beyond time and space . . . re-newed and made present once again.  
[Italics mine]

Now, dear Lector, although I shall never be privileged to enact the Divine Mystery of the Mass, nor called to that exacting responsibility of precise, solemn attentiveness toward it, nevertheless, I can echo one sole point from the above. It is this, that “mindfulness and self-awareness” not only focus the Priest’s own attention, but they likewise focus my own awareness. True mindfulness from the Priest subtly calls each of us to the same thing. But now, let us continue to listening to this anonymous Priest:

How can mortal flesh be anything but silent in the presence of so profound a mystery? How can anything but silence draw the men and women of all nations and languages into such a wonder?

After Communion is distributed the prayers are brief, and the Priest turns to tell the congregation *Ite, missa est*. Go, the Mass is ended! First used in the catacombs of ancient Rome, these three simple words have echoed down the corridors of history for over two millennia.

From barren rocks off the coast of Ireland to the great cathedrals of Europe, in hidden rooms in England’s stately homes, behind the lines in battlefields, in bamboo huts in Asia, Catholics have heard the words *Ite, missa est* concluding this very same ritual.

And as the Mass draws to a close the words of the prologue of St. John’s gospel are brought before us again: *Et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non*

*comprehenderunt*. “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

Through Latin words and gestures sanctioned by tradition and enshrined in clear and precise rubrics, the hearts of celebrant and congregation have communed with the heart of Christ . . . they have seen the Sun shine in the midnight of materialism.

Here is eloquent testimony to the living beauty of the Latin Mass. Yet this Mass was nearly lost forever. It may be only thanks to a few courageous souls—the early Catholic traditionalists after Vatican II—that we owe its survival. Most notable of these was the French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, whose heart, as we noted earlier, was pierced by such travesties as a Chilean Bishop smoking during a televised Mass. In truth, Lefebvre’s heart was rent by more than just liturgical butchery. For Lefebvre, this was simply one aspect of a far-reaching betrayal of the Church. And so, in 1970, he founded his Society of St. Pius X.

Archbishop Lefebvre and the Society of St. Pius X! What controversy surrounds this tragic, brave, and polemical figure. No consideration of the traditionalist Catholic movement (even one as cursory as this) can omit mentioning this bold Archbishop. For it is debatable indeed whether there would even be a Latin Mass today—or a Catholic traditionalist movement—without the immense courage and clarity of vision provided by Marcel Lefebvre, during the 1970s!

*During the 1970s*, I stress. Alas, the later situation, from the 1980s and beyond, becomes entangled in factors beyond our scope. Suffice it to say, Monsignor Lefebvre believed his mission to save the Church’s tradition would be jeopardized if there were no Bishops to succeed him after his death (although the Vatican had promised him one). Yet in 1988, three years before he died, Lefebvre consecrated three new Bishops in express disobedience to the will of St. John Paul II.

The result was their excommunication—and his—along with twenty-five further years of strife in the Church.

Who is competent to judge the gnarled history of the SSPX? Certainly, I am not. Although speaking very personally, dear Lector, I have pondered Lefebvre's history, writings, and legacy for years. What I see reveals not only great courage, but frequently astonishing foresight. Thus, I understand why Benedict XVI spoke of "Archbishop Lefebvre, this great man of the universal Church" when he met the SSPX Bishop Fellay in Rome.<sup>7</sup> I read, for example, things Lefebvre said during Vatican II and can only conclude that, like Martin and Tomberg during the same era, Lefebvre was awake—whilst the vast majority remained sound asleep.

We have noted already the prodigious controversy as to what extent Vatican II truly mandated the innovations that later followed. The reasons for this debilitating fifty-year conundrum entail the highly ambiguous language used in the Council documents. For it was argued these documents should be rendered in language accessible to modern humanity. Such "accessible language," however, is usually not precise, but rather ambiguous. Today, half a century later, many people clearly recognize the immense problems with the documents' language. But at Vatican II itself, Archbishop Lefebvre was one of very few who saw clearly in this matter. And he proposed a neat, practical solution: Each Council document should have two versions. One version would be suitable for lay people, who lacked time and education to comprehend technical, precise theological concepts. Thus, Lefebvre affirmed, alongside the Council, the real need to include the laity. The other version, however, would use precise language—so no doubt should exist as to what the Council actually mandated. After the Council finished in 1965, there could be no justification for the endless controversy that has ensued ever since: "The Council meant this; the Council meant that; The Council meant rupture; the Council meant continuity." Obviously, the Archbishop's motion was defeated. The

results appear all-too-evident: enormous division, a vast expenditure of energy and immense suffering, decade after decade—with little end in sight (despite the blood, sweat, and tears of the Papacy to establish a “hermeneutic of continuity”).

But Marcel Lefebvre’s courageous, lonely stance did not stop when Vatican II ended. After the Council, he became increasingly isolated. Those gripped by euphoria were impatient with Lefebvre’s foresight. And so, almost singlehandedly, he took on the work of training Priests who had little appetite for the holocaust of tradition. Yet his work was checked again and again. A 1974 Vatican document, *Conferentiarum Episcopatum*, was widely interpreted as almost entirely forbidding the Tridentine Liturgy. (Although later Benedict XVI decreed the Latin Mass had never been abrogated.) These were dark days for whose love of liturgy and tradition has only recently been vindicated by Rome.

And so I cannot judge you, Monsignor Lefebvre. For one thing, I have hardly a shred of your fortitude or foresight. Nor can I begin to comprehend the forces arrayed against you. All I can render is my very personal opinion—that this 1988 act of disobedience was a tragedy. Moreover, it is my opinion that, broken-hearted, as you were, you sometimes—not always!—spoke uncharitably toward Rome. Humanly speaking, this is entirely understandable, given the calumny you suffered. Still, an acid spirit of antagonism has grown amongst certain of your Priests. Yet your courageous Priests are desperately needed inside the Church—fully inside. No, Monsignor Lefebvre, I cannot agree with everything you said, nor support your every action. Yet your prescience and courage compel my respect. And how your stricken, pain-streaked words break my heart:

They wanted to be ecumenical to such a point, to bring themselves closer to the Protestants in order to pray with them, that in the end they no longer affirm the Faith. And

that is very grave. This diminution is excessively grave.

...

To no longer kneel, for example: Do you think that children still believe in the Eucharist and in the Real Presence of Our Lord [when] they have never seen a Priest genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament. . . ?

In France, there are only twenty-seven out of one hundred practising Catholics who still believe in the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist.

...

I no longer understand it. I no longer understand it! This is not our Church! This is no longer our Catholic Church! It is no longer our Catholic Faith. I want to be and to stay Catholic.

So why am I required to suppress our seminary? Why am I required to suppress our Sacerdotal Fraternity of St. Pius X? Why am I required not to perform these Ordinations? There is only one reason: to bring me into line with this policy. They want me to lend a hand in this destruction of the Church, to join in this communion which, for the Church is adultery.

I will not be an adulterer. I will keep my Catholic Faith! That is why I refuse. I refuse to collaborate in the destruction of the Church. I refuse to collaborate in loss of faith, in the general apostasy.<sup>8</sup>

I can neither condemn nor lionize the soul of Marcel Lefebvre. Certainly, I cannot join the multitudes that revile the man without listening to a word he said. Nor will I join that far smaller contingent

that holds Lefebvre higher than the Church Herself, treating Rome as the enemy. However, what most concerns us here is not the SSPX—but the fact Lefebvre *founded a movement*. This might be loosely termed the Catholic traditionalist movement. Now, prior to 1988's tragic division, it might be said—with a little exaggeration—that the SSPX *was* the movement. One might even say that, all-too-often, Lefebvre's bold initiative was “the only game in town” for those famished for tradition.

Since the 1988 tragedy, the situation has altered. Whilst the SSPX continues in a highly irregular situation with Rome, there are now numerous traditional Catholic groups loyal to the Holy Father. Happily, certain SSPX Priests refused the path of disobedience, leaving the society in 1988 to establish the Fraternity of St. Peter in union with Rome. Later in 2005, further SSPX Priests followed suit, founding the Institute of the Good Shepherd. Whilst in 1990, entirely independent of the SSPX, the Institute of Christ the King emerged, whose spirit of charity and fidelity to Rome has been as notable, as it is moving. These efforts to preserve Catholic tradition within the Church are bearing rich, beautiful fruit.

Unlike the modern Church, for example, traditional seminaries and religious houses are marked by flourishing vocations. Yes, traditionalism within the Church constitutes a vibrant sign of hope and must be distinguished from the SSPX—or indeed, groups even further beyond the Church than the SSPX. (For example, sedevacantists, who recognize no Pope since the time of Vatican II—for they believe that the Chair [sede] must be vacant—given the betrayal they see.)

What can be said regarding this diversity of Catholic traditionalists, from the sedevacantists to faithful societies like the Institute of Christ the King? One may be gladdened, at least, that these traditionalists—whether lamentably disobedient or radiantly faithful—are nevertheless awake to critical issues within Catholicism today. They are neither asleep, nor de-sensitized, nor in denial of that

which many Catholics never admit: the Judas Kiss within the Church Herself

Yet it is one thing to recognize a problem and another to address it prudently, prayerfully, and charitably. And it is regrettable how often Catholic traditionalists fail to be prudent, prayerful, and charitable! Personally, I am especially troubled by the attitudes traditionalists frequently take toward the newly-emerging Catholic orthodoxy. The new faithful are sometimes scornfully mocked as “neo-conservatives.” The term is grievous, insofar as it misleadingly evokes a particularly American form of unbridled hyper-capitalism. Moreover, it serves to destroy bridges—bridges that could and should be built between the two.

For significant unity exists, at least potentially, between these traditionalists and a new faithful Catholic counter-culture emerging. Each group deserves support. For sincere souls exist in both, who are not embarrassed to speak openly of the Catholic Mystery. They are convinced of the reality of the Supernatural—and the preternatural. And they know the only hope for battling preternatural evil lies with Christ in His Church. Thus, neither group is drifting off into liberal Catholicism, liberal politics, or liberal New Age-ism. (Alas, some, particularly in America, may drift off into liberal economics but a sounder fidelity to Catholic Social Teaching should be sufficient to correct that.)

Moreover, both groupings possess the coherence that liberal Catholicism lacks. Their practice of the Faith is coherent with the doctrine of the Faith. Thus, the Eucharist—whether it be a reverent *Novus Ordo* or the Latin Mass—will be celebrated by “Young Fogey” everywhere in a manner consistent with the Church’s teaching. In liberal celebrations of the Mass, by contrast, the disjunction between doctrine and praxis remains glaring. Yes, the spirit of the “Young Fogey”—whether they be traditionalists or new conservatives—is not weakened by the insidious processes of

dissociation that slowly divide the body of the Church from its soul (which processes, whether they happen slowly or quickly, are those of death).

Still, the lack of charity sometimes found in traditionalist circles remains understandable—because, for half a century now, lovers of Catholic tradition have seen everything they love mocked, scourged, and betrayed. Now, with the restoration of the Latin Mass, their essential concerns have begun to be vindicated.

However, many have suffered greatly—and continue to suffer. Yet, in this hour of crisis, what is needed is not further splintering—or even schism—but its precise opposite: bridge-building and unity. Here I would pay a special tribute to Monsignor Gilles Wach of the Institute of Christ the King. For the Institute Monsignor Wach founded clearly understands the necessity of charity, fidelity, and unity within the Church in a way far more profound than is often seen amongst Catholic traditionalists.

If the Church is to be renewed, a united front of the new faithful and the old traditionalists is crucial. Here perhaps is why Benedict XVI made such dramatic gestures—such as restoring the Latin Mass and even dramatic turn-arounds with regard to the SSPX in recent years. Now, Benedict XVI predicted he would suffer much for these efforts. But he clearly saw the death-process in the Church and he clearly meant to arrest it, whatever the personal cost. Still, Benedict XVI hardly endorsed everything that happens within the Traditionalist movement. And nor do we. We simply point to it as a seed of hope—one that we shall return to, ere this book is finished.

### **The Lost Antidote to the New Age**

ONCE the contemporary betrayal of the Catholic Mystery has been honestly confronted, a certain question naturally arises. In the New Age movement, we see growing numbers of folk, repelled by

materialism, who starve for Supernatural Mystery. But where can New Agers go when the Church no longer clearly proclaims the central Mystery of the world? What can they do when the Holy Mass is celebrated by clowns and “cheeseheads”? Where can they turn, whilst the Church disguises Her true nature? The answer is terribly obvious: ten thousand New Age teachers, gurus, channelers, and psychics who would speak to them of Angels, forces, powers, star signs, spiritual healing, ancient pagan mysteries, galactic reptiles—but never of the Holy Mystery that beats within the bosom of the Church.

Ironic it may be, but New Agers and Catholic traditionalists do, in fact, share some common features. For example, Catholic traditionalists take the Supernatural very seriously. They cannot easily tolerate facile worldly skepticism. The same is true of New Age seekers. Neither group has much tolerance for zany populism either. For example, New Agers are, more often than not, put off by evangelical, charismatic forms of Christianity, just as I was in my own youth. And the same is true for traditionalists.

Where would this New Age movement be—were the Church to speak, once again, *unambiguously about Her Central Mystery*? In Ireland, I was stirred when a Priest reported his experience, discussing baptism with two young parents. Initially, the couple showed little interest. All was rote and ennui. But then the Priest invoked the matter of exorcism and protection from supernatural evil. A spark of life was generated! Here is evidence of young folk who are awake to dimensions beyond the reigning sclerotic worldview—just as young New Agers are likewise awake. Whatever the truth of the matter, there are many sensitive youth today who will only reject a kooky clone of Protestantism. But these same sensitive souls might be genuinely stirred, if only they heard the Church speak seriously and unambiguously of the Supernatural Mystery She is meant to guard.

World materialism grows. Proportionally, the hunger for spiritual mystery grows. Perhaps proportionally as well, interest in the New

Age movement grows. Whilst in the West, the Church declines. One may well ask, then, whether the decline of the Catholic Church is proportionate to the extent her members collude with Secular Materialism.

Because in all my New Age years, it would never have occurred to me to look to the Church for Supernatural Mystery. For I never heard the Church speaking—truthfully—about Herself in words like this:

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated in this consecrated, hallowed place. Not only does the Lord of the Universe become present whilst bread and wine are transformed, but surely Angels fall down in adoration by His Altar.

Fittingly, this Mass is not celebrated in the ordinary, mundane language of everyday life, but in a tongue, which has been reserved for centuries for august Sacred Mysteries. Here in this church you will find still further supernatural Graces. Confession will cleanse your very soul. Holy water is effective for warding off the advance of evil. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament can lead you into ever-deeper contemplation of the Mystery of His Love. By the transcendental virtue of Ordination, the soul of the Priest has been altered so that he may intercede with the Resurrected Christ for all these Sacraments and sacramentals.

If you are not a Catholic, you are welcome to avail yourself of much that is here. To fully participate in the Catholic Mystery, however, a rite of initiation is required. Sincere applicants for initiation are never turned away.

Are the words that I suggest here pompous? They would

certainly be pompous, if they did not happen to be true! Yet to Catholics of Faith, their truth is self-evident. But how seldom we proclaim their truth boldly and unambiguously! So it is that New Agers have never heard such things. Who can blame them if they seek elsewhere? But what would have happened for myself and a million more young seekers, if Catholic churches everywhere spoke openly and unequivocally regarding the Catholic Mystery?

### On Mystagogia

WHILST zany Priests and prelates celebrate zany masses, worldly theologians advance worldly theology, the Catholic Church continues to wither. What can be done? We began this chapter with Valentin Tomberg's profound reflections on regenerating Christianity, wherein he invoked Jesuitism. This earlier Jesuit regeneration of the Church displayed intense fidelity to tradition. For it not only retained the three traditional vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity—it added a fourth vow of direct obedience to the Pope! Yet, as Tomberg says, Jesuitism also added *something new* to the Church in the form of the spiritual exercises. And later on in the Seventeenth Century, it opened itself again to something new, which set the Jesuits on fire—devotion to His Sacred Heart.

Today, we must hope and pray for something of like kind—as intensely faithful as the early Jesuits, yet fiery and innovative. Authentic innovation, however, does not stem from liberal whims to placate secularism, but rather openness to the breath of heaven! Now, the late Stratford Caldecott wrote impressively of authentic renewal in terms of *mystagogia*:

Christianity is not a set of (more or less coherent) ideas. It is not, like Gnosticism, a doctrine of liberation through enlightenment. It is primarily a means of salvation, which

is to say a method of integration—the *integration of human with divine life, through a series of stages*. . . . The integration it brings about is a *genuine transformation*; it goes much deeper than the exchanging of one pattern of moral habits for another. Christianity is declining in Europe largely because this essential interior dimension—the spiritual dimension in which we experience a living relationship with Jesus Christ—has been neglected.

The need for ongoing catechesis in the mysteries of Christ and of the Church, a catechesis traditionally known as *mystagogia* (“initiation into the mysteries”), has been noted in Church circles for years. *Mystagogy* is the stage of exploratory catechesis that comes after apologetics, after evangelization, and after the Sacraments of initiation (baptism, Eucharist, and confirmation) have been received. Baptism and confirmation may be given only once. Christian initiation, though, is a continuing adventure, since the grace of these Sacraments is the source of a new life of prayer that must continue to grow if it is not to wither and die.

The modern revival of the ancient Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults by the Catholic Church in the 1960s was an attempt to recapture a sense of the initiatory power of the Sacraments as it had been experienced by the early Christians. There is a period of formal *mystagogy* at the end of RCIA, which continues from Easter Sunday through Pentecost (and sometimes longer). But this does not go nearly far enough. It certainly does not suffice to introduce the catechumen to the full richness of mystical theology.

All too often, the new Christian, having been

received into the Church through RCIA, or the young person newly confirmed, is left to sink or swim in the parish. A shortage of priests or qualified spiritual directors means that such a person receives very little encouragement to journey deeper into the Christian mystery. He may not even be aware of the full richness of the spiritual resources that exist within the tradition, resources to help him grow in prayer and holiness and the knowledge of God.

Some people may find help within a parish prayer group or one of the new ecclesial movements (Focolare, the Neo-Catechumenal Way, or Communion and Liberation). They may join Opus Dei or one of the older “third orders,” which were designed for lay people who wished to attach themselves to a religious order . . . but . . . many people simply settle down into a routine Christianity that often turns into a spiritual wasteland. The danger then is that such a person may drift into a kind of indifference, gradually cease to pray, and eventually lose the sense of faith altogether.

How can we “crack the nut” and find our way deeper into the tradition of living prayer?<sup>9</sup>

What can I say? We have heard how Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger once reflected how the so-called “spirit of Vatican II” too often led to “boredom and discouragement.” It is worth asking, then, how much pre-Vatican II Catholicism suffered from the ennui Caldecott evokes here. Certainly, the Church of the past did not breed indifference like this! People did not fall away so easily after confirmation. For true Christianity is never boring. Rather, it offers just what Caldecott says: the transformation of the soul, whereby the divine becomes ever more integrated with the human life!

But, as Caldecott also says, the modern RCIA hardly provides for this. How can we can “crack the nut” he asks? I hope this book addresses that question a little—because my own life-experience after conversion was never boring. Instead, it became ever more richly meaningful. It must be said, however, that my experience differed from that of many newly confirmed, following RCIA. For by the Grace of God, I soon fell into spiritual patterns that far more resembled pre-Vatican II Catholicism than the modern RCIA. I had, for example, the grace of soon discovering the Latin Mass. Another grace happened as my wife prayed her Rosary ever more intensively and we both found ourselves drawn into daily Communion. In time, we also discovered the very thing that so inflamed the early Jesuits: devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The New Age crisis only confirms that Stratford Caldecott is right. New Agers turn to lesser mysteries, because they never see a Church of continuing mystagogia. Valentin Tomberg is likewise right to point out how the original Jesuits—whilst remaining faithful—also pioneered a new meditative life. And Tomberg’s own *Meditations on the Tarot* provides an extraordinarily profound manual for Christian meditation in the new millennium.

Lector, I am far from able to write any such manual myself! All I can offer, I think, are small hints, extended throughout this book. For example, I have encouraged interior attention toward the Sacraments—or practicing Eucharistic Adoration with eyes open, gazing into the Host, letting tension fall away from the face, the torso, the body. Alongside these little hints, my book hopefully offers more in terms of “cracking the nut.” Go to frequent or daily communion, I say. And if you can, go to Mass where the Priest faces *ad orientem*—for his mindful attentiveness will foster your own. Pray your Rosary daily—as meditatively as you can. Go to Confession regularly and sincerely. All these things will ensure your Christian path becomes one of regenerative mystagogia—not routine ennui. At least, here are things

that have regenerated me. And, as we shall now explore, there is also devotion to His Sacred Heart. For although this devotion was heedlessly cast aside after Vatican II, it remains an inexhaustible treasure by which you may ensure you never fall into the modern ennui of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, 104–08.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Sewell, *Catholics: Britain's Largest Minority* (London: Viking, 2001), 144.

<sup>4</sup> Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Russell B. Shaw, *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 618–19.

<sup>7</sup> According to Bishop Fellay, “Actions Speak Louder than Words,” accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.remnantnewspaper.com/Archives/2010-1031-mccall-fellay.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in David Allen White, *The Horn of the Unicorn: A Mosaic of the Life of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre* (Kansas City, MO: Angelus Press, 2006), 224–25.

<sup>9</sup> Stratford Caldecott, “Life Beyond Confirmation: How to Revive the Ancient Practice of Mystagogy,” accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/life-beyond-confirmation-how-to-revive-the-ancient-practice-of-mystagogy>.

## The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

*One of us reposed upon His Breast at the beginning of a New Universe.*

*One of us went inside His Breast at Paray-le-Monial.*

**T**O EXTERIOR VISION, Paray-le-Monial appears to be an unassuming country town in a region of western France that scarcely seems significant. Yet from a small convent in this inconspicuous corner of Europe, events would unfurl, that forever transformed the face of Christendom. What is even more remarkable, the woman at the heart of those events, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, lacked any worldly authority. She was a humble cloistered nun, who never ventured into wider society, nor had contact with those in power. She lived in utter obscurity, subject to a Mother Superior who doubted her visions. John Dalgairns, a Nineteenth-Century biographer of the Saint, describes her situation—drawing a conclusion that is difficult to avoid:

Every attempt on her part to put [the Devotion] forward in the community was put down with a strong hand; and yet she was bidden to spread it abroad in Christendom. She was ordered to proclaim the institution of a Feast in its honor, on the Friday in the Octave of Corpus Christi; yet, utterly unknown, as she was, what possible access had she to the Holy See, or even to the local authorities of her own diocese? Before she died, however, she had the consolation of seeing the devotion make its way in her own order, and even in her own convent, where at length a

tardy justice was done her; and after her death it spread with unexampled swiftness throughout the world.

If you ask me by what means the devotion became popular, I answer that I know not. I can only say that, in the course of thirty years, it numbered three hundred confraternities, in all parts of the known world, from France to China. I could be content to see nothing supernatural in a devotion rising in the hearts of a few devout souls. But when an obscure nun persuades the world to adopt a devotion dear to herself, when the movement originating with her spreads like wildfire, and acts the part of a burning cross, handed on from country to country, across seas and mountains, from the Old world to the New, I can only see the finger of God.<sup>1</sup>

Dalgairns is right: God worked a global miracle from Paray-le-Monial. Given this, it is well to ponder Paray's location. For example, it is surely no accident the Cult of the Sacred Heart arose in France, long regarded "the eldest daughter of the Church." Neither is it insignificant that France later became the principle source of the revolutionary fervor that transformed the face of Western civilization. Nor it is immaterial that, after the French Revolution tried to exterminate Christianity, the French Counter-Revolution adopted His Sacred Heart as its central emblem.

### **At the Cusp of Modernity**

YET not only is the physical location of the birth of the Sacred Heart devotion significant, but also its *location in time*—the latter Seventeenth Century, the cusp of modernity. Here, I turn to a remarkable passage regarding the historical timing of the revelation at Paray. And, once again, it stems from Valentin Tomberg, who has

yielded me so much inspiration, not only for my conversion but also for the major themes of this book. For, as Tomberg pinpointed, the Sacred Heart appeared at the very moment that Europe was about to be engulfed by Enlightenment rationalism. And, all this was so dangerous, Tomberg wrote, that it required heaven itself to intervene:

There have been (and still are) times in Europe and elsewhere during which for whole nations the life of the soul as such has been (and still is) in grave danger, having been smothered and reduced to a minimum. This holds not only with respect to the tidal wave of materialism that has flooded across the world in this century, but also for the outpouring of “intellectual enlightenment” during the age of rationalism in the Eighteenth Century which paved the way for materialism.

At that time the danger facing the human soul was so great that, in order to avert it, a special intervention from heaven proved necessary as a preventive measure. This took place during the second half of the Seventeenth Century. It was then that the revelation of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus occurred. This led to the cult of devotion to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, which spread rapidly in Catholic countries and took root there. *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was to save the soul of humanity.* For, with the intellectual enlightenment, the danger threatening to break in upon human beings was that of the *centaur*. Human beings would have been turned into a kind of centaur—a being consisting of head and limbs (intellect and will), but without heart—that is, a “clever beast.” Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus had the task of rekindling the heart. Thereby the light, warmth, and life, streaming from the heart of Jesus, was to counteract

the will-to-power and the intellect serving this will.

Be that as it may, the soul—understood as the most refined and deepest life of the heart—is by no means certain of survival, not even within Christian, civilised mankind. All kinds of dangers threaten, and destruction is an ever-present danger. The life of the soul has to be cultivated and stimulated, as took place (and is still taking place) with the help of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What deeply moving moral deepness and beauty can be seen and experienced through devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus! [*Italics mine*]<sup>2</sup>

Yet Tomberg was hardly the first to consider the warmth of the Sacred Heart manifesting in a cold era of intellect and power. Earlier writers also invoked the *particular timing* of the Sacred Heart's appearance—for example Bishop Emile Bougaud, who penned *The Life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*. Thus, Bougaud remains very conscious that *earlier* saints experienced visions of the Sacred Heart, remarkably similar to hers. However, these earlier revelations of His Sacred Heart were never popularized—they remained obscure. Before St. Margaret Mary, the mystics who beheld His Sacred Heart kept largely silent. Hence, the mystery that confounds Bougaud:

But what does astonish me, O holy lovers of Jesus, is your silence. Why, though so inflamed with love for this Sacred Heart, have you revealed its beauty to none? We seek amongst you apostles and evangelists of the Heart of Jesus, but we find only contemplatives, on fire, 'tis true; but silent. Your silence we should be unable to explain . . . had not one of you taught us the mysterious reason.<sup>3</sup>

Bougaud then recounts an Eleventh-Century mystical encounter St. Gertrude experienced with St. John the Evangelist:

Once St. Gertrude asked the beloved disciple St. John why he, who first had the happiness of reposing on the Saviour's breast, had taught us none of the secrets of the Adorable Heart. St. John answered that God had reserved to Himself to make them known *in a time of great coldness*, and that He held back these wonders *to rekindle the flames of charity at a time in which it would have grown cold and almost extinct*. [Italics mine]<sup>4</sup>

Thus, it was not till the “time of great coldness”—the late Seventeenth Century—that the revelations to St. Margaret Mary occurred and adoration of the Heart of Jesus became widespread practice in Catholic culture.

For Our Lord now adjured the faithful *to console* his suffering Heart—making *reparation* to It for the outrages committed by an ungrateful humanity. Reparation, as we shall see, became the centerpiece of the new devotion. For this, the Master of Love prescribed specific devotional practices, including *a great rhythmic triad* of the Holy Hour *every week*, the First Friday *every month* and an *annual* Feast of the Sacred Heart. Now, conscious relationship to His Sacred Heart was no longer reserved for isolated saints and mystics! For the first time, ordinary people everywhere began to console the pierced Heart of Jesus Christ!

Thus, the great cult to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was born at the beginning of modernity. Millions of souls participated in this devotion, which now diffused across the Catholic world, via prayers, litanies, sermons, books, and much else besides. Moreover, the great symbol of His Heart started appearing not only in churches, monasteries, schools, and other public places, but was also mounted in private homes. There were even movements to place the Heart of God on the national flag—most notably in France, but also in Ireland and Belgium. Catholics everywhere were now habitually reminded of

the human Heart of God.

## **Our Lord Appears in Paray-le-Monial**

BUT let us return to Paray-le-Monial. St. Margaret Mary had many encounters with the Sacred Heart, although three of these have long assumed outstanding significance in shaping the Sacred Heart tradition. They transpired between 1673 and 1675 and have long been known as the Three Great Apparitions. The first occurred on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist in 1673. Here is how the Saint recounts it in her *Autobiography*:

I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, when I felt myself wholly penetrated with that Divine Presence, but to such a degree that I lost all thought of myself and of the place where I was, and abandoned myself to this Divine Spirit, yielding up my heart to the power of His Love. He made me repose for a long time upon His Sacred Breast, where He disclosed to me the marvels of His Love and the inexplicable secrets of His Sacred Heart, which so far He had concealed from me. Then it was that, for the first time, He opened to me His Divine Heart in a manner so real and sensible as to be beyond all doubt, by reason of the effects which this favor produced in me, fearful, as I always am, of deceiving myself in anything that I say of what passes in me. It seems to me that this is what took place:

“My Divine Heart” He said “is so inflamed with love for men, and for thee in particular that, being unable any longer to contain within Itself the flames of Its burning Charity, It must needs spread them abroad by thy means, and manifest Itself to them (mankind) in order to enrich them with the precious treasures of sanctification and

salvation necessary to withdraw them from the abyss of perdition. I have chosen thee as an abyss of unworthiness and ignorance for the accomplishment of this great design, in order that everything may be done by Me.”

After this He asked me for my heart, which I begged Him to take. He did so and placed it in His own Adorable Heart where He showed it to me as a little atom which was being consumed in this great furnace, and withdrawing it thence as a burning flame in the form of a heart, He restored it to the place whence He had taken it saying to me:

“My well-beloved, I give thee a precious token of My love, having enclosed within thy side a little spark of its glowing flames, that it may serve thee for a heart and consume thee to the last moment of thy life; its ardor will never be exhausted.”

. . .

After such a signal favor which lasted for a long time, during which I knew not whether I was in Heaven or on earth, I remained for several days, as it were, on fire and side, inebriated (with divine love) and so completely out of myself, that I had to do myself violence in order to utter a single word.

In another passage, the saint further relates what she beheld in this first Great Apparition:<sup>5</sup>

After having received from my Divine Saviour a favor almost similar to that bestowed upon the beloved Disciple on the evening of the Last Supper, the Divine Heart was represented to me as on a throne of fire and flames,

shedding rays on every side brighter than the sun and transparent as crystal. *The Wound which He received upon the Cross appeared there visibly; a crown of thorns encircled the Divine Heart, and It was surmounted by a cross.*

These instruments of His Passion signified, as my Divine Master gave me to understand, that it was the unbounded love which He had for men that had been the source of all His sufferings; that from the first moment of His Incarnation all these torments had been present to Him, and that from the first moment the Cross had been, so to say, planted in His Heart; that from that moment He accepted all the pains and humiliations which His Sacred Humanity was to suffer during the course of His mortal life, and even the outrages to which His love for men exposed Him till the end of the world in the Blessed Sacrament.

He gave me to understand afterwards that it was the great desire He had to be perfectly loved by men that had made Him form the design of disclosing to them His Heart, and of giving them in these latter times this last effort of His love, by proposing to them an object and a means so calculated to engage them to love Him, and love Him solidly, opening to them all the treasures of love, mercy, and grace, of sanctification and salvation which . . . this divine Heart is the fruitful and inexhaustible source. [Italics mine]<sup>6</sup>

What an abundance of spiritual riches presents itself for contemplation here—far more than we can ever do justice to. Still, we may start with the fact the Sacred Heart is presented *symbolically*. The visible wound to the Heart, the Crown of Thorns, the Cross atop the

Heart, the flames—all these form parts of a symbol *signifying* inexhaustible truths beyond all words. The saint indicates, for example, a little of what the Cross above the Heart signifies—the acceptance of suffering and humiliation from the moment of His Incarnation. But there is more. For the Sacred Heart appears “more resplendent than a sun,” blazing with the fire of an infinite love. And this is not all. The Sacred Wound is there and the Crown of Thorns. St. Margaret Mary apprehends the *unfathomable suffering* all these entail.

God becomes human and, as a human, He suffers with us and for us. Is it not *inevitable* that “unbounded love . . . for men” should become “the source of all His sufferings”? What else is possible, when it is a matter of nothing less than *intimate identification* with every human being who has ever lived, lives now, or ever will live? Can Infinite Love do anything else but suffer, whilst *identifying* with the personal tragedy of every fallen creature, wherever it may be, including purgatory, hell, or here in this earthly vale of tears? And elsewhere, St. Margaret Mary speaks of the crown of thorns in her vision, still surrounding the Sacred Heart, “which signified the pricks our sins caused him.”<sup>7</sup>

Here we have the vision of the Sacred Heart, still pierced by the sin of the world. Yet our sins hurt the Lord because they hurt us. For He remains infinitely more conscious of how much our own sin hurts us, than we can ever imagine. Here are matters incomprehensible for any fallen heart, like yours or mine, Lector. We cannot begin to conceive LOVE such as this—a love that completely identifies itself with the immensity of cosmic suffering.

Here is how the Sacred Heart of Jesus revealed Itself to St. Margaret Mary at the cusp of modernity—that very point where the world began falling, once again, into paganism. For Enlightenment Rationalism necessarily rejected the *revealed* religion of a *personal* savior. And, naturally and inevitably, “enlightened” cultures fell prey

to new forms of paganism (if not outright materialism and atheism). Thus, we come today to contemporary New Age neo-paganism, which prefers the *impersonal* forces and energies of “the Universe” to Jesus Christ. Here are the consequences of spurning the Personal God of Christian Revelation. Thus, anyone who spurns Christian revelation, likewise spurns the God who became so personal He was willing to incarnate, suffer, and die beneath the cosmic weight of our sin.

### **God Now Has a Human Heart**

ALONG with her aforementioned autobiography, St. Margaret Mary also left behind numerous letters, memoranda, and communications with her confessors, including St. Claude La Colombière and later Father Jean Croiset. These holy men were Jesuits and devotion to the Heart of Jesus would become ever more central to Jesuit spirituality during the centuries that followed. Indeed, after St. Claude la Colombière died, St. Margaret Mary was given a remarkable vision of St. Claude in heaven, wherein she heard the Blessed Virgin Mary address her former confessor:

As for you, faithful servant of My divine Son, you have a great share in this precious treasure. . . . It is reserved to the Fathers of your Society [i.e., the Jesuits] to show and make known its utility and value so that people may profit from It by receiving It with the respect and gratitude due so great a benefit.<sup>8</sup>

Later, as we shall see, St. Margaret Mary believed Our Lord inspired Father Croiset to compose the first great treatise on the Sacred Heart devotion. Thus, heaven inspired St. Margaret Mary and her Jesuit confessors to lay the foundations of a new cult within the bosom of the Church. These foundations were then elaborated, as the centuries

proceeded and untold souls continued to meditate on her revelation, further developing its themes through countless homilies, books, prayers, Papal commentaries, etc. And as the Cult of the Sacred Heart advanced, something of tremendous significance was evoked—or rather re-evoked—within the Catholic universe. For the new devotion recalled the dogma of the Hypostatic Union to the hearts of the faithful.

*The Hypostatic Union.* Here is the great dogma established at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. At that point, the Church formally recognized that the Second Person [*hypostasis*] of the Trinity, was completely and forever united with our human nature. In other words, since the Incarnation, the Word of God is not only fully Divine, *but also fully Human.*

Thus, the Church proclaimed the true, full incarnate humanity of God—long disputed during the first centuries of the Faith. For prior to Chalcedon, there were many souls—gnostics, docetists, Appolinarians, Manichaeans, and more—who found it inconceivable God could become fully and truly human. They denied God would abase Himself by taking on the wretched matter of a fallen universe. But Chalcedon affirmed the Hypostatic Union: Christ Our Lord, Second Person of the Trinity, had, from the moment of His Incarnation, fully *assumed* human nature. From then on, human nature belonged inseparably to the Godhead. And therefore *God now had a human heart.*

Now, the new Sacred Heart devotion, as we have said, served to remind the faithful of the Hypostatic Union—something urgently needed at that epoch in history. But to fully appreciate this, one must understand something of ecclesiastical history during St. Margaret Mary's era. In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Catholicism not only contended with Protestantism and Enlightenment rationalism assaulting the Church from outside, but also *Jansenism* attacking the Church from within. Indeed, Jansenism had parallels with Protestantism. It might be described briefly, if inadequately, as a

particularly dour and rigorist movement within Catholicism, which resembled Calvinism. And when the Jesuits began to promote the glory of His Most Sacred Heart, the “enlightened” rationalists, Protestants, and Jansenists of the epoch objected—violently.

For the new devotion promoted the precise opposite of either “enlightened” Deism or a remote Calvinistic deity set apart from the world. Instead, it championed the *warm, human love of God*. Yet “enlightened minds” of the era (whether within the Catholic Church or not) reviled the new cult to the *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*. Many argued, for example, that devotion to a human heart was nothing but materialistic idol worship.

However, apologists of His Sacred Heart—laity, Priests, and prelates alike—now leapt to the fore. Adoration of the Heart of Jesus, they said, was not devotion to a material idol! It was, in fact, the very antidote to materialism! Materialism idolizes the strictly earthly things of the fallen world. Yet what was at issue here was hardly fallen matter, but something else entirely. It was matter that had been *assumed*: conjoined with the Divine and thereby glorified. For the Heart of Our Lord does not belong to fallen nature—rather it is unfallen human nature assumed by God.

Hence, the glory of the Sacred Heart could not be appreciated without apprehending the Hypostatic Union, in which human nature became united to divine nature. Through the Hypostatic Union, the Godhead became Emmanuel: God with us. God had joined our humanity and the newfound devotion to the human Heart of Jesus was yet another means to recall that God now had a human heart.

Certainly, the Jesus who revealed Himself to St. Margaret Mary in Paray-le-Monial was so very vulnerable, personal, and human. Indeed, He was *shockingly human* for those of a deist or Calvinist persuasion. How deeply all this moved apologists of the Sacred Heart during earlier times! For they remained keenly aware of the soulless, icy chill within the rationalist spirit of their era. And in the Cult of the

Sacred Heart of Jesus, they recognized a clear antitoxin to its harshness. Thus, these authors ringingly proclaim that adoration of the human Heart of Jesus is hardly idolatry of matter, but rather adoration of Sacred Humanity.

All this beautifully culminated in 1956 with *Haurietis Aquas*, from Ven. Pius XII, which magisterially summed up the Sacred Heart tradition. Here was the final encyclical issued by that great pontiff just before his death in 1958 and the new ecclesiastical direction, which then commenced with his successor, St. John XXIII. (At which point, the Sacred Heart tradition began to decline.) Yes, Ven. Pius XII movingly expresses this intensely personal Jesus, true man and true God, the Hypostatic Union, affirmed at Chalcedon to correct every attempt to de-humanize Our Lord. Here is what is central—this very human Jesus—to the Sacred Heart devotion. Let us, then, draw close to Ven. Pius XII, as he proclaims how Our Lord manifested the love of God in a NEW way—most human and personal:

[Christ's] love was *not entirely the spiritual love proper to God* inasmuch as “God is a spirit.” Undoubtedly the love with which God loved our forefathers and the Hebrew people was of this nature. [It was a] true but entirely spiritual love with which God continued to sustain the human race. On the other hand, the love . . . of the Heart of Jesus Christ, expresses not only divine love but also *human sentiments of love*. [Italics mine]

Hence, prior to the Incarnation, God loved us in a spiritual way. But because He had not yet assumed human nature, he *lacked a human heart*—a human way of loving. Yet *now the very cosmos is changed*. As Ven. Pius XII explains:

We ought to meditate most lovingly on the beating of His Sacred Heart [during his time on earth] until that final

moment when, as the Evangelists testify, “crying out with aloud ‘It is finished,’ and bowing His Head, He yielded up the ghost.” Then it was that His heart ceased to beat and His sensible love was interrupted until the time when, triumphing over death, He rose from the tomb. But after His glorified body had been re-united to the soul of the divine Redeemer, conqueror of death, His most Sacred Heart never ceased, and never will cease, to beat with calm and imperturbable pulsations.

Thus, Jesus Christ is both God Divine and *One of us*—a particular, personal human being—who in His Glorified Human Body (with His Glorified Human Heart) continues to call out to humanity, as He called out to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.

### **A Very Human Jesus**

HERE is the very origin of the Sacred Heart devotion: the personal experience of St. Margaret Mary, hearing a personal call from Our Lord—to enter into intimate relationship with Him, even console Him, as we console our dearest friends. And as we shall see, he prescribed special devotional exercises for this, aimed at *reparation*.

First, however, let us dwell a little longer on *Haurietis Aquas*. For Ven. Pius XII not only illumines the traditional spirituality of His Sacred Heart, he also speaks to something central to this book: *the vital difference between the New Age and the Catholic Mystery*. For the New Age would offer us a “Christ” who appears to come straight from India: detached, serene, transcended—hardly passionate and scarcely human. How different is the God-Man—the supremely personal Jesus Christ, Who poured out His Heart to St. Margaret Mary! And how beautifully Ven. Pius XII expresses this very human Jesus:

The adorable Heart of Jesus Christ began to beat with *a love at once human and divine* after the Virgin Mary generously pronounced Her “Fiat.” . . . Likewise was He moved by love, completely in harmony with the affections of His human will and the divine Love . . . during His public life: in long apostolic journeys; in the working of innumerable miracles, by which He summoned back the dead from the grave or granted health to all manner of sick persons; in enduring labors; in bearing fatigue, hunger and thirst; in the nightly watchings during which He prayed most lovingly to His Father; and finally, in His . . . parables, in those particularly which deal with mercy—the lost drachma, the lost sheep, the prodigal son.

. . .

But the Heart of Jesus Christ was moved by a more urgent charity when from His lips were drawn words breathing the most ardent love.

. . .

When He looked down on His beloved city of Jerusalem . . . He uttered this sentence: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that slayest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not!”

And His Heart beat with love for His Father and with a holy anger when seeing the sacrilegious buying and selling taking place in the Temple, He rebuked the violators.

. . . .

But His Heart was moved by a particularly intense love *mingled with fear* as He perceived the hour of His bitter torments drawing near and, expressing *a natural repugnance* for the approaching pains and death, He cried out: “Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me.” And when He was greeted by the traitor with a kiss, in love triumphant *united to deepest grief*, He addressed to him those words which seem to be the final invitation of His most merciful Heart. . . . “Dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”. . . . And when the divine Redeemer was hanging on the Cross, He showed that His Heart was strongly moved by different emotions—burning love, desolation, pity, longing desire. . . .

Even before He ate the Last Supper with His disciples Christ Our Lord . . . felt His heart roused by *strong emotions*, which He revealed to the Apostles in these words: “With desire have I desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.” And *these emotions were doubtless even stronger* when “taking bread, He gave thanks, and broke, and gave to them, saying, ‘This is My body.’” [Italics mine]<sup>9</sup>

What contrast between a smiling Eastern master who has transcended the world and the agonized Jesus Christ on the Cross of the world! How I wish the sentiments of Ven. Pius XII could be heard in New Age circles. Yet New Agers frequently cannot bear such a personal Jesus. Usually, they prefer an impersonal array of “energies,” detached and remote Supermen or the channeled “Jesus” of *A Course in Miracles* who never suffers.

## On the Sacred Heart Devotion

ALL the while, the Sacred Heart devotion calls the human heart back to personal relationship with God. As we have indicated, it did this through a particular form, with specific devotional practices. Amongst these is the rhythmic Great Triad of the weekly Holy Hour, the Monthly First Friday, and the annual Feast of the Sacred Heart. Let us consider these, beginning with the Holy Hour, whose origins are found in the Second Great Apparition. Here is what Our Lord disclosed to St. Margaret Mary at that momentous point:

Every night between Thursday and Friday I will make thee share in the mortal sadness which I was pleased to feel in the Garden of Olives.

. . .

And in order to bear Me company in the humble prayer that I then offered to My Father, in the midst of My anguish, thou shalt rise between eleven o'clock and midnight, and remain prostrate with Me for an hour, not only to appease the divine anger by begging mercy for sinners, but also to mitigate in some way the bitterness which I felt at that time on finding Myself abandoned by My apostles, which obliged Me to reproach them for not being able to watch one hour with Me.<sup>10</sup>

Here we find the great central theme of the Sacred Heart devotion—*reparation* in response to divine anger and suffering. In pondering the very serious matter of Reparation, one naturally arrives at the expiatory sacrifice of Christ. For although Jesus Christ made the ultimate immolation for our outrages against God, He still asks something analogous of us—albeit in an extremely limited manner,

suitable to our limited natures. Traditionally, Christians have long been called to carry the Cross—yet St. Margaret Mary was now called to further sacrifice, by sharing in His “mortal sadness.”

Now, in her words above, St. Margaret Mary recorded a highly personal instruction to herself. Thus, initially, the Holy Hour does not appear to have formed part of the public Cult of the Sacred Heart. Rather, the Holy Hour only became promoted as a general practice long after her death. As Joseph McDonnell tells us:

How different are God’s ways from those of men. . . . He can afford to wait . . . whole centuries to pass without any apparent progress toward the end He has in view. So it was with regard to the devotion of the Holy Hour. God allowed a lengthened period to elapse during which this devotion lay dormant, or at most concealed within the hearts of some few chosen souls. Yet it was but gathering strength to come forth vested in a splendour and attractiveness that at once secured for it a foremost place among the practices of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

It was a brother-religious of [St. Claude La] Colombière . . . who was destined in God’s Providence to be instrumental in making known to the world the devotion of the Holy Hour. In 1828 the Fathers of the Society of Jesus came back once more to their ancient home in Paray-le-Monial, from which they had been driven by the Revolution.

The superior of the residence was Father Debrosse, a man of remarkable virtue and holiness. The following year, 1829, he felt within himself a strong attraction urging him to make the Holy Hour in the very spot where, well-nigh a century and a half before, it had been made for the first time by [St.] Margaret Mary Alacoque herself.

Hitherto, he had been in the habit of making it once a year on the night of Holy Thursday; he now began to make it on the eve of each First Friday. And as he knelt one night in May, keeping his hour of loving vigil before the silent tabernacle, a voice within him spoke through the silence of his lonely watch, and bade him go forth and spread abroad the devotion of the Holy Hour. Was it a voice from heaven, or the prompting of his own deep fervent piety? He knew not; but from that day forth he strove with all his might to [establish] the Holy Hour.<sup>11</sup>

During the Nineteenth Century, the Holy Hour became an established Catholic devotion, where it was celebrated in conjunction with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. However, whilst St. Margaret Mary actively promoted the monthly First Fridays and the annual Feast, it does not seem she gave the Holy Hour the same public attention. One may legitimately ask then, whether this devotion—at least in the form given to her—is reserved for a special kind of soul. For after the Holy Hour became widely disseminated—following Father Debrosse’s endeavors—the Church decided in favor of greater leniency. Whilst monks and nuns might be reasonably expected to keep to eleven o’clock each Thursday night, such a schedule was more demanding for lay people with families.

It was decreed, then, that the Holy Hour could be observed at any time between 2pm Thursday and 6pm Friday. Now, this, it should be said, was reserved for *private* Holy Hours prayed by individuals in their own homes or churches. In terms of *public* gatherings, the Church was more lenient still—leaving it entirely to the Priest or religious director to select the time of week for a Holy Hour with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Hence, in one’s local parish church, one may find the Holy Hour celebrated, whichever day the Priest sees fitting. And, in places like Ireland, this even gave rise to

permanent chapels of continuous Eucharistic exposition, wherein people could come at any time to pray a Holy Hour of Adoration.

Of course, one may still choose to emulate St. Margaret Mary late on Thursday night, keeping to Our Lord's request to her. There is nothing to discourage such an act—especially given the troubled nature of our times! In any event, even if St. Margaret Mary did not actively call souls to the Thursday Holy Hour, she definitely urged them to First Friday communion and the annual Feast. Let us, then, return to her account of the Second Great Apparition, where we also find the wellsprings of the First Friday devotion:

On the First Friday of each month, the above-mentioned grace connected with the pain in my side was renewed in the following manner: The Sacred Heart was represented to me as a resplendent sun, the burning rays of which fell vertically upon my heart, which was inflamed with a fire so fervid that it seemed as if it would reduce me to ashes. It was at these times especially that my Divine Master taught me what He required of me and disclosed to me the secrets of His loving Heart.

On one occasion, while the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, feeling wholly withdrawn within myself by an extra ordinary recollection of all my senses and powers, Jesus Christ, my sweet Master, presented Himself to me, all resplendent with glory, His Five Wounds shining like so many suns. Flames issued from every part of His Sacred Humanity, especially from His Adorable Bosom, which resembled an open furnace and disclosed to me His most loving and most amiable Heart, which was the living source of these flames. It was then that He made known to me the ineffable marvels of His pure [love] and showed me to what an excess He had loved men, from

whom He received only ingratitude and contempt. “I feel this more,” He said, “than all that I suffered during My Passion. If only they would make Me some return for My love, I should think but little of all I have done for them and would wish, were it possible, to suffer still more. But the sole return they make for all My eagerness to do them good is to reject Me and treat Me with coldness. Do thou at least console me by supplying for their ingratitude, as far as thou art able.”

On my representing to Him my inability, He replied: “Behold, this will supply for all that is wanting to thee.” And at the same time His Divine Heart being opened, there issued from It a flame so ardent that I thought I should be consumed, for I was wholly penetrated with it, and being no longer able to bear it, I besought Him to have pity on my weakness. “I will be thy strength,” He said to me, “fear nothing, but be attentive to My voice and to what I shall require of thee that thou mayest be in the requisite dispositions for the accomplishment of My designs.”

“In the first place thou shalt receive Me in Holy Communion as often as obedience will permit thee, whatever mortification or humiliation it may cause thee, which thou must take as pledges of My love. Thou shalt, moreover, communicate on the First Friday of each month.”<sup>12</sup>

Here one notes the emphasis not only given to the First Friday, but also *frequent communion*—a theme we will shortly consider. And many years later, during Mass on the First Friday of May 1688, St. Margaret Mary heard further words regarding these things from the Master of Love:

One Friday during Holy Communion . . . He spoke these words. . . “I promise you, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that Its all-powerful love will grant all those who communicate on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month the grace of final repentance. They will not die in My disfavor nor without receiving their Sacraments. My divine Heart shall be their secure refuge in their last moments.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the First Friday communion became key to the Sacred Heart devotion. In time, it was coupled with the public Holy Hour. And for long years, this mutual enrichment of these two practices vitalized the Church. As Joseph McDonnell writes in 1913:

The “Holy Hour” in common with other devotions connected with the Sacred Heart, is becoming wonderfully popular nowadays. In many places it forms, with the Monthly Communion of Reparation and the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, an integral part of the First Friday devotions, and wherever it has thus been introduced thronged churches and a wonderful increase of devotion in the faithful have been the immediate and assured result.<sup>14</sup>

Having looked to the origins of the Holy Hour and the First Friday, it remains to consider the Feast of the Sacred Heart. And it was during the Third Great Apparition in 1675 that Our Lord called for that great annual festival—once again summoning the faithful to *reparation*:

Being before the Blessed Sacrament one day of Its octave, I received from my God signal tokens of His love, and felt urged with the desire of making Him some return, and of rendering Him love for love. “Thou canst not make Me a

greater return of love,” He said, “than by doing what I have so often asked of thee.” Then, discovering to me His Divine Heart, He said: “Behold this Heart, Which has loved men so much, that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify to them Its love; and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude by reason of their irreverence and sacrileges, and by the coldness and contempt which they show Me in this Sacrament of Love. But what I feel the most keenly is that it is hearts which are consecrated to Me, that treat Me thus. Therefore, I ask of thee that *the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi be set apart for a special Feast to honor My Heart, by communicating on that day and making reparation to It by a solemn act, in order to make amends for the indignities which It has received during the time It has been exposed on the altars. I promise thee that My Heart shall expand Itself to shed in abundance the influence of Its divine love upon those who shall honor It, and cause It to be honored.*” [Italics mine]<sup>15</sup>

### **The Treasure of Frequent Communion**

CHRIST’S love blazing like the Sun; the very personal nature of that love; the need to make amends; the summons to publicly honor his Heart: All this and more becomes apparent in the Three Great Apparitions. But let us briefly note another feature to the new devotion—the call to frequent or daily communion. We have seen how Our Lord *commanded* St. Margaret Mary to receive communion, as often as possible. Likewise, frequent or daily communion was also emphasized in *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*—the initial treatise on the new spirituality of the Sacred Heart. This book was written by Father

Croiset at St. Margaret Mary's request. Or rather, according to her, Our Lord Himself requested Croiset to compose it. The saint makes this clear to her confessor, writing: "If you knew the ardent desire which urges me to make the Sacred Heart of my Sovereign known and glorified, you would not refuse to undertake this work. If I am not mistaken, He wishes you to do so."<sup>16</sup> And in later correspondence, she adds: "I have no doubt that He has assisted you, since the whole work, if I be not mistaken, is so perfectly in accordance with His wishes, that I so not think that it will be necessary to change anything in it."<sup>17</sup>

We have, then, an initial treatise both devoted to and inspired by the Sacred Heart. Here one reads of many themes that later came to characterize the Sacred Heart devotion beautifully elaborated—including the following:

There is no surer means to be in a short time inflamed with love for Jesus Christ than to receive Holy Communion frequently. It is not possible to carry fire in one's bosom and not be inflamed by it. Divine fire has lit a great furnace on our altars in the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist, and it is by approaching this Sacred Fire that all the Saints have been inflamed by a most ardent and tender love for Jesus Christ. The love by which they burned on receiving Holy Communion appeared even on their faces. At such times, the very name, the very image of Jesus would be enough to make them go into ecstasies, and we may regard it as certain that the great love which the early Christians had for Jesus Christ was the effect of Holy Communion which they received daily.

Those who with proper dispositions receive Holy Communion daily or frequently, experience the admirable effects of frequent Communion. They love Jesus Christ

ever more and more. Their love increases in the measure in which they nourish themselves often with this Bread of Angels and far from feeling satiety from the frequent reception, their hunger for it grows.

...

The Sacrament of the Altar is the love of loves. It is the effect of the greatest of all the loves which Jesus Christ has for men. He gives them His Body and Blood in order to gain their hearts, expressly to gain possession of their hearts.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, from the very beginning, the sacred fire of frequent communion was closely associated with devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Indeed, we can see how it was willed by Jesus Christ Himself. And, speaking very personally, Lector, I call particular attention to frequent communion regularly throughout this book—for not only do I intimately experience the immense graces it yields, but, amidst these grave times for the Church, I consider it vital for restoring Christendom (a matter we explore further on).

### **The Image of The Sacred Heart**

THAT being said, let us turn to another striking feature of the devotion—the familiar image of the *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*. How preeminent the Sacred Heart symbol once was across the entire Catholic universe. Anglophones, usually surrounded by predominantly Protestant heritage, may be unaware of this visual tradition (unless they have spent significant time in places like France, Ireland, Spain, or Latin America). But in Catholic lands, Sacred Heart imagery was almost omnipresent not very long ago. Indeed, a visitor to France today finds it still: on statues and weather-beaten wayside crosses and faded church

walls with decorative motifs of the *Cor Jesu* endlessly repeated. Yet these reminders are but the last vestiges of the integral Catholic culture that once existed in France. How much more visible the Heart of Jesus was back then! For the image of His Heart blazed forth on prayer cards, scapulars, medals, flags and banners, in journals, books and newspapers, and pictures above the hearth. This vast diffusion of the Sacred Heart symbol owes everything to St. Margaret Mary's mission. As George Tickell SJ writes in his biography of the saint:

Margaret Mary mentions also the pleasure, which our Divine Lord said He took in seeing His Sacred Heart visibly represented, in order that the hearts of men might be touched and powerfully drawn to Him by the cords of His Sacred Humanity.

“He assured me besides,” she says, “that He took a singular pleasure in being *honored under the representation of this Heart of flesh*, in order, He added, to touch the insensible hearts of men. And He promised me that He would shed in abundance on all who should honor It all the treasures of grace with which It is filled. *Wherever this image shall be exposed for special veneration it shall draw down upon the spot every kind of blessing.*” [Italics mine]<sup>19</sup>

Here one finds the origins of the practice of placing the Sacred Heart image prominently in the home. But to fully appreciate this tradition, one must move from St. Margaret Mary's time to 1907. In that year, a Peruvian Priest, Mateo Crawley-Boevey, was suffering mysterious, yet almost crippling, neurasthenia. Unable to perform his priestly duties, he was given leave to travel to Paray-le-Monial—where he was instantly healed, whilst praying in the same chapel Our Lord had appeared to St. Margaret Mary. As Father Crawley-Boevey would

later describe his mysterious cure in the chapel of the Sacred Heart:

I prayed, and suddenly I felt within myself a strange shock. I was struck by a blow of grace, at the same time very strong, yet infinitely gentle. When I arose, I was completely cured. Then, kneeling in the sanctuary, absorbed in an act of thanksgiving, I understood what Our Lord wished of me. That very evening I conceived the plan to reconquer the world home by home, family by family, for the love of the Heart of Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

So it happened that Father Mateo Crawley-Boevey came to the inspiration of consecrating individual homes to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After that, Pope St. Pius X entreated him to devote his life to spreading this devotion, which he did, then, for the rest of his days. Thereby the heart of Jesus was enthroned in home upon home.

This enthronement entails a Priest blessing both the home and the image of the Heart of Jesus, which is placed centrally therein. Perhaps this beautiful practice occurred nowhere more than in Ireland, where the tradition became deeply implanted. Indeed, I recall an elderly Irish lady telling me that, when her home was built around 1970, it was still builders' standard practice to ask the client: "Where do you want the fitting for your Sacred Heart lamp?"

Be that as it may, the Sacred Heart symbol began appearing everywhere in Catholic culture, throughout the last centuries. This is the era the West became awash in imagery, as never before. For during the Middle Ages, one saw relatively little imagery like we do today. One beheld sacred images in great stained glass, but neither the printing press existed then, nor, of course, photography, movies, and all the rest. Today, we witness imagery increasing exponentially everywhere, exhorting everything from baked beans to Chevrolets to human body parts (particularly feminine). Can there be any doubt Our

Lord anticipated this deluge of pictures enticing desire?! It would seem clear that widely disseminating sacred images might help to balance this lamentable feature of modernity, at least a little.

In any event, there are numerous instances whereby Heaven has called for devotional images. For example, there are the pictures associated with certain scapulars and, more recently, there is the Divine Mercy painting of St. Faustina. Moreover, the Blessed Virgin appeared to St. Catherine Labouré in the Rue du Bac of Paris, some hundred and fifty years after the revelation of Paray. Once again, we witness Heaven's will to disseminate the symbol of His Sacred Heart. For, as we tell in the following chapter, Our Lady called for the Miraculous Medal, which was subsequently worn by millions. What is pictured on this Medal? There are a number of sacred elements: stars, cross, the Blessed Virgin herself—in addition to the *dual images of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts*.

In Paray-le-Monial, Our Lord promised graces for the venerated display of His Heart. In Paris, Our Lady promised the same for those who would wear a medal, bearing the same symbolic representation of His Heart. Furthermore, there are miracles associated with the emblem of the Sacred Heart. Thus, some thirty years after St. Margaret Mary died in 1690, a ship from the orient carried bubonic plague into the harbor of Marseilles. The Black Death had again reached the shores of Europe. The Bishop of Marseilles—a holy man named Belsunce—risked his life walking the streets of Marseille barefoot, carrying aloft the image of the Sacred Heart. And miraculously, the plague retreated before his steps. (One can even read this in academic history books by today's skeptical historians.)<sup>21</sup> Belsunce's astonishing victory over the black plague in Marseilles only furthered the rapid spread of the devotion. And, as we shall see, it later inspired the Catholic French, who—seeing the 1789 Revolution as another deadly plague—pinned the Heart of Jesus on their chests, whilst they marched into battle to defend Altar and Throne.

Here we touch on further aspects of the Sacred Heart revelation, unmentioned so far. For example, Our Lord also called on the King of France, Louis XIV, to emblazon the Heart of Jesus upon his standards. And generations later, following the Revolution, Catholic France sought to place His Heart on the flag of France. Likewise, Our Lord called for a special church dedicated to His Sacred Heart. And two hundred years later, Catholic France began erecting the Sacré Coeur de Montmartre in penitence for the French revolution. Here are things, however, for our [next chapter](#) devoted to Catholic France.

For now, we are concerned with the global devotion to the Sacred Heart, which flourished for centuries, amidst the innumerable prayers; novenas; medals; works of art, architecture, and literature dedicated to the Heart of Jesus. All these and more ensured that, in the words of theologian Wendy M. Wright: “By the eve of Vatican II, the Sacred Heart had become virtually the defining symbol of Roman Catholicism.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus was devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus central to Tridentine Catholicism. This was the era, in which Catholicism was scorned, persecuted, and banned, first in Protestant nations, and then by various revolutionary governments, starting with France in 1789. The new Protestant and secular mentality emerging from the centuries of reformation and revolution has been scathing toward Catholic imagery. The colored plaster statues, the scapulars and medals, the imagery of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts—how frequently all these are mocked as nothing but syrupy sentimentalism by the modern, utilitarian mind.

Yet, it is precisely this same mentality that took hold of Catholicism in the wake of Vatican II. Many modern Catholics are now embarrassed to see the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Countless statues have been removed from churches, vast tracts of decor eradicated and no doubt many old stained glass windows would have likewise been destroyed—were it not so costly to replace them. Often,

then, it is only in the windows of the past that one still sees the pious images, which once captured the hearts of a less cynical age.

### Montceaux L'Etoile—an Embarrassment of Riches

HERE I should like to interpolate a little homage to the ravaged spirit of Montceaux L'Etoile. What is Montceaux L'Etoile? It is a small village, not far from Paray-le-Monial. During one of my visits to Paray, I discovered a little Romanesque church in this village, which was decorated to the hilt with old devotional imagery, which is now deemed unfashionable by Catholics and Protestants alike. In all possibility, it was the loveliest village chapel I have ever seen. The walls and ceilings were covered with beautiful renderings, beloved by Catholics of an earlier era. Words fail to describe how deeply moving this was—praying amidst these once cherished walls.

Yet, sometime later, I returned to that little church of Montceaux L'Etoile. I wanted, in fact, to photograph its beauty. I was too late. The church was in full process of “wreckovation.” All the decor was being stripped from the walls. The statues were soon to be removed. A learned woman explained to me the church’s Nineteenth-Century style represented *dégénérescence*—degeneration. By stripping the walls, she hoped the church would reflect an earlier, more austere and “genuine” age, which (I strongly imagine) was less embarrassing to her. I do not think I can ever bear to face the church at Montceaux L'Etoile again. But I have googled it and found photos of her walls as they now appear—plain and whitewashed.

My heart will always weep for the desecration of this humble place of piety. I cannot imagine its desecrators understood the least thing about such piety. Instead, they were consumed, I think, by a pseudo-aestheticism, which conceives itself as culturally refined, but sneers at devotion. France seems filled with such attitudes today—all taste and manners and rationalism—which is the dry (very dry) heir to

the French Enlightenment and Revolution.

Of course, it is not simply France. A widespread feeling of superiority seems to exist everywhere these days—that we cannot bear to be so cloyingly “juvenile.” Or can we not be a little more acceptable to our separated Protestant brethren? Can we not use Orthodox imagery, instead of Catholic? Can we not use *anything* that is not so embarrassingly sweet and sentimental—and Catholic?

What is such embarrassment in the end, except pride? And what is pride, except what lies at root of the Fall? Our pride takes much satisfaction in the holocaust of pious pre-Vatican II Catholic imagery. We have become “clever beasts” indeed, but at what cost to our souls?

Was there something childlike in earlier Tridentine images? Sometimes, but is there not something legitimately childlike in all of us—even into old age? Does not this inner child deserve comfort and consolation—if we are not too proud to admit it? Perhaps the Tridentine images of Our Lady and Our Lord console the child in all of us, who never stops looking toward a Mother or a Comforter? Have we become too pompous to admit such things? If so, what pettiness!

Indeed, it may be worse than pettiness. For the great modern Apparitions of Our Lady and the Sacred Heart reveal the *will* of Heaven. Heavenly Will wanted to disseminate this imagery far and wide. And perhaps part of the reason why (if only part) is *the will to console* the young or the young at heart.

Here are things we might pause to consider before consigning Tridentine Catholic imagery to the bonfires of our enfeebled imaginations. Now, this is not to say there is no such thing as Catholic kitsch. Certainly, there are kitschy pictures of the Sacred Heart. Yet, ironically, the most kitschy images—sentimental and cartoon-like—have emerged in recent decades since Vatican II. This imagery apes the Tridentine age, but lacks its sincerity. No, the imagery I have in mind, such as that found in old church windows or beneath the whitewashed walls of Montceaux L’Etoile remains pious

and humble, rather than kitsch. How very, very much has been lost.

## Reclaiming the Lost Devotion

BEFORE Vatican II, the Catholic world was awash with devotion to both the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts. But with the Protestantization of the Church after the Council, the decline began. The pictures disappeared. The statues came down. The votive lamps were extinguished. And the practice of the Holy Hour, the First Friday, and the Feast of the Sacred Heart all but evaporated. What can we say if we *trust* the Sacred Heart appeared to St. Margaret Mary for an all-important purpose? And what if we likewise *trust* the promises Heaven proffered? For Our Lord promised benediction through the image of His Heart. And Our Lady of the Rue du Bac promised the very same with the medal of the Two Hearts.

Now, if Heaven promises increased benediction from pious practices and venerated images, is it not logical to assume a *decrease* in benediction—when such piety disappears from our midst? Are we not entitled to ask—at very least!—whether the recent decline of the Church is connected to our recent disregard for these *promises of benediction*?

Who knows how many blessings were bestowed by the Cult of the Sacred Heart? Who can say how much grace flowed from the Sacred Annual Rhythm of the Holy Hour, the First Friday, and the Feast of His Heart? Who knows how much mercy was received by the millions, who wore images of His Heart or venerated it in their homes? Can anyone really, truly say?

No, no one can *calculate Grace*. Yet how many Catholics today would seem supremely confident in their capacity for such calculations! For they appear all-too-assured that all the above counts for nothing whatsoever. And how often liberal Catholics tell us these devotions are passé. One may even be scolded for being “archaic” and “magical” in

trusting benediction from the Sacred Heart of Jesus!

But what if Catholics of Faith can no longer stand by idly whilst the Church is decimated? And what if Catholics recognize, alongside Valentin Tomberg, the *centaur* that stalks the secular world? This is to say, once again, the condition whereby humanity becomes ever more clever (at least in a rational and technological sense)—yet ever more bestial.

Dare we ask whether the decay of the civilization has to do with the decay of tradition? Must we renounce the conclusion that the loss of the great tradition of His Most Sacred Heart—as well as Her Immaculate Heart—is not without grave and serious consequence for humanity?

Now, the present volume touches but fleetingly the Mysteries of the Immaculate Heart. Still, any Catholic of Faith can easily recognize how Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Our Lady of Fatima beckon us to the Two Hearts. In any event, as your author writes these words, two pendants are suspended from his neck, bearing witness to the promises of the Two Hearts. One is the Miraculous Medal, the other bears the symbol of His Most Sacred Heart, which he purchased in Paray-le-Monial—most holy city.

### **Paray-le-Monial**

It will be clear to you, Lector, that your author invokes the crisis of his own life's journey. For I travelled from iconoclasm to tradition in stages: from being a liberal New Ager to being a liberal Catholic enamored of the "Spirit of Vatican II" to being the traditionalist that I am today. And this traditionalism owes everything to my life-changing experience in Paray-le-Monial. Here, then, I want to add a very personal note regarding that extraordinary place in Eastern France. For, obviously, it is not only relevant to our present chapter, but also it was only through the extraordinary presence I experienced in praying

there, that I was able, at long last, to leave the past behind. There, in Paray, I finally shed my liberal leanings and became convinced the Catholic Church must recover its traditions for the sake of the world—including the Sacred Heart tradition.

Paray-le-Monial, what does it mean for the world today? The postcards on sale there speak of the “Coeur spirituel de l’Europe”—the spiritual heart of Europe! When first I saw these, I imagine I laughed. A bit over the top, I must have thought! But now, after more than twenty visits, I am no longer as skeptical, as once I was.

Once in Mulhouse, a great French city, hundreds of kilometers from Paray, I was praying in a church—when a complete stranger, an elderly Frenchwoman, interrupted me. We had a little conversation, which turned to Paray. She exclaimed: “Paray! One can feel the Heart of Jesus there.” I had to say I felt exactly the same thing.

A holy presence is felt in Paray. It is palpable in the Chapel of the Apparitions, where the relics of St. Margaret Mary lie. It is also profoundly present in the Jesuit chapel, which holds the relics of St. Claude Colombiere. Therein, I experienced, in my prayer, graces that transformed me forever. And in the pages of old books, written long ago, I have found something that tells me I am not alone and neither is that elderly woman in Mulhouse. For here Bishop Bougaud describes the Chapel of the Apparitions:

Our humble Margaret Mary now rests . . . under the very spot upon which Our Lord appeared to her. . . . The pilgrim on his arrival pauses, *involuntarily moved*. The sweet mysteries accomplished in this place: on the one side, virginity, tenderness, thirst for immolation, heavenly detachment; on the other, condescension, mercy, infinite love . . . all that speaks to the soul. *He forgets himself for hours in mute contemplation*. There have been places more highly venerated on this earth, but there are very few

more august or more sweet. [Italics mine]<sup>23</sup>

O Bishop Bougaud, how grateful I am for your testimony! And a hundred forty years later, you inspire me to leave behind my own feeble testament of my hours lost in prayer in this selfsame chapel, as well as in that astonishing Jesuit chapel.

Truly, the presence in these two chapels transformed my life, dear Lector. I could never have written this book without them. Yet this presence also extended beyond these chapels. Waking in my bed at night, I felt struck: It is *different* here in Paray. Yes, around the clock in Paray, a very special presence could be felt bathing me, cleansing me, working on my soul. I confess there were times in Paray, where I endured real suffering. But how I felt succored and strengthened there, like nowhere else on earth. In my agony, I knew I was being *held*.

The Mystery of Paray-le-Monial! How many New Agers make modern pilgrimage to so-called “Mystery” or “Power Centers.” Over the years, I visited some of these New Age “Power Centers” myself whilst my friends told me of others: Findhorn, Glastonbury, Stonehenge, Rennes-le-Chateau, Ojai, California, and all the rest. All that time, I never once heard of Paray-le-Monial! But next to the power of Paray, these New Age centers seem to me as nothing.

The Mystery of Paray-le-Monial did not cease when St. Margaret Mary died in 1690. Innumerable souls continued to wend their way to this sacred place, forever hallowed by His Heart. New religious orders like the Poor Clares and the Dominicans arrived, whilst Paray became the Jesuit headquarters in France. But Paray became something else besides, after the French Revolution of 1789. For at that time, there still existed *another France*—very different to the secular of France today. *La Vraie France*—the true France—she was called by those who felt her spirit and cherished her. This France could never celebrate 1789, but only weep for everything the Revolution destroyed. *La Vraie France*—the Sacred Heart became *her emblem and her rallying point*.

And those who refused to forget La Vraie France, those who *loved* her, came to Paray. They even came with a *new* French tricolor flag, the blue, white, and red of the Revolution, but with this singular difference. There in the middle white band of the tricolor was emblazoned the Sacré Coeur. But to understand these things properly, we now turn, in-depth, to the trauma of Catholic France and the brutal politics of secularization.

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<sup>1</sup> John Dobree Dalgairns, *The Devotion to the Heart of Jesus: with an Introduction on the History of Jansenism* (London: T. Richardson and Son, 1853), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, 280–81.

<sup>3</sup> Emile Bougaud, *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque* (Rockford, IL: TAN 1990), 140.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Dispute exists as to whether the Saint refers to a continuation of the experience above or whether it is a separate experience that occurred afterwards.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in George Tickell, *The Life of Blessed Margaret Mary: With Some Account of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart* (London: Burns, Oates and Co., 1869), 141.

<sup>7</sup> Marguerite Marie Alacoque, James J. Doyle, and François Léon Gauthey. *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1997), 229.

<sup>8</sup> Alacoque, Doyle, and Gauthey, *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> Pius XII, *Haurietis Aquas*, nn. 63–68, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Marguerite Marie Alacoque, *The Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1986), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph McDonnell, *Meditations on the Sacred Heart: Commentary & Meditations on the Devotion of the First Fridays, the Apostleship of Prayer, the Holy Hour* (New York: Benzinger Brothers), 123–25.

- <sup>12</sup> Alacoque, *The Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, 55–57.
- <sup>13</sup> Alacoque, Doyle, and Gauthey, *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, 120.
- <sup>14</sup> Joseph McDonnell, *Meditations on the Sacred Heart Commentary & Meditations on the Devotion of the First Fridays, the Apostleship of Prayer, the Holy Hour* (Montreal: Canadian Messenger Office, 1913), 118.
- <sup>15</sup> Alacoque, *The Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, 95–96.
- <sup>16</sup> Quoted in Jean Croiset, *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ: How to Practice the Sacred Heart Devotion* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1988), xii.
- <sup>17</sup> Alacoque, Doyle, and Gauthey, *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*.
- <sup>18</sup> Croiset, *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ*, 142–43.
- <sup>19</sup> Tickell, *The Life of Blessed Margaret Mary*, 143.
- <sup>20</sup> Abbey of Saint-Joseph de Clairval, “Spiritual Newsletter, March 3, 2008 Lent” accessed August 16th, 2016, <http://www.clairval.com/lettres/en/2008/03/03/2050308.htm>
- <sup>21</sup> See Raymond Anthony Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 39.
- <sup>22</sup> Wendy M. Wright, *Sacred Heart: Gateway to God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 4.
- <sup>23</sup> Bougaud, *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, 333.

## The Sacred Heart—Symbol for a Counter Revolution

*One of us wants to counter the effects of revolution.*

**T**HROUGHOUT these pages, we have pondered the trauma of modernity in many different guises: ascending global materialism, capitalism run riot, the destruction of the biosphere, the rise of an Eastern spirituality that masquerades as universal—and so much else that breaks the Christian heart. But beneath these guises, we witness a common, underlying thread: *the de-Christianization of the West*.

By dint of this, we have regularly invoked the Reformation. For the Reformation initiated the reduction of Christianity—stripping away her Sacraments, devotion to Our Blessed Lady, the Holy See and more. Thereby the soil of Western culture became prepared for further de-Christianization, via Enlightenment, liberal and secular ideologies, and now New Age neo-paganism. At least, it is clear that Protestant cultures (with the notable exception of America) generally de-Christianized more rapidly than Catholic ones. For well into the late Twentieth Century, nations like Spain, Italy, Ireland, and Poland still powerfully asserted their Christian identity, whilst Christianity was reduced to a minimum in Britain, Canada, Australia, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and so forth.

With this in mind, we considered countries where de-Christianization happened more slowly: Catholic Spain, Catholic Ireland—even Catholic France. For whilst de-Christianization *did* occur more abruptly in France than other Catholic countries, there was

—as we say—a definite reason for that: Christianity was savagely persecuted. Despite this brutality, French secularization never happened easily or smoothly. Indeed, it was met with *ferocious resistance*. In fact, we will suggest it was precisely due to the intense Catholic resistance to secularization that savage methods were deemed “necessary” in France—methods not “needed” in the Protestant countries.

In other words, the marked French hostility to secularization would have been inconceivable in places like England, which made the transition from Christian to post-Christian society relatively easily. Compared to France, England seemed little troubled by secularization and has ringingly endorsed the rise of so-called pluralism. (Whether the highly homogenized, exceedingly conformist nature of secular-capitalist society can truly be considered “pluralistic” is another matter.)

But, again, there were once millions of Catholic French who did not celebrate the secular replacement of Christianity. As we shall see, they fervently opposed it for over 150 years. In other words, something once existed in France (and elsewhere) that is scarcely conceivable in the Anglosphere: *the phenomenon of Counter Revolution*.

### **What is a Counter Revolution?**

WHAT is a Counter Revolution? No neat, tidy definition is possible, for the notion meant different things at different times to different people. It encompassed everything from armed, violent insurrection to the precise opposite of this: peaceful, prayerful resistance. For us, this latter is the most authentic meaning of Catholic Counter Revolution. For even if the French Counter Revolution initially entailed warfare, a Catholic Counter Revolutionary tradition emerged in France, whose greatest lights abhorred violence. For them, Catholic Counter Revolution meant, in essence, this *intensity of resistance* to de-

Christianization that can be so difficult for “Anglo-Saxons” to conceive. Now, there is violent intensity and prayerful intensity. What we mean by Counter Revolution entails the latter.

Counter Revolution only became a significant phenomenon in countries like France where the Church’s Sacraments played an important part in people’s lives. In other words, Counter Revolution was a vital force in those lands that never participated in the earlier waves of iconoclasm that inundated the English-speaking world. For, unlike the situation in the British Isles, the Catholic Sacraments were never banned after the Reformation. There had been no penal laws, which served to fine, imprison, or even execute practicing Catholics. Nor had monarchs like Henry VIII razed the monasteries to the ground. The religious life of monks and nuns, with their prayers and sacrifices, was never exterminated, nor was the spiritual respiration they provided for the realm. Whilst Protestant nations closed themselves off to these sacramental blessings, Catholic (and Orthodox) peoples remained open to the Sanctifying Grace of the Church.

Moreover, Catholic cultures remained open in another important way. Unlike the Protestant nations, they did not impede *the continued development of Catholic tradition in recent centuries*. Now, we have seen how Catholic tradition was transformed by devotion to the Sacred Heart. But the nations whose spiritual life was violently interrupted by the Reformation were excluded from the spread of this new devotion. However, the situation in Catholic cultures was very different. When the Cult of His Most Sacred Heart disseminated throughout the Church, its warmth and fervor permeated souls wherever Catholic tradition had been maintained. And, as we shall see, the Sacred Heart became the outstanding symbol of Counter Revolution!

Yes, it was in Catholic Europe and Latin America that Counter Revolutionary endeavor once thrived. In those countries, the great menace to the Church was not the Reformation. Rather, it was the great Revolutionary tide, starting in France in 1789 and stretching out

across Spain, Italy, Latin America, Russia, and beyond in the decades that followed. All these places and more witnessed violent efforts—some successful, others less so—at de-Christianization. The faithful were persecuted, exiled or massacred, whilst churches were closed, burnt or else appropriated to revolutionary regimes.

Yet everywhere the faithful resisted, occasionally by bloody means. When the original revolution broke out in France, thousands took up arms for a Counter Revolution. Whilst this militancy was concentrated in the Vendée region of Western France, Counter Revolutionary sentiment was apparent throughout the land. Was this Counter-Revolution a disgruntled alliance of nobles and religious, who resented the stripping of their privilege? This is far from the case. Rather, it was largely poor peasants who sought to defend the nobility, monarchy, and the Church. Now, as we shall see, this Vendée Counter Revolution was obliterated by the Revolutionary forces in the bloodiest way imaginable: genocide. But even after the Vendée people were exterminated, the dream of Counter Revolution lived on. And far more often than not, its efforts were, as we say, peaceful rather than violent.

What, then, is a Counter Revolution that does not countenance armed resistance? To answer this question, let us take Joseph de Maistre for our point of departure. For de Maistre was, in so many ways, the philosophical father of the Catholic Counter Revolutionary tradition. For he, who had been eye-witness to the French Revolution, was categorical that diabolical evil had erupted. De Maistre was horrified by the menace to both Church and Christendom alike. This is to say, he was not only a devout Catholic, but also a monarchist. For de Maistre, Throne and Altar belonged together in the Sacred Order of things. And after Louis XVI and his queen were murdered by the State, de Maistre predicted a renewed monarchy (which did indeed happen, as we shall see). Now, the following passage from de Maistre concerns the French throne. However, Catholicism was likewise all-

important to him and he would surely have felt exactly the same regarding the authority of the Church:

The return to order will not be painful, because it will be natural and because it will be favored by a secret force whose action is wholly creative. We will see precisely the opposite of what we have seen. Instead of these violent commotions, painful divisions, and perpetual and desperate oscillations, a certain stability, an indefinable peace, a universal well-being will announce the presence of sovereignty. There will be no shocks, no violence, no punishment even, except those which the true nation will approve.

. . .

The king will bind up the wounds of the state with a gentle and paternal hand.

In conclusion, this is the great truth with which the French cannot be too greatly impressed: the restoration of the monarchy, what they call the counter revolution, will not be a contrary revolution, but the *contrary* of revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, for Joseph de Maistre, a genuine Counter Revolution cannot be effected through violence—for this would simply be another form of revolution. By contrast, a genuine Counter Revolution will be “precisely the opposite of what we have seen.” To imagine this, let us consider the verb “to counter.” Counter Revolution entails effort *to counter* revolutionary destruction. But to counter revolution with revolution is a contradiction in terms! And to truly counter the (still on-going) Revolution means—above all—creative, prayerful intensity rather than the manic intensity of revolutionary rage.

And here is what we see in Nineteenth-Century France after the Revolution. For, as we shall explore, France became the site of an *astonishing Catholic revival* by those who sought to re-establish both the Church in French society, but also the Catholic monarchy. They were Counter Revolutionary, but their ideal was creative, not destructive. Their arms were not the guillotines and bayonets of the Revolution, but the prayers and Sacraments of the Church.

Here is the ideal of Counter Revolution and how its spirit has usually manifested. This remains true, even if we cannot deny that the spirit of Counter-Revolution has, in relatively rare instances, expressed itself in armed combat, as in the Vendée or (as we shall argue in the next chapter) the Ireland of 1916.

Does this mean that all Counter-Revolutionary violence was completely unjustified? Speaking personally, Lector, I cannot say this. Whilst de Maistre points us to the truest, most genuine notion of Counter Revolution, only God can see what Catholics in the past suffered through, whilst everything they held precious was being suppressed or destroyed. He, alone, is fit to judge their defense of Catholic and Christian civilization.

Now, all this remains quite, quite strange for most modern people. Such folk will naturally ask *why?* Why should one try to counter the revolutionary movements of recent centuries? We moderns are generally so enamored by our present civilization that we can neither imagine any real alternative, nor understand why Counter Revolutionaries would *yearn* for that alternative. Perhaps the closest thing we can imagine to their attitude is anti-communism. We understand why people would resist the Marxist-Leninist revolution. But we cannot readily appreciate why anyone in his right-mind would resist other (clearly-related) revolutions. Were these other revolutions not critical to achieving rights we take for granted today—such as the right to practice our religion or freedom of speech? Have they not led to *unequivocal* progress: greater equality, democracy, and liberty? Why

would Counter Revolutionaries want anything different?

Of course, my own answer should be clear to you by now, dear Lector. For I hardly believe in unequivocal progress toward greater freedom! Rather, we appear to be increasingly enslaved by materialism! Consider the addictions that underpin our present “free” society: addiction to look good, feel good, sex, wealth, drugs. No one, in Christendom gone by, believed life *depended* on all this. No one, in Christendom gone by, suffered the rising stress and mental illness that attends these addictions. None of this spells freedom. Moreover, amidst the ballyhoo of a free, pluralistic, multicultural society, we scarcely acknowledge the highly conformist, controlled, and uniform nature of capitalism. Such a society is not so much multicultural—as a monoculture. A numbing sameness characterizes the way we all go about our consumer lives with the same habits, the same drives, the same fashions—whether we live in Japan or Germany, Singapore or Sicily.

Yet most of us believe—whether consciously or not—in “progress,” whilst scarcely noticing the cost to our humanity. By contrast, Counter Revolutionaries are those who clearly mourn all that has been lost. For example, a profound sense of loss informs what Valentin Tomberg has said of the French Revolution:

The French Revolution was but a stepping stone—a stepping stone that demonstrated with alarming clarity the great trend of revolutions which began with humanism in the Fourteenth Century, then resulted via the Reformation in the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century, which in turn, took “fleshly” form in the revolution of 1789. From there it advanced via 1830 and 1848 to the international community of 1871—and to the Russian revolutions in 1905, February 1917 and October 1917.

The beginning of the revolutionary development is

harmless humanism, the swooning over laical culture; and it ends with Black and Red Bolshevism—as the final result of the destruction of the great temple of piety, in which and from which the soul of the occident draws its life-force. The joy of thinking and researching without God in laical humanism led to the first push in the direction toward further “emancipations,” i.e., the severing of the bonds of reverence: reverence for the Church’s tradition, including her saints and sages; reverence for the tradition of chivalry, including its reverence for women and the sanctity of word and honor; finally reverence for the human being itself, with its right to life, liberty and property. One started thinking without God and one ended up with life without God, the push to liberate oneself from one bond (research liberated from religion) led ultimately to the liberation from all bonds. Thus was created a human without reverence, the psychological Bolshevik.<sup>2</sup>

In citing Joseph de Maistre and Valentin Tomberg, we invoke a long line of thinkers who might be broadly termed “Counter Revolutionary.” They tried to imagine an alternative civilization to Secular Materialism. And many, like Tomberg above, have long regarded the Protestant Reformation as playing a decisive role in secularization: the initial revolt against the Church, which later begat de-Christianization everywhere. Thus, Counter Revolution has followed Counter Reformation. Just as saints like Ignatius of Loyola and Francis de Sales spearheaded the Counter Reformation, working to preserve the integrity of the Church from the attacks of “reformers,” so have Counter Revolutionaries tried to protect Christian society, from the attacks of revolutionaries.

### **De-Christianization in France**

ALTHOUGH Anglophones often remain unconscious of the fact, great tracts of Europe and Latin America once struggled, worked, and prayed to conserve and restore Christian society. For once upon a time, it was not simply “obscure thinkers” like de Maistre and Tomberg who counted the terrible cost of revolution. For in France, Spain, Italy, Latin America, and elsewhere, the deadly, determined de-Christianization at the heart of the revolutionary agenda was manifestly obvious. In this chapter, we cannot tell of every revolution that menaced Christendom. But we will speak of France, the scene of both the original Revolution and Counter Revolution—or, if you like, violent de-Christianization and the struggle for re-Christianization.

The French Revolution is a prototype for the modern world. In other words, our contemporary society remains unfathomably indebted to the radical, brutal secularization that commenced with 1789. That revolution was not only archetypal for every revolution that followed in its wake, it also inspired numerous innovations of the modern epoch. Such innovations include: the rise of republics and democracy, the spread of secularism, liberalism, libertarianism and related ideologies, as well as the recent invention of total war (which obfuscated the distinction between civilians and combatants). All these find their origins in the French Revolution. Even our present term “Left-wing” stems from 1789. For those of revolutionary fervor lined up on the left side of the French parliamentary chamber—thus, in France, “the Left” was born.

Yet for many Anglophones, the French Revolution remains a little-understood phenomenon—even whilst it elicits their respect or even admiration. Rather than truly understanding what happened, many are beguiled by superficial impressions. Many English realize, for example, how proud the French are of the Revolution. And they appreciate 1789 played a pivotal part in securing rights we all take for granted today. Moreover, many have heard vague reports about terrible poverty and repression, prior to the Revolution. And we have all heard

vignettes such as the callous, off-repeated (and mythical!) response of Marie Antoinette, who supposedly said: “Let them eat cake,” whilst the people starved for bread. Many, likewise, have heard how this Queen went to the guillotine with her husband, Louis XVI, and how a republic was then declared—proclaiming Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! Yet many never realize the murder of the French King hardly secured a lasting democracy, but very shortly led to Napoleon’s dictatorship. And few know of the genocide meted out by the Revolution, or the fact that, for a generation, the French suffered the wholesale destruction of their age-old Christian culture. For their Priests were either killed, exiled, chased into hiding, forced to marry or otherwise renounce the priesthood, whilst their monasteries and church lands were taken and sold for the State. Even less known is the French Counter Revolution.

We may be able to illumine these things, at least a little, through an excursion into French history. Thus, we will now zoom in on France, as she existed in the late Eighteenth Century—the eve of the Revolution. At that time, French culture was dominated by the Enlightenment. And, as with everything concerning the Enlightenment, rationalism holds the key to understanding here. The French Descartes had blazed the trail of reason alone, divorced from faith, and was followed, in his turn, by Voltaire, Rousseau, and the other French *philosophes*. Christian revelation—which lay beyond the realm of rational explanation—became anathema to these people. They ridiculed the personal God who revealed His Sacred Heart. And any deity that remained to them was usually reduced to a remote, deist conception. Thus, a cultural and intellectual elite emerged in Eighteenth-Century France, which mocked Catholicism as nothing but irrational superstition.

Liberty became the idol the French Enlightenment, liberty understood as *living and thinking without God* (as Tomberg put it for us, above). In other words, the new elite in France wanted a society without any higher claims on people’s conscience than rationalism

would permit. Needless to say, this clashed with the Christian order of the past. Things like Catholic tradition, monarchy, or an unelected hierarchy (such as we still have in the Church today) were to be obliterated—in favor of a new order said to consist of democracy, freedom, and equality. But how democratic, free, and equal the new revolutionary order really was remains to be seen.

Now, late Eighteenth-Century France was, in theory, an absolute monarchy of a medieval kind. The reality, however, was different. The King, Louis XVI, was hardly a despot. Compared to the absolute monarchs of old, he was even somewhat liberal, prepared to make radical changes in favor of the new democratizing impulses born from the Enlightenment. Yet the King's actions—though extraordinary for their time—were not enough. It would seem they appeared too half-hearted for the new Revolutionary mind of those seeking complete and utter transformation of France overnight. Thus His Majesty was first sequestered, then imprisoned, and finally executed, whilst the French Republic was proclaimed in the pools of his blood, alongside the blood of thousands of royals, nobles, and Catholics.

It should be noted that, in 1789, France was still politically ordered according to the medieval *ancien regime* in three estates—which were represented in the Estates General, prototypes of our modern parliaments today. The First Estate encompassed Priests and prelates, nuns and monks. This was followed by the Second Estate, comprised of the aristocracy, and then the Third Estate, the bourgeoisie or middle classes. In theory, the Third Estate also represented the vast number of peasants, yet the peasants could not vote and, as we shall see, the poor often preferred the king and aristocracy to their “representatives” in the Third Estate.

The French Revolution is the story of how *those supposed representatives* of the Third Estate rose up and grabbed power. It is also the story of mob violence (in Paris, above all). For in the increasingly urbanized areas of France, people were pressed together in

terrible slum-like conditions. Certainly, their misery and unrest fostered a climate in which the Third Estate could seize control. Now, we lack scope to tell the tale of how the Third Estate seized *political* power. Here we are more concerned with how their takeover played out in *religious* terms—leading to massive, vicious de-Christianization. Let us note, however, that initially there was no plan (at least, no open plan) to outright destroy Altar and Throne. Rather, power was seized in stages.

The early stages entailed a crisis of the French treasury. The Third Estate pushed through measures whereby Church land and property was forcibly appropriated by the State—and sold. In practice, this entailed closing age-old monasteries and evicting their inhabitants. Monastic vows were then forbidden, whilst religious orders were dissolved. Initially, however, certain orders were permitted to continue—especially those deemed as possessing “social utility.” In other words, “socially useful” monks and nuns engaged in tasks like tending the sick were, at first, spared, but “non-useful” monks and nuns who “merely prayed” were turned out of their homes and livelihood.

Such dry, utilitarian rationalism is key to the French Revolution. Churches were valuable because they could be sold; monks and nuns were not valuable for their prayers and piety. Ruthless Enlightenment “reason” runs throughout every stage of the revolution. French society became savagely segregated in two opposed camps. Whilst the “enlightened” reveled in the Revolution, it was clear to the vast Catholic faithful that something had gone horribly wrong.

But expropriating religious buildings and eradicating monastic life was simply the beginning, because such drastic rearrangements between Church and State required legislation to enforce it. Thus, the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* was drawn up, wresting control of the Church from Rome and handing it to the State. Draconian measures such as electing Priests and forcibly cutting the nation’s Bishops by

nearly forty percent were thereby enforced. Not surprisingly, the clergy dissented. And so a new law was passed obliging them to swear an oath of loyalty to the *Constitution*. If a Priest refused to swear the oath, he was deprived of his livelihood (now controlled by the State). When even this measure proved ineffective, Priests were offered the choice of self-exile within eight days or forced deportation to French Africa. Still later, they would be condemned to death (along with anyone who sheltered them).

The French Revolution grew ever more terrifying, depraved, and cruel. Later, of course, it entailed executing the King and His Queen and guillotining—without trial—thousands who objected or were even suspected of objecting. The execration of Christianity became ever more vicious and thorough. Churches were not only closed, but large-scale destruction of religious monuments followed—as well as outlawing Christian worship and religious education, forced marriages of the clergy, and, later on, the executions of Priests.

Here is a brief, basic summary of the *negative* or repressive tactics of the West's first brutal secularization. However, *positive* tactics were also employed, as repression by itself was clearly insufficient to achieve the desired ends. For this reason, an alternative, replacement religion was engineered to replace the now-illegal Christian faith. Thus, the *Cult of Reason* was born. Two thousand French churches were converted into "Temples of Reason." Perhaps most notorious amongst these was Notre Dame de Paris, where a ceremony was enacted with a living woman dressed as the "Goddess of Reason." Likewise, a new calendar supplanted the ancient Christian one. Having abolished the monarchy, 1792 was proclaimed Year One of the Republic. Seven-day weeks were then replaced by ten-day decades. The Sabbath was thereby expunged. The age-old Christian feasts were ousted in favor of new festivals dedicated to reason and revolutionary values. Moreover, town and street names bearing ancient Christian associations were replaced by new names with republican motifs.

Revolutionary “catechisms” were introduced, mimicking the old question and answer format of Catholic catechesis. Thus, French children now faced questions like: What is baptism and what is communion? The answers were that Baptism meant the “regeneration” of French people, beginning in 1789, whilst communion referred to the revolutionary brotherhood of man, free of “any idol or tyrant.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Against the Revolution**

UNTOLD millions looked on in horror. Perhaps nowhere was that horror felt more acutely than Western France. We have already invoked the revolt of the Vendée region. Elsewhere in the West, there was also a separate revolt by the Choans in Brittany. However, Western France was not alone. For example, James Roberts writes:

Revolutionary governments had every reason to take Counter Revolution seriously. . . . In the South serious disorders began even earlier [than in the West]. In 1793 three of the major cities of the South—Marseilles, Lyons and Toulon—seemed to be on the brink of falling into the hands of Counter-Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

Yet it was the Vendée that saw the most sustained and mighty resistance to the Revolution. And for several months in 1793, the Vendée held out against Republican armies. Eventually, forces from Paris were dispatched to crush the revolt. Republican armies marched through town and countryside, massacring men, women, and children. A “scorched earth” approach was adopted: farms were destroyed, crops and forests burned, and whole villages razed to the ground. By some estimates, 300,000 were killed out of a total population of 800,000. Whilst precise statistics are impossible to establish, perhaps nothing better illustrates what happened than the words of General François

Joseph Westermann, known as the “butcher of the Vendée”:

The Vendée is no more. . . . According to your orders, I have trampled their children beneath our horses’ feet; I have massacred their women, so they will no longer give birth to brigands. I do not have a single prisoner to reproach me. I have exterminated them all. . . . Mercy is not a revolutionary sentiment.<sup>5</sup>

This is more than massacre. Massacre refers to indiscriminate killing. The word *genocide* is more apt here: the calculated effort to exterminate an entire class of people—in this case, the pious Catholic French.

Now, such people specifically recalled St. Margaret Mary’s call to *display* the Heart of Jesus. They remembered, too, Bishop Belsunce, who repelled the plague at Marseilles, holding aloft the banner of the Sacred Heart. Now, they recognized a new—yet very deadly—form of plague had arrived. And so when the Vendée soldiers went to battle, the image of His Most Sacred Heart was affixed to their chests.

So it happened that the Sacred Heart became the symbol of French Counter-Revolution—*par excellence*. Yet even the 1793 genocide was insufficient to extinguish the Vendean cause. For long years afterwards, revolts continued breaking out in the region. Perhaps one of these even changed European history. Napoleon famously lost the battle of Waterloo in 1815. And why? Some historians have suggested the critical factor lay in his own “backyard.” He was forced to deploy crucial troops back home to suppress a local revolt. It was in the Vendée. Moreover, if it is true Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo was due to Counter Revolutionary uprising back home, it suggests that, in the end, the Vendée triumphed—at least for a little while. For after Napoleon fell, the French monarchy was re-established and the Church was allowed to prosper once more—again, at least for a little while.

## From Whence the Fury?

FROM whence the fury of Revolution? From whence this massive eruption of violence that not only profoundly transformed France, but rippled out to all the West? These days, it is often popularly supposed the revolution was born of terrible oppression. Undoubtedly, there were grave injustices in the *ancien regime*. Many urban poor certainly suffered greatly, yet their situation was better than in other places in Europe—as well as other times in French history. Explanations stemming from poverty and oppression are too superficial. As Warren H. Carroll writes:

On January 24, 1789 Louis XVI issued writs for the convocation of the Estates General. . . . It was to vote on equal taxation for all, and a constitution for France, which had never had one. The writs also promised regular meetings of the Estates-General in the future, a national abolition of the *lettres de cachet* (by which men could be imprisoned indefinitely without trial). Thus *many of the basic rights of man which the French Revolution was allegedly fought to establish had already been granted by the King of France before it began.*

. . .

Despite multitudes of groundless assumptions that have gathered among historians of this shattering cataclysm, the facts are—and honest, thorough historians admit them—that none of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, none of the traditional harbingers of disaster, rode in France during the reign of Louis XVI before the Estates-General convened in May 1789. There was no war, to sap the country's strength or strike down its young men. When the

Revolution began, France had enjoyed complete peace for six years. There was no famine, though much has been made of the narrow margin by which the poor of France were able to afford the bread which was their staple of life. But the margin was there, even though there had been a significant rise in the price of bread, culminating in 1789. For the most part, there was enough for the people to eat. There was no major change in the availability of food from the pattern of most people's lifetimes. There was no pestilence. There was no great change of religion; for all the growing, fashionable unbelief in some upper-class circles, for all the popularity in those circles of the vehemently anti-Christian Voltaire and Diderot and Rousseau, these ideas and tendencies had barely touched the ordinary people of France in 1789.

. . .

Fairly serious economic problems did exist, due to the inadequacy and unfairness of the taxation system. . . . But they were not problems of the catastrophic kind that the whole nation would be aware of

. . .

There were real long-standing grievances. There was need for reform. . . . Probably the most serious grievance was the impenetrability of the body of aristocrats who dominated society and government. Unlike England, where titles of nobility could directly or indirectly be bought, in France, the only way to be an aristocrat was to be the biological descendent of an aristocrat.

. . . .

But when all is said and done, when the evils and shortcomings of the French political and social system in 1789 are stated frankly but without exaggeration, when the economic problems of the nation at that time are given their full just weight, when the impact of the destructive criticism and widespread intellectual vogue of the *philosophes*—Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and their followers and admirers—is duly evaluated; the sum total does not come close to accounting for the horrifying events of the French Revolution.

Other Western nations had endured, and were to endure, far worse afflictions than those of France in 1789 without bursting forth in an explosion that released the fountains of the great deep. France herself had known and was to know, far greater evils that faced her then, without repeating the revolution. In fact, the French Revolution has never been repeated. It is unique. Only one other event bears comparison with it: the Communist Revolution in Russia in 1917. But then, *all the precipitating factors of war, famine, pestilence, and preciously organized political opposition* were present, that had not existed in 1789 in France—and, above all, the well-remembered example of the French Revolution itself, to which Lenin, the maker of the Bolshevik Revolution, often referred.

Why then, did the French Revolution come? Honest history is silent. [Italics mine]<sup>6</sup>

Carroll is right. More—much more—is needed to explain the revolutionary fury than oppression and anguish, which, as Carroll says, was greater elsewhere during that epoch in Europe, where

revolution did not break out. Yet this truth is often overlooked—or even whitewashed. Behind the revolutionary fervor lies a mysterious, buried reality, which merits lengthy, sustained contemplation, over the course of a lifetime perhaps.

In what follows, we will try to evoke just a little of that hidden reality, and not try to explain it away with facile notions of tyranny. In doing this, I am certainly aware that reverse criticism may be levelled at myself—that I pay insufficient attention to the real misery and real injustices that certainly played a part in the Revolution. I make no attempt to defend myself against such charges. What follows reflects my own individual search for the deeper truth of these matters. That search is, I admit, deeply dissatisfied with the whitewash I perceive. Still, I offer a certain *caveat*, Lector. For this *is* a personal, incomplete and not professional search. I am not a professional historian and I am not impartial. However, let me also say *caveat lector* regarding professional historians, because few, if any, of these are impartial either! No, what follows is not so much a broad examination of all the issues entailed here, but a very personal attempt to rescue the lost and buried voice of Catholic France. In the language of psychotherapy, it amounts to the “return of the repressed.” France savagely, systematically repressed its Catholic faithful for well over a century. Here is their story, as I see it.

### A Tale of Two Frances

In relating this, I want to recall Valentin Tomberg’s reflections on the Sacred Heart. For the Revolution represents a *rupture* in French society. It initiated a profound schism between *two very different types* of French mentality. On one side, there were those dedicated to the rationalist legacy of Descartes and Voltaire or—as you may recall, Lector—what Tomberg called: “The outpouring of ‘intellectual enlightenment’ during the age of rationalism in the Eighteenth

Century, which paved the way for materialism.”<sup>7</sup>

On the other side, there were those devoted to the Heart of Jesus. Tomberg’s notion that the Sacred Heart appeared as a healing remedy to the impending crisis of Enlightenment rationalism is, I think, most helpful here:

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was to save the soul of humanity. For, with the intellectual enlightenment the danger threatening to break in upon human beings was that of the *centaur*. Human beings would have been turned into a kind of centaur—a being consisting of head and limbs (intellect and will), but without heart—that is, a “clever beast.”<sup>8</sup>

We make no secret here, Lector. For us, these words are apt indeed for what the French Revolution unleashed. There was indeed pronounced bestiality and cruelty, conjoined with tremendous cleverness and rationalist utilitarianism. We have seen how the Revolution treated “non-useful” monks and nuns, whose prayers were meaningless from the standpoint of materialistic utility. We have seen how the Church was trampled on. Likewise, the medieval institutions of monarchy and nobility were treated as so much detritus to be cleared away after the bloodshed.

French rationalism attached no value to these traditions. What mattered to the revolutionary mind was liberty and egalitarianism. Here were the over-riding idols of the Revolution—even if it must be acknowledged that many basic liberties we take for granted today owe something to the revolutionary fervor of the past.

Was it necessary, then, to abruptly, savagely dismantle the entire traditional order? Clearly, the revolutionaries believed it was. A new spirit had emerged—rationalist, deist, supposedly egalitarian, and free—and this new spirit urgently required a new body. Certainly, the old

Catholic body could never house this new spirit. French rationalism could no longer be confined to intellectual elites—now it must be firmly, ruthlessly established in new social, political, and cultural arrangements (even a new religion of reason, as we have seen) whether people wanted these or not. Thus, it became “necessary” to eradicate the old politics and the old religion.

By the end of the 1790s, the worst was over. The First Republic had degenerated into chaos. Dictatorship was deemed necessary to restore order. First came Robespierre, then Napoleon. Thus, the French Revolution is usually regarded as a brief eruption over a few short years. In one sense, this common understanding of the Revolution is valid. France was forever changed. And the French Church has never been the same again.

However, from another perspective, the French Revolution can be seen as an ongoing project—one that took generations to complete. For the Revolution was *not* immediately successful in its goals. The First Republic did not yield lasting democracy—only Napoleonic dictatorship. (Yet in a highly paradoxical fashion, Napoleon forcibly exported Revolutionary values across Europe, whilst his armies conquered her. For the Holy Roman Empire and other august Catholic institutions collapsed before Napoleon’s surging forces.) In the end, Napoleon fell. In 1815, after twenty-six years of terror and war, France restored her monarchy. Then the Church re-emerged, protected by the Throne.

1815 must have been a bleak year for those of a Republican fervor. For decades of scintillating rationalism, followed by a quarter-century of genocide and war, proved insufficient to “cure” the French of their “misguided superstitions.” Further revolutions would be needed to destroy the ancient loyalties to Throne and Altar, even if they proceeded in a less drastic fashion. Thus, the July 1830 Revolution did not destroy the monarchy outright. It simply deposed the reigning Charles X and secured a king more amenable to revolutionary politics.

Louis-Philippe, the new monarch, called himself “Citizen King.” But when the “Citizen King” proved insufficiently amenable to revolutionary agendas, another revolution in 1848 finally toppled the monarchy and proclaimed a Second Republic. Yet this republic also shortly transformed itself into dictatorship. And when elections were finally restored in the 1870s, as we shall see, a democratically-elected parliament *voted to restore the monarchy*.

From whence all this tumult throughout Nineteenth-Century France? We have already concurred with Warren H. Carroll that we cannot accept “explanations” like “tyrannical” kings and abject poverty—real as that poverty often was everywhere in an industrializing, increasingly capitalist, Europe. Indeed, to truly understand these matters it seems necessary for us to heed the words of Joseph de Maistre:

There is a *satanic* element in the French Revolution, which distinguishes it from any other revolution known or perhaps that will be known. Remember the great occasions—Robespierre’s speech against the priesthood, the solemn apostasy of the priests, the desecration of objects of worship, the inauguration of the goddess of Reason . . . these all leave the ordinary sphere of crimes and seem to belong to a different world.<sup>9</sup>

As ultimately mysterious as the ongoing revolutionary fury remains, we may note that different, albeit overlapping, factions were involved. There were intellectual elites—enamored of Voltaire, they became, in turn, enamored of Marx. A growing scientific elite was likewise enamored of Darwin. Closely related to these, were members of secret Free-masonic lodges. Finally, there were the urban poor—although not usually the rural poor. The working classes in the cities, however, often suffered greatly, above all in Paris. The Left is usually a

fusion of intellectual elites and the urban working classes. In Nineteenth-Century France, these revolted against what they regarded as tyranny—with the Church seen as handmaid to that tyranny. And it did not matter how much rural France regarded the revolution as the real tyranny—from which Catholicism offered solace and protection.

In fact, an 1871 revolution broke out that was almost entirely restricted to Paris. Here is the profound schism that afflicted French society. For the Parisian revolutionaries actually dreamt of *geographically dividing* the country. Paris, with Lyon and other urban centers might be divorced—so they hoped—from that detested, rural France that clung tenaciously to Altar and Throne. Yet even Paris was hardly of one mind. Again, revolutionary slaughter was deemed necessary. The Archbishop of Paris, amongst many others, was rounded up and shot.

But the Other France once again asserted itself. Now, it surrounded Paris and quelled this latest Revolution. Now, the revolutionaries were slaughtered in their turn . . . thus went the agony of sundered France. The nation remained bitterly divided between those who celebrated 1789—and those who considered it diabolical. For generations, France see-sawed from one side to the other. Attempts to restore Christendom were followed by attempts to renew the Revolution. Each side loathed the other.

By the 1870s, two opposing forces were balanced on knife-edge. Across France, elections followed the Parisian carnage. The elected members of parliament voted to restore the monarchy. The exiled French King appeared set to return to his kingdom. Coins were even minted with his head. But at the last minute, Henri V refused the throne—perhaps fearing France remained still too much in thrall to revolutionary horror. A few years later, Henri V died with no obvious successor. And so the dream of Catholic monarchy died (with the Catholic parties hopelessly divided between different candidates for an heir to the throne).

But let us ponder this moment in 1873, where Catholic monarchy was very nearly restored. It would seem, even then, that the majority of French still rejected the Revolution—nearly a hundred years later. Some historians, however, have argued these 1873 elections were something of a freak occurrence (for reasons beyond our scope here).<sup>10</sup> Yet this analysis fails to acknowledge that *women had no vote in 1873*. Rational, revolutionary secularism has long been a distinctly male preoccupation and clearly “superstitious” women were far more likely to “vote Catholic” than men. It is an uncontested matter of fact that Republican France long-resisted giving women the vote for *that very reason*. (They did not, in fact, achieve it till 1945, significantly later than many other countries.) All this means that the real will for a Catholic civilization in France was much greater than is commonly attested and had women possessed the vote, the terrible course of history we are about to relate might never have happened.

### **Anti-Clericalism in France**

WITHIN a few short years, the Republican faction regained power. With the 1879 elections, violently anti-Catholic forces achieved a majority in government and began enacting draconian anti-clerical legislation. Their leader Gambetta is remembered to this day for his (in)famous cry, “Le cléricalisme, voilà l’ennemi” (Clericalism—there is the enemy).

*Anti-clericalism.* The term functioned as a euphemism. One who professed to be anti-clerical could still say: “I am not against Christianity, I am simply opposed to clerical domination.” Smokescreens are valuable tools in political power struggles. Beneath the “anti-clerical” smokescreen, moderation could be feigned. For anti-clericals favored secular notions of science and progress and were frequently determined to eradicate Christianity at any cost. Some anti-clericals were deists; many were atheists. It is safe to say very, very few

cherished the revealed religion of the Savior.

The anti-clerical movement worked, like nearly every political movement works, through propaganda. Gambetta, for example, generated unsubstantiated notions of a Catholic conspiracy for war with Italy. Clearly, Catholics of this era were appalled by the new situation in Italy, for Papal Rome had recently been annexed by Italian armies and the Pope was a virtual prisoner—unable to safely step beyond the Vatican. Gambetta cleverly exploited the Catholic outrage of the time—demanding whether rural peasants wanted to send their “sons to their deaths” to restore Papal rule. A hostile secular press only supported government propaganda. Thus, the message went out. The Church was dangerous to France.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Right fell into disarray after its monarchist hopes were shattered. Deprived of the female vote and divided between different visions after the 1870s, Catholic France never again succeeded in uniting against the Left.

After Gambetta’s faction achieved power, all-out war was declared on Catholic France. The first assault was against the religious orders. The Jesuits were exiled from France altogether. Other religious houses then had to be authorized by the state. A decision of “non-authorization” destroyed the order in France. In all, 261 religious houses were closed and somewhere between 9000 and 10,000 religious turned out of their homes.<sup>11</sup>

The impact on French education was extreme. For the Church had long educated youth through its religious orders. Now, Catholic schools were not only effectively destroyed, but religious were then forbidden to teach in public institutions—for no other reason than they happened to be monks or nuns. Further hostile legislation was enacted in 1901. Within a year, 13,000 of the remaining 16,000 Catholic schools were closed.<sup>12</sup> Thus, a once-Catholic education was replaced by secular teachers with an aggressively secular curriculum. As Valentin Tomberg has written:

The French Republic . . . was explicitly hostile to the Church, because it *itself* wanted to raise its citizens to be “citizens” with “citizen virtues” (instead of Christians with Christian virtues). For the same reason, Hitler’s so-called Third Reich was hostile toward the Church. The people were to be educated in “the national-socialist conception of the world” in order to become National-Socialists.<sup>13</sup>

All this appears largely forgotten today. Yet, once upon a time, Catholic France still *cared* about such things. Here is why it had to be savagely repressed. Freppel, the Bishop of Angers, was hardly alone in speaking out like this:

One imagines the silence of the teacher on religion is the equivalent of his part of an act of neutrality. To not speak of God to the child for seven years, while one teaches him six hours a day is *to positively delude him* into believing that God does not exist or that one has no need to bother with him. [Italics mine]<sup>14</sup>

This seems completely normal in the West today. But, not so long ago, it outraged clergy and laity alike in France. Of course, protests of French Bishops were easily ignored. It was harder to overlook furious public officials, of which there were plenty. For example, 2000 magistrates who opposed the new rulings felt no other option than to resign their posts, rather than carry out the new form of “justice.” Needless to say, this only further secularized the French judiciary.<sup>15</sup>

Across the board, France was ruthlessly de-Christianized. French Catholicism was ruined at every turn and replaced with secular ideology. Public crucifixes were removed and statues of republican

heroes erected. Catholic universities could no longer grant degrees to their graduates. Catholic processions were restricted or banned. The national holiday was *Bastille Day*—marking a key event in the revolution. Likewise, a new national anthem was proclaimed: the *Marseillaise*, the marching song of the Revolution, with its bloodcurdling lines:

*To arms citizens*

*Form your battalions*

*March, march*

*Let impure blood*

*Water our furrows...*

*Drive on Sacred patriotism*

*Support our avenging arms*

*Liberty, cherished liberty*

It is difficult to mark an exact date for the final triumph of French secularization. Certainly, 1905 is significant, for the separation of Church and State in that year marked a decisive victory for the anticlerical faction. Church property was now finally, fully expropriated to the State. And the State then took inventory of its newly-acquired property—which meant ransacking the churches. Outrage swept across Catholic France; riots broke out to protect the sanctuary of Christ. The State relented. Instead, it merely allowed the churches to go to ruin. This accounts for the appalling condition of countless French churches today. It also explains why many are now being demolished: they are no longer structurally sound and, stripped of its wealth, the French

Church is unable to maintain them.

### **From Whence Consensus?**

WHAT of today? Do French Catholics still recoil in horror at the Republican annihilation of their culture? Generally, no. For a modern accord has emerged in France, between the (vastly-reduced) Catholic faithful and the (vastly-increased) remaining population, which tolerates a Church that now appears relatively harmless to them. The two groups, divided between perhaps five percent of practicing Catholics, on the one hand, and an overwhelming majority of nominal Catholics, agnostics, and atheists, on the other, now acclaim the Revolution together. The year 1989 witnessed wide-scale celebration of the Revolution bicentennial across France. (Although a singular exception stood out amidst the festivities: It was the Vendée.)

Still, broad consensus now exists and it may be asked: How was it achieved? Has there been a natural reconciliation where both sides recognized their errors? Or was there a gradual process of “enlightenment,” whereby recalcitrant Catholics finally renounced their retrograde opposition to the onward “march of progress”? Depending who you listen to, dear Lector, you will hear different narratives to explain this modern consensus. Let us consider one such narrative, which runs something like the following.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, a mighty impetus was born to reconcile the bitterly-divided nation. Now, the two Frances united against a common enemy. Catholics and Republicans marched to the front together. And in those terrible trenches, they were slaughtered side by side—but not before each side recognized real valor in the other. After the war, a new spirit prevailed. The anti-clerical climate quietened down somewhat. Jesuits and other exiled religious orders were permitted to return to their homeland. For their part, Catholics increasingly respected the Republic’s secular ideals.

Moreover, they too-belatedly acknowledged some unsavory features of their cultural past (particularly an ugly anti-Semitism, which had long blamed the Revolution on Jewish elements). Later, Hitler's 1940 invasion of Paris led to the infamous Vichy government. This Third Reich puppet collaborated with Hitler in the unspeakable horror of the Shoah. Fascist Vichy was, however, sympathetic to Catholic tradition, allowing, for example, Catholic education to flourish unimpeded once again. Many Catholics, after generations of brutal secularization, tragically rallied to this government. Vichy thus served to link Fascism with Catholic tradition in the modern French mentality. Catholic culture was thereby even further discredited. With Vatican II in the 1960s, the high tension between Catholicism and modernity became further defused. Thus, a gloriously reformed Church encouraged "peace in our time"—peace between secular and Catholic France. Secularizing processes have only accelerated ever since, with the Globalization of television, video, internet, and all the rest.

Yes, Lector, a narrative—something like this, at least—is frequently found in France these days. According to it, French Catholics are rightfully ashamed to remember the acrid battles of the past, where their intransigent ancestors resisted progress. They are likewise rightfully ashamed of those last reactionary integristes in their midst who still recall a time when Catholics were *not* proud of the Revolution.

However, once more, history is written by the victors. Other narratives are possible and we will work toward such here. For the narrative above—whilst not without significant elements of truth—leaves much to be desired, if we wish to understand how France became the most thoroughly de-Christianized of all Catholic nations. For if one of two competing French visions—Secular Materialism—has triumphed today, it was not without two hundred years of revolutionary fervor—including lying, propaganda, skullduggery, massive theft of property, immense political repression, and genocide.

Moreover, the former narrative fails to attach *any merit whatsoever* to the vision of Catholic France. It remains deplorably one-sided. Yes, yes, yes, we have been repeatedly apprised of the naïve, reactionary nature of those who dared question the Revolution. We have heard how they were “unenlightened,” “fanatical,” trapped by “medieval superstition.” We have been endlessly assured they were inevitably doomed to fade into obscurity, for they were against time, against science, against the glorious march of progress. What such assurance lacks is the least imagination. The incapacity *to imagine the other side* is woeful. Instead of being able to *really* listen and *really* hear a different worldview, something else happens: the opponent’s cherished ideals are trashed in favor of one’s own bias.

What of my own bias? For the sake of transparency, let me inject a very personal element at this point. My horror of contemporary France informs everything I write here. It is the horror I felt, living and travelling in modern France and seeing her Church *decimated*—whilst few seem to care. It is the horror I felt, meditating on the lost voice of that exterminated France—which *did* care. It is the horror I felt, surveying what France has become: ultra-rationalist, ultra-secular, ultra-materialistic, and ultra-intolerant of religion. No doubt Voltaire would be proud indeed.

On my last travels through France, it was as though I beheld *pyramids along the Nile*—remnants of a dead civilization. Here is what I felt seeing decaying churches, basilicas, and faded weather-beaten crosses that still stand along lonely country roads, as monuments to the piety of a forgotten world. For whilst these monuments are hardly old, compared to the pyramids, it would seem today’s French lack the least understanding of their ancestors who built and cherished them. And how frequently these French are contemptuously certain there is *no point* to understanding. Catholic France is as alien to them as the Egyptian pharaohs who built the pyramids.

It is true one still finds Catholicism alive in a few last outposts of

the faith. On my travels, I encountered some of these last outstations of the France that once was: Paray-le-Monial, Lourdes, La Salette, Chartres. In the past, these had been like the great mountains of Catholic France. They stood out prominently amidst the cultural landscape of the nation. And millions of French made pilgrimage to breathe the “high mountain air” of these peaks. But now, a secular sea has engulfed virtually the entire country. And these once-great mountains are like tiny islands of a lost continent—the final remnants of Catholic France—which barely rise above the soulless sea of Secular Materialism.

Whilst Catholicism is still breathing in these last little outposts, elsewhere, France is like a Catholic cemetery. In the Pyrenees, I met a Priest who was solely responsible for *forty* (dead) parishes. Not long ago, these parishes would have each had a Priest, or even two, and the power of the Sacraments would have streamed through every mountain village.

The dry, secular mind may at least credit me with transparency, I hope. Having owned my emotion, I can now be safely written-off, as too subjective to be reliable. As if the French secular mind were neutral, detached, and objective! As if Voltaire were simply rational—and nothing else! As if French secular narratives were not profoundly colored by partisan attitudes! Spare me, please.

Yes, my own personal sense of horror has led me to *another narrative*. According to this narrative, it is not so much that clerical domination was destroyed by a progressive Republic—but secular domination destroyed traditional French values. For it seems to me whole generations have been skillfully manipulated by propaganda and inculcated in a kind of secular religion. In my narrative, modern consensus in France was engineered by infernal methods. Clearly, the First Republic was the most terrifying of all. But although subsequent Republics never massacred their opponents, they had little compunction for exiling dissenters, stealing property, trampling on

rights, and tearing up long-cherished traditions.

Yet how few French people today really remember this. Of course, there are those who *do* remember. French *integristes* remember! Catholic traditionalist societies ranging from the SSPX founded by the French Archbishop Lefebvre to the Institute of Christ the King founded by the French Monsignor Wach remember. Yes, France is unmistakably the epicenter of the Catholic traditionalist movement. Where Catholic tradition was most savagely repressed is where the “rage of the repressed” is most keenly registered.

On the opposite side, there are undoubtedly a few secularist souls who likewise remember. And perhaps some of them do not regret what happened. At least, I imagine there may be a few honest enough to admit (if only to themselves): “Yes, strong, even terrible, tactics were employed—but it was necessary to free the French people from the superstitious irrationalism that retarded French progress.”

### **The Lost Dream of a Sacred Civilization**

POLARIZATION results from the loss of imagination. How frequently modern souls, for example, seem incapable of *imagining* the Catholic Church has anything important to offer. This poverty of imagination was much the same in post-revolutionary France—on *both sides*. Catholics frequently recognized not even a grain of truth in revolutionary demands. And the revolutionaries frequently believed Catholics were likewise devoid of any worthwhile vision. All their dreams, hopes, and sacrifices appeared ridiculous to them. No matter how many of these Catholics were noble, gifted, or creative, no matter how much they suffered for their vision—their cherished aspirations amounted to nothing more than hopeless reaction to progress. It never occurred to the revolutionary mind that the Other France, rejected and suppressed, had anything worth saying whatsoever. The incapacity for imagination is pitiful.

But to arrive at a deeper understanding of this terrible conflict, imagination is necessary. One must *listen* to both sides, even if today one side has triumphed and the other is virtually extinguished. So that nowadays, the voice of Catholic France has become extremely faint. To register it, one must, as it were, stoop to the ground, ear cocked, to hear the whispering voices buried beneath two centuries of propaganda, oppression, and bloodshed. Will you strain your ears with mine, Lector? If you can, you may understand what I think is of the essence here: *the dream of a Sacred Civilization*. I say this, because, for so many of these French, the Church was their lifeblood. *It meant everything to them*. It inspired their ardor, their passion, and their love. Souls like this could still feel the kind of Christianity the martyrs died for. Back then, the Holy Church expressed Her Mystery in a vital, numinous fashion, which commanded profound fidelity. It was clear the Church guarded a mystery so hallowed that people made real sacrifices to defend Her. Certainly, one can feel this traveling through the Vendée, where numerous monuments exist to those martyred by the Revolution.

Moreover, they did not die in vain. For in Nineteenth-Century France, there was *a monumental Catholic revival*. And if you read the annals of that time, Lector, you may well catch your breath in wonder! For although the old monasteries were sold off during the Revolution, robust new monastic communities now established themselves. Formidable Catholics, like Dom Guéranger, spearheaded a tremendous renewal of liturgy and religious life. Up and down the country, churches destroyed by the revolution were rebuilt. The nation was re-evangelized by a passionate clergy, whose spirit markedly differed to that in 1790. Whereas perhaps half the French clergy submitted to the revolutionary Oath back then, the Catholic priesthood was transformed by the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Appalled by the Revolution, the new priesthood became almost entirely ultramontanist.<sup>16</sup> *Ultramontanist*. The word was coined in France and means: beyond

the (Alpine) mountains. The Priests now looked to Catholic Rome rather than secular Paris, and France emerged as the leading Catholic missionary culture in the world.

This is the era of the Catholic Counter-Revolution, pioneered by figures as diverse as St. Sophie Barat, Joseph de Maistre, Cardinal Pie, and Louis Veillot—to name only a few. The French faithful said a mighty *non* to secularization and worked to rebuild Christendom—a Christian order where the Holy Sacraments of the Church would infuse society, creating a culture of piety, veneration, and charity. Here is a different dream to that of Secular Materialism. It is the yearning for a civilization oriented to God. How did all this arise? First, it must be recognized that the revolutionary horror reverberated for generations afterwards. The menace to the Faith by Republican France was chillingly apparent. Yet whilst this grim reality called for renewed vigilance, there is something further we must relate. For Heaven itself intervened.

### **Secularization and the Mother of God**

HERE we refer to the great Nineteenth-Century Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary on French soil. For Our Lady first appeared to St. Catherine Labouré, in 1830, in the Rue du Bac in Paris, calling for the Miraculous Medal. She then revealed herself again at La Salette in 1846, at Lourdes in 1858, and Pontmain in 1871. And the Blessed Virgin repeatedly *wept for French de-Christianization*. But let us begin with the first great Apparition in Paris. As Bernhard St. John tells us:

Looking back [to] 1830, we see the religious atmosphere of the time illumined by [a] series of Apparitions. La Salette and Lourdes will at once present themselves to the reader's mind.

. . .

The supernatural has been asserting itself boldly in the face of science and unbelief . . . We go back to 1830, [when] St. Catherine Labouré . . . was . . . a novice [at] the Rue du Bac. . . . On the 18th July, 1830 [she] was in the chapel, while the rest of the community were in bed. . . . According to her account, she . . . saw a female figure of exceeding beauty come and take a seat on the left side of the sanctuary.

. . .

In her account she says: “That moment, which it would be impossible for me to describe, was the happiest I had known. The Blessed Virgin . . . said to me: “My child, I am going to entrust you with a mission. It will cause you suffering, but you will be sustained by the thought that it is all for the glory of God. You will meet with opposition, but do not fear, for grace will be given you. Tell simply and without fear what takes place within you. You will see certain things; you will be inspired in your prayers.”

. . .

The heavenly visitant [continued]: “My child, the times are evil; troubles are about to come upon France; the monarchy will be overthrown; and the whole world will be upheaved by misfortunes of every kind. . . . At a certain moment, the danger will be great and things will seem to be at their worst. . . . There will be victims in other communities. (Here, according to the recital, the Blessed Virgin shed tears.) There will be victims among the Paris

clergy. The Archbishop will die. My child, *the cross will be despised and overthrown and men will open our Lord's side afresh, and the whole world will be in trouble.*"

"When will all this happen?" asked the novice within herself, and an interior voice answered: "In forty years time." [Italics mine]<sup>17</sup>

Now, we have already seen what transpired in 1830. The monarchy was overthrown weeks after Our Lady's tears in the Rue du Bac. And forty years later, during the Parisian revolution, the Archbishop of Paris was rounded up and shot.

Whilst the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared gravely saddened by French secularization, she did not arrive empty-handed. She promised graces. And the next time she manifested, she revealed the design for a medal, soon to be worn by millions. This Medal, as we noted earlier, bore the dual image of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts. Thus, Our Lady's first intervention in Nineteenth-Century France kindled even further devotion to His Sacred Heart.

Yet the Mother of God repeatedly appeared in France during the next forty years. And her anguish never ceased. Her tears were particularly marked at La Salette, where she appeared bent down by grief, lamenting de-Christianized France. However, the theme of sorrow likewise continued at Lourdes. For whilst Our Lady of Lourdes is rightly revered as a source of hope and healing, it is well known how her voice cried out: "Penitence, penitence, penitence."

Less well known is the final great Marian Apparition at Pontmain in 1871. This occurred just as France suffered a crushing defeat by Prussia and immediately before the Parisian revolution, where the Archbishop was shot two months later. Our Lady of Pontmain appeared in a cold night sky in January, bearing a blood-red crucifix. Her visage, at one point, revealed mortal sadness. Many years afterwards, one of the children who saw her recalled:

She shed no tears, but the sadness depicted on her face was such as to defy description. When, a few months later, my father was stricken by death, I saw my mother under the influence of an all-absorbing sorrow. It is easy to conceive the impression that such a sight was calculated to make on a child. Nevertheless, I remember that *my mother's sorrow seemed to me as nothing compared with that I had seen depicted on the face of the Blessed Virgin.* [Italics mine]<sup>18</sup>

Alas, we lack scope to detail the Blessed Virgin's appearances at La Salette, Lourdes, and Pontmain. The reader must turn elsewhere. However, it was evident to Catholic faithful everywhere that the Mother of God wept for French secularization. Undoubtedly, their resistance to the ongoing revolution became thereby fortified.

### **“The Heart of Jesus is Regenerating Us”**

WHILST harkening to Our Lady's tears, let us not forget the Cult of the Sacred Heart, which now advanced after the Revolution like never before. The Sacred Heart, as we have said, became the symbol, *par excellence*, of the French Counter Revolution. We have already heard how Father Debrosse rediscovered the Holy Hour and how this practice, along with the First Fridays, took hold after the Revolution. But this is only the beginning. In horror of the Revolution, Catholic France cried out to the Heart of Jesus. Moreover, Our Lord had requested the symbol of His Sacred Heart to be displayed and venerated far and wide. And this request was not unheeded by Counter Revolutionary France! The Sacred Heart could be seen everywhere throughout Nineteenth-Century Catholic France. As we have mentioned, there was even the widespread campaign to establish the Sacred Heart on the French tricolor flag.

All these things—prayer, penance, imagery, the renewed Cult of

the Sacred Heart, the great Marian Apparitions—are vital to apprehending the revival of Catholic France. Yet it is lamentable how little this renaissance is properly understood. Earlier, we mentioned the prejudice of professional historians. There is, for example, the philosopher Charles Taylor, who has rendered us *A Secular Age*—his truly epic account of the origins of secular society. Now, in discussing French secularization, Taylor clearly acknowledges the extraordinary regeneration of French Catholicism that countered it:

In France . . . the ultramontane Church of the nineteenth century was . . . remarkably successful with masses of people, rural certainly, but also urban. . . . It did so, because . . . it adapted in certain crucial ways. It abandoned . . . rigorism and took on [a] more compassionate stance. It was more tolerant and open to popular modes of piety, including alleged miracle sites, like (most famously) Lourdes. And it proposed a warmer, more emotional piety, of which the devotion to the Sacred Heart was a prime example. . . . It also adapted in another crucial way . . . it began in practice to subvert [its official stance on hierarchy] for the organization of laypeople in new bodies.<sup>19</sup>

Now, Charles Taylor is one of the great historians—and brilliant intellects—of our age. Truth to tell, his materialistic bias is less pronounced than many others. Yet he seems obliged to preface Marian Apparitions with the word “alleged.” And he hardly allows for factors such as Miraculous Medals, First Fridays, or *en masse* supplication toward Heaven! Nor does Taylor mention the power of prayer or the Sacraments of the Holy Church. For worldly academia must account for everything by readily explainable human phenomena, such as “adaptation” or “organization.” None of this is to say Taylor’s

observations are necessarily inaccurate. It is only that, for Catholics of Faith, they remain hopelessly skewed toward materialism.

Were it possible, a number of questions might be put to materialistic historians. What if the great revival of Catholic France *cannot* be accounted for by the factors Taylor gives? What if Our Lady *did* intervene and all the medals, Rosaries, and devotions *did* make a difference? What if the real reason for French Counter Revolutionary inspiration lay, likewise, in *benediction* from His Sacred Heart? We have already concurred with Tomberg's view that "devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was to save the soul of humanity." Not surprisingly Taylor is silent regarding such things. But what if the truth is that the new devotion called forth a *real* response from heaven—that is, *real* benediction from the Sacred Heart? What if subtle, sacred graces rained down on each and every Frenchman or woman who turned toward His Heart? What if this is the *primary cause* for the monumental resurgence of Nineteenth-Century French Catholicism?

For our part, renewed, reinvigorated devotion is critical to understanding what happened in France. Prayer and Sacraments—they are the vital, living essence of authentic Catholic Counter Revolution! And so is veneration of His Sacred Heart. But all this is as nothing for academic history, where miracles must, perforce, be prefaced by words like "alleged." Nor in this flourishing of French Catholicism, can we ignore the great pilgrimages that took place. For French Catholics travelled *en masse* to Chartres, Lourdes, La Salette, and, of course, Paray-le-Monial. Let us listen again to Bishop Bougaud as he describes once such pilgrimage in 1873. This followed the Marian Apparition at Pontmain and the terrible French defeat by Prussia in 1871—both of which admittedly precipitated an intensification of French religiosity at that time. The following, nonetheless, is remarkable:

The month of June, 1873, witnessed a fact which . . . the

gigantic proportions with which it was clothed bear all the appearance of a miracle.

. . .

National pilgrimages began to Lourdes, Salette, Chartres, Fourvieres, Pontmain, Puy, and France threw herself into them suppliantly. On one day Lourdes saw one hundred thousand kneeling men gathered round her shrine.

. . .

Among them all, that of Paray *holds a rank apart*. It was estimated that one day would suffice for all the others; but that of Paray required a month.

One felt that all France was coming. . . . But it was not only its duration and the number that composed the pilgrimage that gave to it its miraculous character; it was the manner in which it was performed that rendered it truly surprising.

. . .

The pilgrims set out in procession from some church and went to the railway station. There they . . . placed on their breast the picture of the Heart of Jesus, and, at the first sound of the whistle, began their chants.

Almost every age, to express its sentiments or give soul to the emotions it has aroused, produces a popular chant or song. . . . No one has written it, but every one sings it. It springs from the soul of the people. In the same manner came forth the hymn that then resounded for the first time, ardent and sad, supplicating and tender, bathing in tears the sorrows of the Church of France, and uttering

at each refrain a cry of hope and a cry for pardon. Very different from the savage clamours of the revolutionists, it appealed to the tenderness of Heaven and not to the anger of earth; instead of exciting souls to hatred, it appeased them by repentance.

. . .

At every step we made, the true character of the pilgrimage was proclaimed. We had under our eyes France mutilated and bleeding. We could not pray for self, we prayed for her. We forgot our own miseries. We cried: "save, save France, through Thy Sacred Heart!"

. . .

Yes, the finger of God is here! Who can deny it? *The Heart of Jesus is regenerating us.* Since our fearful disasters . . . a new France has arisen. She it was that unfurled at Paray the standard of the Sacred Heart. [Italics mine]<sup>20</sup>

Now, 1873 was also the year parliament voted to restore the Catholic monarchy. It is easy to understand Bishop Bougaud's faith in Christendom regenerated, and France as the site of a sacred Christian civilization. Little did Bougaud see how, scarcely six years later, the Republicans would return to power and renew their scourge of Catholic France. So began the exiling of Priests, the closure of schools and monasteries, and the continuous campaign of abuse.

All this, because Catholics dared to dream a dream *counter* to the Revolution, one plainly *dangerous* to the Revolution. Those of a revolutionary spirit realized Catholic France had recently triumphed in the election and the monarchy had very nearly been restored. Yes,

whether they were Priests, monks or nuns, cultural figures (such as Josephin Péladan), or whether they were simply pious peasants, such Catholics remained a menace to the ongoing Revolution. Moreover, they proved themselves capable of doggedly working for their vision. They were willing, for example, to organize mighty pilgrimages to Paray-le-Monial, singing songs of penance for the sins of France. It is not hard to imagine how revolutionary France reacted to these displays!

All this may put us in mind of the “culture war” that characterizes contemporary America. Whilst certain parallels may be seen, they remain limited. Today’s American Christians cannot be motivated by something they have never experienced: *an integral, sacramental Catholic culture*. By contrast, Catholic France still knew the beauty of this and longed to see it preserved and extended—free from harm. They knew something firsthand that was radically different from our secular society today. Thus, they *yearned* for something we can scarcely imagine, for we have experienced nothing remotely like it ourselves.

Today, we no longer dream of anything different, for almost nothing in our modern world alerts us to the things that haunted Catholic France. Our horizons are too tightly restricted. The major films and television of our era reflect contemporary Anglo-American civilization. Or if Anglophones do see “period” drama, it usually stems from the likes of Jane Austen, E. M. Forster, or similar authors steeped in Protestant heritage. Such figures were hardly capable of imagining the aspirations of Catholic France. We are unlikely, then, to hear anything of the yearning for Christendom. But if, by some happy accident, we *do* hear about Catholic Counter Revolution, we are likely to be hoodwinked by the idea, endlessly reiterated, that its cherished aspirations were nothing but hidebound, reactionary, and futile.

For such reasons, I evoked the long-forgotten literary figure of Josephin Péladan in an earlier chapter. There we heard of Péladan’s

Jesuit education and his horror at the Paris Stock Exchange. It was the Jesuit order that Republican France detested most and was therefore first to be exiled. No doubt it believed the Jesuits inculcated dangerous ideas in the impressionable minds of foolish young men like Péladan, and it did not want these youth writing best-selling novels when they grew up. Better to exile the Jesuits, rather than let them “brainwash” a new generation of Counter-Revolutionaries.

But what if the reverse is true? What if Péladan was not brainwashed by the Jesuits, but, instead, his Jesuit education *opened* him to possibilities the French revolutionary mind could never imagine? Péladan had a high school education unlike almost anyone today, steeped in the ancient classics of Greece and Rome, as well as theology. Now all this was to be eliminated for secular education instead. But what if the truth of the matter is that stripped-down, materialistic education brainwashes impressionable minds? What if Péladan’s Jesuit education opened his sensitivities to the soulless, utilitarian, mercantile world he saw emerging all around him? At any rate, Péladan was hardly alone. France was filled not simply by pious Catholic peasants, but also intellectuals, philosophers, and literary figures who, like Péladan, were revolted by the flat, irreverent world taking shape in their midst.

### **Yearning for the Transcendent**

BY contrast, the Christianity they longed for *was not flat*. The Revolution introduced aspirations that meant little to these people. Liberty. Accomplished by endless bloodshed and religious repression? Equality. By exterminating the royal family and murderously replacing the old hierarchical order with a new repressive order instead? Fraternity. . . ?! What of God? What of the Sacred? What of the Holy Church? What of the great art and culture produced by Christendom? In other words, what of everything that *transcends* the dry, utilitarian

rationalism of the French Enlightenment?

Just south of Paris stands perhaps the greatest of all medieval Cathedrals—Chartres. Chartres, with its soaring gothic heights, renders an astonishing testimony to *transcendence*—and how Christendom once cherished such testimony. It was this dream of Christendom that animated Counter-Revolutionary France. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than the Nineteenth-Century construction of another towering monument to rival Chartres—the Sacré Coeur de Montmartre! To understand the origins of the Sacred Heart basilica atop Montmartre, we must return to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. For, as we indicated before, Our Lord appeared to the Saint with unusual demands of the French nation. These included asking King Louis XIV to emblazon the Sacred Heart on his royal standards, as well as building a royal edifice to honor It.

However, Louis XIV did not do these things. Many Catholics felt France thereby failed the Sacred Heart. Christendom had been betrayed and the Godless revolution only confirmed the need to make amends. However, two hundred years had elapsed since the time of Louis XIV. Now, there was no king and no longer *royal* standards that could bear the Sacred Heart. Nor could a *royal* edifice be dedicated to the Sacré Coeur. However, France still had a *national* flag and the potential for a *national* church of the Sacred Heart. And so Catholic France called for the Sacred Heart to be placed on the flag (which, to this day, of course, has never succeeded). However, success was achieved with a national church on the hilltop of Montmartre.

During the 1870s, Catholic France determined the time was ripe to fulfill the long-outstanding request for a special church to His Sacred Heart. Now, this point in French history was overshadowed by an unusual confluence of ominous factors. France had suffered the terrible military defeat of 1871. This was also the year of the Parisian revolution, where the Archbishop was shot, as Our Lady predicted. The Blessed Virgin Mary had also appeared, looking mortally sad at

Pontmain. Catholics, too, were grieved by the recent annexation of Rome by Italy. As we have seen, reparation was central to the Cult of the Sacred Heart. Thus it is not surprising that Catholic France felt inspired to make a *collective reparation* for the sins of their nation.

This took the form of a monumental church to the Sacred Heart on Montmartre hilltop overlooking Paris. Montmartre, as the name suggests, had ancient Christian resonances. In the Third Century St. Denis, first Bishop of France, had been martyred there. Later, a church was built to him, attributed to St. Genevieve, patron saint of Paris. Later still, the Jesuit order was established by St. Ignatius there.

The initiative for a national Church of the Sacred Heart was spearheaded by some of the outstanding Counter Revolutionary figures of the day, including Archbishop Guibert of Paris who replaced his assassinated predecessor, Cardinal Pie, and Alexandre Legentil, the pious layman who conceived the project. Whilst we lack the scope to tell the full tale of their efforts, let us harken to a national vow they made early in the 1870s. That vow can still be seen carved in stone at the Sacré Coeur today—and nothing better expresses the mighty penitential resolve that gave birth to it:

In view of misfortunes which afflict France and perhaps even greater misfortunes which still threaten it, in view of sacrilegious attacks committed in Rome against the rights of the Church and the Holy See and against the person of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, we humble ourselves before God and reconcile in our love the Church and our Fatherland. We acknowledge we have been culpable and have been justly chastised. And to make a full apology for our sins and to obtain from the Infinite Mercy of the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ forgiveness of our faults, as well as extraordinary assistance which alone can deliver the Sovereign Pontiff from his captivity, and to put an end to

the misfortunes of France, we promise to contribute to the construction in Paris of a sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Sacred Heart basilica was conceived as *a massive ex voto*, or votive offering, on behalf of the French nation to the Heart of Jesus. *Ex voto* is short for the Latin *ex voto suscepto* “from the vow made” and the Catholic tradition of votive offerings and masses was long familiar in Nineteenth-Century France (even if it is a sad sign of our times that fewer and fewer Catholics understand such devotions today). Clearly, the new sanctuary should be no small undertaking. For this was not simply another church for Parisians, but *a national church for all of France*. Montmartre had been sacred to the French people for centuries and the new basilica would be a place to welcome them on pilgrimage. Accordingly, it had to be massive, for the great masses of Catholic France who would be coming there.

Moreover, the cost of the immense edifice was such that the whole nation was asked to contribute. Whilst in the past, church construction usually relied on wealthy patronage, Montmartre would be different. Catholic France would demonstrate her collective resolve to the nation by a mighty reparatory monument to the Heart of Jesus. The envisaged basilica was of such enormity that it would take decades—and millions of francs—to achieve. And so a fundraising call went out to the entire nation. Catholics from every walk of life, who regretted the Revolution, were asked to donate. The very wealthy funded entire chunks of the construction. Some purchased, for example, mighty pillars, costing up to 100,000 francs each. The less rich bought individual stones for the walls, which were then inscribed with their names. Another means of fundraising was offering to put donors’ personal prayers on scrolls placed in vials, which were then sealed in niches in the stones as construction continued. As Raymond Jonas writes:

Sponsors liked to speak of the Sacré-Coeur as a massive *ex voto*, the embodiment of a national prayer; thanks to the encapsulation of scrolls, the Sacré-Coeur not only embodied prayer, it incorporated prayer. Donors had the satisfaction of knowing that their prayerful intentions had been deposited within the national *ex-voto* of the Sacré-Coeur—a prayer within a prayer.<sup>21</sup>

Each stone that was laid, then, represented an individual pious act. Many poor, of course, could not afford these gestures. But their wish to contribute was not ignored. Jonas tell us:

The *carte du Sacré-Coeur* was the ideal instrument for the investor of modest means. The “card of the Sacred Heart” consisted of a heavy paper card on which more than a thousand squares were printed in columns and rows. Each time donors set aside ten centimes for the Church of the Sacré-Coeur, they filled in a square. Donors picked up cards or received them in their parishes and homes. Participants were encouraged to share cards among friends or within a family, as a way of hastening the completion of the card and also a way of associating greater numbers with the effort to build the Church.<sup>22</sup>

And so, from across the whole of France, contributions flowed in to build the mighty church of national expiation for the sins of the Revolution. Not surprisingly, the succession of left-leaning governments after 1879 objected. At least three serious attempts were made to halt the construction by law.<sup>23</sup> Yet stone by stone, prayer by prayer, building continued unabated. The Sacré-Coeur was finally completed in 1914 on the eve of the First World War. It represented, and still represents today, a mighty collective testament, in stone, to

the vision of the pious Catholic French, rich and poor alike, who dared to imagine a different France. It manifests their yearning to see their country consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, rather than the Secular Materialism of the Revolution.

How different the integral Catholicism of the Nineteenth Century is from our present globalized society! Imagine people today building a mighty basilica as penitence for secularism! Yet this mighty collective vision appears all-but-forgotten today. It would seem people know hardly anything about Catholic France of a century ago. Or anything they *do* know will be painted as reactionary and paranoid.

But the Catholic French who loved their Church and Monarchy were not victims to simple irrationalism or hysteria. They were not wrong to instinctively reject the flat, soulless trajectories of republicanism. And they were not paranoid about Christianity being destroyed by encroaching Secular Materialism. A hundred years of hindsight all too amply demonstrates the truth of their essential concerns—because, today, Christianity has been virtually destroyed in France.

How few people honor their foresight! Instead, Catholic France has been thoroughly traduced in nothing but negative terms: against reason, against science, against democracy, against “progress” depicted as inevitable. Such is the secular myth. It sees Catholic France as standing not only against, but FOR nothing at all—at least nothing of any importance. But Catholic France stood for things of paramount importance. It stood for piety and prayer. It stood for reverence of tradition, the saints and geniuses of the past. It stood for loyalty, self-sacrifice, and obedience. And it stood for a wholesome family and community life that now seems unimaginable to our atomized, materialistic world.

These were not empty abstractions to these people. Very ordinary French folk still recognized the mystical power of the Church. Now, this, Lector, I can see from a very special mercy God has granted me—

the grace of living in Catholic Ireland. For, even in the Twenty-First Century, one can talk to everyday Irish Catholics of older generations and hear their devotion. Whereas Westerners elsewhere are swept up in secular ideology, I am *astonished* by these elderly Irish—how frequently their lives remain permeated through and through by humble piety! It is in listening to these aging Catholic Irish that I can understand Catholic France. I can understand the French Catholic peasants of the past, because I have listened to the elderly Irish today, with the same peasant origins. And listening to them breaks my heart. For these faithful Irish seem to be a dying breed, to whose sad fate we now turn.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France*, trans. Richard LeBrun (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Valentin Tomberg, *Foundations of International Law* (USA: Grail Guide Publications), 74.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 82.

<sup>4</sup> James Roberts, *The Counter-Revolution in France, 1787–1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 104.

<sup>6</sup> Warren H. Carroll and Anne Carroll, *The Revolution against Christendom* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 2005), 125–28.

<sup>7</sup> Tomberg, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, 281.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Maistre, *Considerations on France*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart*, 171.

<sup>11</sup> John McManners, *Church and State in France, 1870–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 51.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Brown, *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 262.

<sup>13</sup> Tomberg, *Foundations of International Law*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in “Manuel González Prada: une conception libertaire de l’éducation et de la famille,” accessed May 31, 2016, <http://evergreen.loyola.edu/tward/www/gp/critica/delhom-education-famille.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> D.W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France (1870–1939)* (London: Hamilton, 1945), 150–51.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religious and National Identity in Modern France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Bernard St. John, *The Blessed Virgin in the Nineteenth Century: Apparitions, Revelations, Graces* (London: Burns & Oates, 1903), 4–10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 444–45.

<sup>20</sup> Bougaud, *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, 345–54.

<sup>21</sup> Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart*, 215.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

## Christendom in Ireland

*One of us is seeking (still) a Catholic Gaelic nation,  
protected from global materialism.*

*One of us seeks all the latest (English-language) channels  
on his satellite TV.*

**D**EAR LECTOR, we enter the final chapters of this book, where our attention turns from France gone-by to Ireland. By God's mercy, I greet you now from this island, which I have returned to and once again made my home. As you know, this book has been born from a long passageway through Western Catholic Europe: Ireland, Spain, and France—wherein I have spent most of the present millennium. (Although, as we shall later come to, there was also a brief, highly instructive interval in England, before returning to Ireland—whose Catholic culture provided, in so many ways, the initial inspiration for my book.)

For moving to Ireland in 2004 began breaking down many cultural assumptions, accumulated in my forty years of living in the great Protestant-turned-secular countries of the West. Initially, I was jolted to discover a nation shaped by Catholicism instead of the Reformation. For there in the rural West of Ireland, I found the remnants of an astonishing *integral Catholic society*, whose human warmth and piety took my breath away.

Yet this happy time was interrupted. Personal circumstances (and Providence, I believe) dictated my leaving Ireland in 2006 for an extended period in Spain and France. It was not easy to abandon

Ireland, yet, in the end, my sad departure yielded profound riches. For it was only after experiencing the Catholic heritage of France and Spain that I really came to understand the last dying embers of integral Catholicism, which I had earlier discovered in Eire. Only then, were my eyes opened to how Catholic cultures everywhere *once aspired to Christendom*, rather than the descent into Secular Materialism. I understood, too, why the secularizing forces thereby sought to crush the dream of Christendom and how these forces had now finally made their way to Ireland, that last Catholic stronghold.

And so, just as we opened a window onto Catholic France in our last chapter, we will look to Catholic Ireland in this one. In doing this, key themes in this book should be elaborated. First of all, there are significant parallels to France. For the subversive, revolutionary activity that served to destroy Catholicism in France (amongst many other places) is now viciously at work in Ireland. This viciousness, moreover, is abetted by the old Protestant and secular prejudices of the Anglosphere, which now over-run a new “globalized” Ireland. Whereas as Catholic Ireland once resisted the Anglo-American world as decadently materialistic, modern Ireland now champions her same liberal values.

### **The Miracle That Is Ireland**

BUT before considering the present fate of Ireland, we dwell, first, on the essential miracle that Ireland is. For it *is* a matter of the miraculous here. What I first encountered in County Clare in the rural southwest of Ireland in 2004 fully deserves this appellation. In uttering these words, I am conscious of inviting mockery. Cynics have scoffed at my observations from my initial period in Catholic Ireland. Have I not exaggerated the positive qualities and disregarded the bad? Am I not romanticizing and idealizing Ireland? Surely, my initial spell on this island was insufficient to judge, given how brief it was—not even two

years in total?

I admit having had doubts myself, before I came back. Could Ireland truly be as special as I remembered? For I recall being shocked, truly shocked, by Ireland in the West. Perhaps I was deceived? Yet now I have returned here to live in the rural northwest—and I feel only re-confirmed in everything I felt previously in southwest County Clare. Yes, I have spent over five years now in Ireland. “Should you not be taking off your rosy spectacles by now?” This is what I know many people, including the Irish, may be asking me.

But what I am about to say cannot be reduced to tinted glasses. Here is the personal conviction that does not diminish, but only deepens, year after year—even if, inevitably, I also see the dark, fallen sides of this culture better than I did at first. Still, the beauty of Catholic Ireland clutches at my heart—particularly as I have *listened* to older generations who remember what Catholic Ireland was. These folk remember a culture, radically different from the rest of the Anglosphere. Yes, people here still recall—and often mourn—the integral Catholic culture they knew in their youth.

This integral Catholic culture—something of it can be glimpsed in a national survey of the Irish Republic from as late as 1973–1974. That survey found over ninety percent of Catholics went weekly to Mass and nearly forty-seven percent went to confession once a month—whereas ninety-seven percent prayed daily. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed put up holy pictures or statues in the home. Furthermore, around a quarter of the population went to Mass more than once a week and a similar proportion went to confession once a week or more!<sup>1</sup>

Cynics have tried to paint this extraordinary religiosity as largely social control in a culture where Church and State were closely linked. According to them, Irish Catholics simply did what was expected of them by a rigid, hierarchical society. This is often attended by notions of the Catholic Irish as docile and priest-ridden—without the slightest

consciousness of the docile, media-ridden culture everywhere in the West today.

What this cynicism misses is how much Irish religiosity exceeded the expectations of the Church. For example, the Church expects yearly confession of us—not more. The Church certainly does not expect weekly confession. And yet twenty-nine percent of the Irish population went weekly or more! The Church imposes no obligation to put up holy images or statues. Yet seventy-five percent of the population said they did. Yes, all kinds of explanations are given as to why the Irish were religious—but never how the Sacramental Miracle of the Holy Church might have been operating in their souls!

Why did Ireland lose its religiosity? How many different theories I read, including, but not limited to, urbanization, Globalization, industrialization, the scandal of sexual abuse, the power of media elites. But never do I read things like the soul-transforming power of the Church ebbing away after Vatican II. This is not to deny the above theories, dear Lector. But they remain incomplete if one stubbornly ignores the Catholic Mystery. In what follows, then, we will ponder not only the Sacraments, but also the sacramentals—for example, the Rosary, Holy Water, and the image of His Sacred Heart, which once featured in Irish homes everywhere. And in considering these effects of the Sacraments and sacramentals, I cannot help but recall something Hilaire Belloc once said:

Truths are divided into two kinds; those with which all are familiar and which are therefore not worth saying . . . and those other truths which men have not yet accepted, and the saying of which, is therefore, at once irritant and all-important.<sup>2</sup>

What I mean to say regarding the Irish Church is very far from being commonly accepted! It will not only irritate, but, no doubt,

even enrage some. However, it seems to me entirely consonant with the truths of the Faith and what many souls have experienced in Ireland. Shortly, then, we will turn to Ireland's historical and cultural development in a fashion that does not factor out the Catholic Mystery. Before we come to that, however, I want to interject some personal recollections of my life-changing encounter with Catholic Ireland.

### **Personal Encounters with Catholic Ireland**

THIRTY years after the national survey, I moved to County Clare in rural Western Ireland in 2004. Things had changed markedly by then. But what I saw still startled me—I was unprepared for such a warmly human and deeply religious society. I vividly recall my first Easter in Ireland. It was an Easter unlike anything I had ever known. For it was clear that countless Irish folk accompanied me in veneration of the Paschal Mystery. But it was not only during the Masses I felt joined in worship. No, stillness seemed to descend on the land throughout the whole Triduum. At noon on Good Friday, for example, I was deeply moved by the Stations of the Cross, where it seemed that a great mass of the Clare population would be joining me, in chapels up and down the county: silent, still, pious.

These Easter manifestations were an intensification of a profound Christian culture, rooted in the past, yet still living, breathing. In the Clare countryside, I heard the bells of the Angelus. (Indeed, one could hear the Angelus sounded everyday on the main Irish television channel!) I was also surprised by nearby Limerick city, where I commuted. During the week, I walked the city center. Every three or four blocks, there was a Catholic church. There were not only numerous parish churches—but also the great churches of the Franciscans, the Augustinians, Redemptorists, and Jesuits. And often in these churches, there would be not simply one Mass daily, but two or even three. All this in a city whose population did not exceed

100,000 souls.

Moreover, one would hear groups praying every day Hail Mary, full of Grace. And, as we mentioned earlier, the Irish churches frequently had side-chapels set aside exclusively for Eucharistic Adoration throughout the day. The presence one could feel in those side-chapels of continuous adoration is beyond words. Amidst all this, one saw countless little acts of piety—a lady kneeling in reverence clutching her beads, a man rising from adoration and walking forward to kiss the exposed Sacrament.

I was deeply moved by all this, yet realized *it was nothing* compared to what Ireland was even a few decades beforehand. Stirred in my heart, I began questioning older generations about the lost world they remembered. And I heard how often they were markedly disturbed, even horrified, by the eradication of the culture they had known. I recall one old lady who had never forgotten rural Clare as it had been in her youth. There was no television in the evenings and, as night drew near, she went from neighbor's hearth to neighbor's hearth, where the Rosary was prayed. In every home she was welcomed to join in prayer. I asked her about her memories of the Latin Mass. Pained, she told me: "It used to be I was looking into the face of God at Mass. But then the Priest turned round and I had to look into the face of a man." I might add this was not someone I had met in "Latin Mass circles," but in everyday Irish life. This gracious woman had exclusively attended the *Novus Ordo* for decades, but she never forgot her palpable sense of transcendence in the old Mass.

Now, piety like this is often more common in women than men these days. But in Ireland, I have been deeply moved by little old men, frail with age and bent backs, saying their prayers. Truly, I have never encountered the likes of the older men I have met going to Mass every day in Ireland. One man told me how the Church he recalled from his youth was "otherworldly"—but not now. Others from very humble, unsophisticated backgrounds can scarcely articulate what they

feel. Nonetheless, they reveal astonishing sensitivity to the Catholic Mystery. I weep inside, knowing that unless something miraculous happens, these little old Irish men will soon be gone forever.

Catholic Ireland. What *wholesome piety* you once rendered your people in your Church-centered culture, education, and in the home! Yet in this cynical age, how I shall be accused of romanticizing and idealizing you! However, it was not simply your devotion that markedly impressed me when I first lived in Clare. It is more! For your folk seemed more genuinely caring, warm, and helpful than any other people I have met in this world. Your spirit of community was profound. And likewise, your society was steeped with charitable activity, unlike any I had ever seen. Indeed, it has often been remarked that, even when you were amongst the poorest countries in Western Europe, your per capita quota of donations to charity was high—very high—by richer countries' standards. And all across your land, I still saw evidence of uncommon humanity.

How to convey this to you, Lector? Allow me a few personal "snapshots" from my initial time in the southwest. I recall coming from my Anglican college in Wales to study at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick. Such difference! One lecturer (a Priest) calls students to prayer in his class—and no one bats an eyelid! The college ethos is markedly different in other ways too. There is, for example, a striking emphasis on charity. Students can be seen raising money everywhere around me. All this is poles apart from my Anglican college, which, despite being a religious institution, appears more worldly and materialistic to me.

Walking the halls of Mary Immaculate, I spy a poster—one of many for organized charity. But this single poster articulates the difference I feel, now, right across Ireland. The poster shows a crossword puzzle. On the puzzle, words are scrawled in. One cannot clearly make the words out. But they give the impression of being obscene words, which serves to make a point. For beneath the

crossword comes the slogan: *The Real Obscenity: Not Caring.*

I never saw posters in my British college remotely like this. But in Mary Immaculate and, indeed, across the country, I will see these posters calling for charity, charity! And I will see people responding more readily than I have ever seen in any country. Now, I do not wish to condone obscene language. It is, no doubt, corroding our culture more than we realize. But the memory of this poster remains stamped on my soul, precisely because it distilled my experience of uncommon Irish generosity. And to be deprived of a caring heart—a heart that bleeds, like His Heart bleeds—is indeed the greatest obscenity of all.

As is well known, Ireland was long steeped in unusual devotion to His Sacred Heart. Could this be reflected in the unusual qualities of the Irish heart? For myself, it is impossible for me to not to see the link here. Now, my fellow-Americans are rightly perceived as an outgoing, friendly people. Still, in Ireland it cut deeper than that. The Irish were also warm and affable—particularly so—but, speaking as an American myself, the remarkable Irish warmth signaled something more profound. Things did not stop at simple friendliness (important as it is). Rather, I was bowled over by how much so many Irish people truly cared for their neighbors, even strangers in the street, in uncommon ways. Not only did I witness repeated acts of genuine consideration, helpfulness, and self-sacrifice that honestly startled me, but the sense for social justice appeared deeper than in my native country. The slogan on that crossword puzzle—the obscenity of not caring—spoke volumes about the Irish soul.

Here is another memory from my initial time in Clare. I meet a perceptive American who has lived seven years in Ireland. His experience mirrors my own. He, too, was astonished, when he first arrived in the late Nineties. Like myself, nothing in his native land prepared him for this. I ask what he thinks now, seven years later. Has he changed his mind? He tells me he recognizes certain Irish faults more than he did at first. But, no, his views have not radically

changed. He still perceives something very unusual here. Many others visit Ireland and report the same things we see, this fellow-American and I. This thoughtful American's testimony was telling for me, because first impressions sometimes lie. When I spoke to him, I had only lived a few months in Clare. Yet his sustained experience after seven years in Ireland confirmed I was not simply imagining things.

Are there not shallow, superficial, and egocentric Irish, you may well ask me? Are there not corrupt—even monstrous—Irish, including sick Priests who destroyed children's lives? Of course. Ireland is shot through with fallen humanity like every nation. The Irish have plenty of faults, just like everyone else. Obviously, their faults sometimes manifest in terrible ways. But I have seen too, too much of the warm, communitarian Irish heart to renounce anything I say here.

How many memories are here! I stop by a lonely wayside shop, tired and wanting coffee. Doubtfully, I ask if, by any chance, they sell coffee in this little place. No, the shopkeeper tells me, but she will happily make me one anyway—for which she refuses payment. Little things like this might seem too mundane to mention. They happen everywhere sometimes. But, in my experience, they happen considerably more often in Ireland. Moreover, they are really not that “little”; taken together they add up to something important. To invoke a current cliché, I have seen too many “random acts of human kindness” in Ireland and I cannot escape the conclusion that the profoundly Catholic culture of the recent past made a genuine, lasting difference to her people.

Much else testified to the unusual communitarian spirit, which, even now, persists in Ireland. Thus, I was startled to discover that there had never been a conventional Right versus Left opposition in Irish politics. Now, there were two major Irish opposition parties and one of them, Fianna Fáil, might be considered the more conservative. Fianna Fáil clearly bore certain resemblances to America's Republicans, say. For example, it has historically emphasized

traditional values and patriotism rather more than its opposition.

However, conservatism in Ireland had a different meaning than in America! At least, in the past, being conservative in Ireland never meant being *economically* right-wing in the sense it does everywhere else in the Anglosphere. Ireland has changed now. Like all the world, she grows ever more materialistic. The famed “Celtic Tiger” arose in the 1990s. Almost overnight, Ireland went from being very poor to very wealthy—a story we shall shortly examine. Amidst this transformation, a small economically right-wing party emerged for a few years (although it has since died). Admittedly, both Irish parties are now much closer than they were to the economic Right elsewhere in the world. Nonetheless, a full-blown capitalist party like Britain’s Conservatives or America’s Republicans never existed in Catholic Ireland of the past. It has never elected a leader even remotely like Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan. The once-profound Irish conservatism was never tied to economic liberalism. No, as we shall see, Ireland embraced a social compassion—even disdain—for wealth-creation that would astonish the Anglo-American mind.

Yes, until very recently, Ireland travelled a different road to the rest of the Anglosphere. Its extraordinary religiosity persisted into the Eighties, at least—and is still felt in the rural West, even now.

Cynics may mutter: “Nothing but the result of social pressure and conformity,” entirely forgetting, it would seem, the conformist pressure of global capitalism. But whilst modernity pressures its youth to become consumerist yuppies—Young Upward Professionals, Ireland once produced YPCs—young Poor Catholics, who often emigrated overseas in search of better conditions. I invoke these poverty-stricken YPCs, abandoning their homeland, precisely because I hardly claim Catholic Ireland was perfect. But neither will I be party to naïve reductionists, who mutter darkly about domination by Catholic Priests—without the slightest inkling that their thinking might be dominated by “Corporate priests” and the media they control.

It is futile to deny social conformity in any society. But only Secular Materialism could deny something else operating in Catholic Ireland. That “something else” had very much to do with the Catholic Mystery. It fostered a world where people aspired to a very different society than Britain, which was widely perceived as decadent and materialistic. Can we not credit these Irish of the past with the possibility they had genuine aspirations? Must we write them off as naïve stooges to the Priests? Might not the reverse be true? It is we who are the naïve stooges of materialistic media domination?

Everyone told me Ireland was different now—that by the time I arrived in 2004, things had changed beyond all recognition since the 1980s. Indeed, Mary Kenny wrote a remarkable 1997 book *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* whose message is emphatic: Over, done, finished, no more.<sup>3</sup> Another grief-stricken lady told me she realized the Ireland that she loved died in 1995, when, by the narrowest of votes (9000 in a country of four million) the country approved divorce. Yet 49.9 percent still voted “no.” *Playboy* magazine was still officially banned in Ireland in 1995. Abortion was also illegal when I first arrived, only being legalized in 2013—against the clear will of the people (for realizing this to be the case, the government pledged not to legalize it. It then proceeded to do so, without a referendum, which it plainly feared it would lose).

Here are startling things for many British or Americans, like myself, who frequently forget our own Anglo-Protestant culture is not the entire universe. Moreover, I heard an unusual litany of lament repeatedly in Ireland: “Money has ruined us. Money has ruined us. Money has ruined us.” Ordinary people in Ireland actually mourned the economic success of the Celtic Tiger! A Dublin taxi driver once gave me a poignant account of the community spirit that, he said, disappeared from his urban neighborhood after Ireland secularized. Yet, I visited Dublin often and its warm spirit still seemed remarkable compared to other similar-sized cities I have known. Yes, even in the

Twenty-First Century, the community spirit of Ireland remains outstanding compared to England or America—even if it was nothing like the past. And never in America or England have I heard anything remotely like that collective lament: “Money has ruined us...”

Cynics will accuse the Irish of being hypocrites. Clearly, plenty of people lived it up in the Celtic Tiger years. Newfound hedonism swept the country—along with spending and borrowing that later led to economic collapse. However, I frequently sensed aching sincerity—not complacent hypocrisy—when the Irish lamented all they had lost.

Here is why Ireland evoked profound questions in my soul—including how the *Mystici Corporis Christi* might affect the soul of an entire people. Dare one ask whether the Sanctifying Grace flowing forth in all those Catholic Baptisms, Communion, Confessions, and Confirmations actually made a real and positive difference to the Irish people? Even to ask such questions is to risk calumny in our brave, new cynical world. For many moderns, the question is beyond the pale. People enamored of “Political Correctness” will object. How dare I parade my Catholicism around like this? How dare I suggest it had a genuine, beneficial social effect, the likes of which neither Protestantism nor secularism can muster? How dare I refuse to sign up for the proffered thesis: the only reason Ireland remained different was rigid control?

I risk another charge as well—one that is far more understandable. As I write, perhaps as much as four percent of Irish clergy have been implicated in sexually abusing minors in recent decades. Sickeningly, this abuse was then covered-up. Twisted Priests were enabled to continue their abuse, amidst the denial “it wouldn’t happen again.” Clerics cared more about the Church’s reputation than young people’s lives, which were scarred forever. What can be said? Only a little now—for we will examine it in more depth soon. Yet, as Christians, we recognize the Fall. We also recognize evil. There *are* preternatural demons who *do* prey on our souls. And sometimes human souls

succumb to the sickest of temptations. Different societies are afflicted by different forms of evil: killing the unborn, war, capitalist sweatshops exploiting children—the list goes on. Ireland has less to do with these than some nations, yet it must never be forgotten that several thousand Irish children were seared for life by a small proportion of sick clerics.

Even whilst we explore this shortly, I know some will be scandalized by what I say of Catholic Ireland. For them, Irish Catholic culture has forever been discredited. Such people will ask: How dare I hold up Catholic Ireland as an ideal society? But I am not holding Catholic Ireland up as an ideal society. I only see it as a society—flawed, broken, fallen, like every society—which, all things considered, honestly seems preferable to me than any other country I have known.

God has granted me the grace of living amidst nine different countries. Other people are given different graces. But I speak from the personal grace of seeing Ireland from the outside and being able to compare her with other nations. From this perspective, I mean to challenge many modern conceptions about Ireland, often held by the Irish themselves. Consider, for example, this sadly typical example from Irish journalist John Waters:

Lamentations from bishops about the decline of Ireland into Godlessness are frequent in Modern Ireland. . . . Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Desmond Connell warned that the Irish people were “in danger of enslaving themselves to the here and now. . . . Not long ago” he said “our people lived with the kind of awareness of God that visitors to our country found striking.”

. . .

I believe the archbishop was mistaken. For what he has

taken for Godliness was in reality a pseudo-piety, inculcated over many generations as a means of announcing Irish moral superiority. It had little or nothing of God in it.<sup>4</sup>

What am I to say? The Archbishop's sentiments make perfect sense to me. When I first visited Ireland, I found the "awareness of God" striking! Years of living here has only confirmed I was not imagining things. Even today, the awareness of God remains deeply moving, yet it is *nothing like* what it was. But, according to John Waters, what I have seen is only pseudo-piety! The miracle of Catholic Ireland that profoundly reoriented my life is merely phoniness inculcated to proclaim "moral superiority." How can John Waters be so sure? I wonder if part of the answer is that he has never lived anywhere else.

Quite consciously, then, I evoke the genuine miracle that is Ireland. Let cynics say I am duped by a romantic penumbra surrounding this isle. If I am frank, I can only say they, in turn, appear duped to me—duped by Enlightenment Despair and modern anti-Catholic media prejudices that, alas, owe all-too-much to my own Anglo-American culture.

### **A Glance at Irish History**

It is high-time different perspectives on Catholic Ireland are voiced. And just as we zoomed in on the story of France in our [previous chapter](#), we will now peer into Irish history. With France, however, we largely confined ourselves to the Counter Revolutionary period since 1789. By contrast, with Ireland, we will engage—if only in a few broad strokes—a much wider sweep of history.

From this, we hope to make clear that Ireland is a land where Christianity took root very, very deeply—and where it has proved, so

far, impossible to destroy. In this, she contrasts sharply with places like England. Looking across history, there is hardly anything like Catholic Ireland—although Poland offers a certain parallel. For Poland withstood dreadful attempts to destroy her Catholic culture under communism, just as Ireland repelled the same under British rule. Yet whereas Ireland resisted British Protestantization and Poland resisted Russian Communism, both nations now appear besieged by the rising tide of Secular Materialism.

To comprehend the scale of the Irish tragedy today, it is first necessary to appreciate something of its Hibernian past. To that end, I return, once again, to a figure who has provided so much inspiration for this book. Hilaire Belloc understood the miracle of Ireland in an intimate way. For, although Belloc is known for his Anglo-French origins, he was also personally connected to Ireland. Not only did his great grandfather hail from Cork, there was, moreover, the great love of his life. Her name was Elodie Hogan and she was Irish. The literal-minded will tell us that Elodie was, in fact, Irish-American—a first-generation American born of Irish parents in California. But Elodie, I say, was Irish. She was fully possessed of that deep, devout Catholicism that has marked Ireland for centuries. And after Belloc married her, her Irish piety started working its unsung magic on his soul. All this, I think, helped that brilliant Oxford-educated historian, to penetrate Ireland more deeply. Certainly, he saw how unique Ireland was in the history of Christendom:

Ireland, presented an . . . exception. It was not compelled to the Christian culture, as were the German barbarians of the Continent, by arms. No Charlemagne with his Gallic armies forced it tardily to accept baptism. It was not savage like the Germanies; it was therefore under no necessity to go to school. It was not a morass of shifting tribes; it was a nation. But in a most exceptional fashion,

though already possessed, and *perhaps because so possessed*, of a high pagan culture of its own, it accepted within the lifetime of a man, and *by spiritual influences alone*, the whole spirit of the Creed. The civilization of the Roman West was accepted by Ireland, not as a command nor as an influence, but *as a discovery*. [Italics mine]<sup>5</sup>

Here Belloc speaks of the extraordinary conversion of Ireland, following the arrival of Patricius—the British Roman citizen whom we know today as St. Patrick. Patricius came to Ireland during the Fifth Century, where he found the “high pagan culture” led by the Druids. Belloc suggests, then, that St. Patrick encountered something singular to this island that facilitated its astonishing conversion. It is a strange thing. Here Belloc echoes a mysterious notion I cannot help but recall from my past reading of Rudolf Steiner (whose “esoteric Christianity” greatly influenced Valentin Tomberg prior to his conversion). For Steiner believed the Irish Druids possessed extraordinary sensitivity such that they *grasped immediately* the Christian Mystery—unlike any other people in Europe. This is not to endorse Steiner’s “esoteric Christianity”—lamentably hostile, as it is, to the Church. We simply note the striking fact that both the anti-Catholic Steiner and profoundly Catholic Belloc likewise surmised something unique to ancient Ireland. (I might add that I have found Steiner singularly useful in this context, whilst talking to New Agers in Ireland. For they inform me that Roman Catholicism is nothing but an artificial “overlay” imposed on groovy Celtic paganism. I tell them of Steiner’s view that—*au contraire*—the druids mystically received the message of the Roman citizen Patricius. An astounded pause can follow here: Steiner, they will listen to, but not the Church.)

Whatever one makes of either Belloc’s or Steiner’s intuitions, pagan Ireland became—in a remarkably short time—mysteriously and

miraculously Christian. And as Thomas Cahill writes: “Ireland is unique in religious history for being the only land into which Christianity was introduced without bloodshed.”<sup>6</sup>

It is an odd thing. France is often called “the eldest daughter of the Church” because in 496, twenty years after the last Roman Emperor fell in the West, the pagan Franks took on the religion of the crumbling empire. But pagan Ireland was even earlier. The Roman Patricius arrived in Hibernia around 430.

This singular, rapid, graceful conversion of Hibernia is only the beginning of the Irish Christian miracle. What happened after the Roman Christian empire fell in 476 remains just as significant. For as the dark ages descended across the face of Europe, and as Christianity became endangered on the continent (and indeed in once-Roman Britain), it *flourished* in Ireland. Whilst elsewhere in Europe, people were forgetting how to read and write, Ireland would become a fabled “isle of saints and scholars.” For Irish religious scribes now protected Western culture. They maintained records of European civilization, copying Greek and Latin manuscripts, whilst libraries on the continent were lost forever.

Night-time covered the rest of Europe, whilst the flame of Christianity was nurtured by the Irish, until from “little” Ireland, the flame went forth. St. Columba, St. Columbanus, St. Fintan, Johannes Scotus Eriugena—these holy men and others carried Christianity back to the European mainland, converting kings, building monasteries, re-introducing scholarship everywhere they went. We cannot tell their tale here, but Cahill relates it in a book whose title evokes much in five simple words: *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. The interested reader is referred to it.

The miracle of Irish Christianity does not end there. It is sustained down through centuries. England commenced her invasion of Ireland in 1169. Two cultures were thereby established on the isle, side by side: English and Gaelic. At first, they did not clash as much

as they later would, for, at that time, England remained Catholic. Both belonged to Christendom—with the Pope at its summit. It was only after the Reformation that truly horrifying persecution of the Irish began, first under the Tudors (particularly Elizabeth I) then Oliver Cromwell and beyond. There is no scope to examine the bloody massacres here, nor the massive expropriation of land and property held by Catholics. Nor can we enter into the terrible penal laws that attempted to crush the faith. All that concerns us here is that the Irish miracle persisted for generation upon generation. Throughout her long agony, Ireland kept the faith. As Belloc continues:

There never was, and please God never can be, so prolonged and insanely violent a persecution of men by their fellowmen as was undertaken for centuries against the Faith in Ireland: and it has completely failed. I know of no example in history of failure following upon such effort.

It had behind it in combination the two most powerful of the evil passions of men, terror and greed. And so amazing is it that they did not attain their end, that perpetually as one reads one finds the authors of the dreadful business now at one period, now at another, assuming with certitude that their success is achieved. Then, after centuries, it is almost suddenly perceived—and in our own time—that it has not been achieved and never will be.<sup>7</sup>

Belloc's "own time" here is 1920—the very moment Ireland was finally on the verge of achieving independence from Britain. The Irish Free State was declared in 1922. Here Belloc rejoices that centuries of effort to Protestantize and Anglicize Ireland had failed utterly and completely. Alas, Hilaire Belloc could not foresee the present age of mighty Anglo-American media that may yet turn out more potent than

the combined efforts of Cromwell, English monarchs, and governors.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves in this fleeting history. We cannot omit mention of the devastating potato famine of 1845–1849, which decimated the population. Here, too, we see the tragic result of British colonialism—as so many of the disenfranchised Catholic Irish had been reduced to a virtual monoculture, surviving on tiny plots of potatoes. When the potato failed, something like a quarter of the population either died or emigrated. Yet this dreadful emigration appears filled with mysterious significance. For just as the Irish spread Catholic Christianity across Europe during the dark Ages, now, during the Nineteenth Century, they spread Catholic Christianity across the Anglosphere. The Anglosphere, of course, had been almost exclusively Protestant before the Irish famine. Catholicism was nearly non-existent in Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, etc.—but as the Irish fled their homeland, they re-introduced the Faith in those countries.

In America, it was a little different, as Germans, Poles, Italians, amidst others, also brought Catholicism to the new world. However, this does not diminish the staggering Irish contribution to American Catholicism. Read if you like, Lector, Charles Morris's epic *American Catholic*.<sup>8</sup> There you will see how, more than any other nation, the Irish built the Catholic Church in the United States. Now, partly this was because they arrived speaking English, whereas other Catholic immigrants did not. However, it is more than this! As Morris makes abundantly clear, the Irish in America possessed a zeal for the Catholic faith, outstripping all others. They proceeded through the American states erecting churches, building parishes, forming missions, with a stunning passion compared to which other Catholics often seemed positively lethargic. Yes, the land of St. Patrick has ever been a great missionary culture. So it was in the dark ages of the barbarian invasion of Europe, so it has been in the dark Ages of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century materialism. Now, Hilaire Belloc was deeply stirred by this astonishing phenomenon:

Think of the American Colonies; with one little exception they were perhaps the most completely non-Catholic society of their time. Their successful rebellion against the mother country meant many things, and led to many prophecies. Who could have guessed that one of its chief results would be the furnishing of *a free refuge for the Irish?*

The famine, all human opinion imagined, and all human judgment was bound to conclude, was a mortal wound, coming in as the ally of the vile persecution I have named. It has turned out the very contrary. From it there springs indirectly the dispersion, and that power which comes from unity in dispersion, of Irish Catholicism.<sup>9</sup>

It remains to speak of post-famine Ireland. By the Nineteenth Century, the worst persecution of Catholic Ireland had finished (at least in the south). From 1829, Catholics could freely practice their faith again. After 1849, the Catholic hierarchy of Bishops was re-established. A mighty flourishing of ultramontane Catholicism then bloomed across the land. Churches were rapidly erected up and down the country and many devotions (such as the Sacred Heart) from continental Catholicism could now thrive and prosper openly. The Irish also began building those extraordinary side-chapels devoted to Eucharistic Adoration—chapels that still exist across this blessed isle, nourishing her faithful.

We have already indicated the Irish devotion to the Sacred Heart. Generally speaking, in fact, Irish Catholicism turned very much toward France for inspiration. When, for example, the Irish could freely build churches again, they generally turned to the French neo-gothic style, (rather than, say, the baroque of Spain, Italy, or central Europe). Through all this, a French influence was carried by Irish Catholics to the New World. Thus, a direct line from France to Ireland to America

can be clearly seen. As the Irish-American Joseph Byrnes has said:

As a kid, I knew that the Catholicism of my Irish American . . . youth was basically a French product. . . . The formation of my parish priests was European [and] Sulpician. . . . Church devotions came from French Saints too: Sacred Heart . . . Our Lady of La Salette and St. Therese of Lisieux. . . . Roman Catholic we called ourselves, but French Catholic we were. <sup>10</sup>

We should also note that, just as Nineteenth-Century France was honored by the Blessed Virgin Mary, the same is likewise true of Ireland. For after Paris, La Salette, Lourdes, and Pontmain, the final great Marian Apparition of that century occurred in Knock in the West of Ireland. Our Lady appeared for two hours, late one evening in August, 1879 to at least fifteen poor peasants, whilst the Irish rain poured down on their heads. Beneath the Lady's feet, however, the ground was dry.

### **“The Ireland That We Have Dreamed Of ”**

YES, Our Lady blessed both France and Ireland in a singular manner during the Nineteenth Century. Indeed, Counter Revolutionary Catholic culture flourished perhaps even more strongly in Ireland than in France. For in Ireland, Catholics also aspired to Christendom. They dreamed of a Catholic Celtic culture free from the Protestant and increasingly secular British rule. But, unlike the French, they actually succeeded in creating that culture—at least for half-a-century.

Yet the truth of this matter is obscured by the fact that, normally, one does not speak of Counter Revolution in Ireland—but, rather, revolution. For the modern Irish state was born from armed revolt early in the Twentieth Century. On Easter Monday of 1916, Patrick

Pearse, James Connolly, and Éamon de Valera led, alongside others, a violent insurrection in Dublin, setting off a chain of events that—astonishingly—led to Irish liberation (in the South) by 1922. It is astonishing because in 1916, the prospect of Irish freedom remained utterly inconceivable. No country had ever succeeded in breaking free from the superpower of that time: the mighty British Empire. And, having suffered British domination for centuries, most Irish assumed that situation could easily continue still further centuries more.

At the time, then, the Easter Rising of 1916 appeared not simply hopeless, but indeed howlingly, ridiculously absurd. The devout Patrick Pearse, however, thought differently—and prepared to sacrifice his life for his vision. Commandeering Dublin's General Post Office—hardly the center of government—Pearse walked out onto its front steps, at four minutes past noon, and proclaimed the Irish nation to astonished onlookers:

Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom. . . . We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms.

Now, as we say, the Easter Rising is generally considered a revolution. Yet in certain ways, it shares more in common with, say, the Counter Revolution in the Vendée than with revolutionary movements elsewhere. As Mary Kenny writes of the 1916 insurrection:

During the rebel's occupation of strategic buildings in Dublin during Easter week, the Rosary was recited on the hour, every hour, a practice which Irish revolutionaries (to the head clutching bewilderment of, say, French radicals)

considered natural.<sup>11</sup>

Mary Kenny is right. The so-called Irish revolution would have *discombobulated* revolutionaries elsewhere. For these Irish revolutionaries were not fighting against a Catholic order, instead they fought for the liberty to secure a Catholic culture very different to England's Protestant culture. In contrast to revolutions elsewhere, the Ireland they were fighting for was not a more secular society, but, in fact, one that would prove far less so! Few things convey that manifestly-less-secular attitude better than the constitution that the Irish would later vote for, following their liberation. For that constitution would have been unthinkable to liberal England, forbidding, as it did, things like divorce and commencing with the following preamble:

*In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred, We, the people of Ireland, humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial, Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our Nation, And seeking to promote the common good. . . . Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution. [Italics mine]*

Now, my interpretation here of the Rising as a Catholic revolt against the Protestant, secular British spirit would have been a common one in Ireland fifty years ago. But today secular revisionists may contest it. They will point out, for example, that a few figures involved definitely did not share such aims. For example, Connolly's goals were certainly more socialist than Catholic and there were a few—very few—Protestants involved. Such things are sometimes asserted

to minimize the Catholic dimension of the Rising. Such arguments collapse, however, when we consider the remarkable Catholic piety, not only displayed by the Rising's leaders, including Pearse, de Valera, and Éamon Ceannt, but also the vast rank and file of those who followed them into battle. Let us consider what Fearghal McGarry writes in a recent (and decidedly secular) history of the Rising:

Volunteers were armed not only with guns but rosary beads, scapulars, and holy water. Confessions were heard, conditional absolution was granted, and the rosary was endlessly recited. . . . One GPO [General Post Office] Volunteer recalled "Twas not an unusual sight to see a Volunteer with his rifle grasped firmly in his hands and his Rosary beads hanging from his fingers" . . . "Every man in the place went to confession," recalled one of the Jacob's garrison. There were many incongruous scenes. In the GPO, a priest set up a confessional beside the ammunition dump: "The men queued up for confession." . . . A large white car was designated the "general Communion building" in Jacob's.

. . .

Eilis Ryan described Father Augustine's spiritual support: "Rosary after rosary was recited during the last twenty-four hours as the British military were closing in on the area. The firing was intense on Saturday. . . . Father Augustine was still on his knees; he consoled the wounded and staff alike and prayed for the success of the men in action."

. . .

One Volunteer described how he surprised Eamon Ceannt,

commandant of the Third Battalion, during a lull in the fighting: “I knocked, opened the door and saw him kneeling in the room, his rosary beads in his hand, and the tears running down his cheeks.”

. . .

“During the week some of the fellows began to cry when they heard shots, because they were a long time from confession,” one of the Marrowbone lane Volunteers recalled, “Father Ciaran and another priest came down from Mount Argus, and they gave us all Agnus Deis.”<sup>12</sup>

Now, although it had originally been intended for Easter Sunday, organizational difficulties delayed the Rising till Monday. Here it is striking how McGarry describes the scenes in churches that weekend:

For most Volunteers, their preparation for the Rising began with religious devotions at the weekend: “The scenes in almost every chapel on Saturday night were amazing—the chapels were crowded with men and boys from confession. Similar scenes were witnessed on the Sunday morning, thousands of men and boys receiving Holy Communion.”<sup>13</sup>

This latter fact assumes greater importance when we realize that, although Mass attendance was extremely high in Catholic Ireland, actually receiving His Body and Blood still remained infrequent. Generally speaking, Catholics during that era often felt unfit to receive. However, these men not only felt fit, they sought out communion with Our Lord for what they knew might well prove the final time. McGarry goes on to note:

The Catholic spirit which infused the Rising influenced even the few non-Catholics involved. . . . Cathal McDowell, one of a tiny number of Protestant rebels, converted to Catholicism during an emotional ceremony in Boland's bakery: "He laid down his Howth rifle beside him and the priest baptized him." Claiming to have experienced epiphany during the Rising, Countess Markievicz . . . also converted to Catholicism.<sup>14</sup>

And, as McGarry explains, the Rising assumed a supernatural dimension for many of those involved, witnessing as they did "miraculous occurrences, such as the rebel saved from a sniper's bullet when he kneeled for the Angelus or the picture of the Crucifixion 'left untouched although the wall all round was torn with bullet marks.'"<sup>15</sup>

And: "[Rising leader] Tom Clarke's wife, Kathleen (who experienced an epiphany after the Rising), was not alone in describing the Easter Rising in the religious language of apparition, divine mission, and sacrifice."<sup>16</sup>

Yet perhaps the greatest testimony to a miraculous dimension here lies in the staggering fact that—against every odd—it *worked*. Six years later, Ireland was free—even though virtually all the leaders of the Easter Rising were immediately executed by the British, following swift victory by their vastly superior forces. Indeed, when the Easter Rising leaders occupied those few strategic buildings in Dublin, they obviously recognized their cause was hopeless *in military terms*. Yet knowing they would be executed, they chose to sacrifice their lives for a gesture they believed would galvanize the Irish nation. Incredibly, their belief proved true. For the Rising leaders were shortly perceived as martyrs and inspired the Irish to rebel like never before. In six short years, the British lost the hold they had on the nation for over seven centuries.

And here, Lector, I am prepared to venture something very

controversial in modern Ireland. For many now criticize Pearse and the Rising's bloodshed and, speaking personally, it also troubled me for many years. Yet the Rising remains one of the most extraordinary true stories I have ever read. Indeed, at face-value, it appears completely bizarre. Before the Rising, Pearse had been an introspective school teacher and, by many accounts, possessed an overly-sensitive, even timid nature. (According to one story, he was so upset by accidentally killing a worm in his garden that he gave up work for the day.) Yet Pearse was mysteriously transformed into a man who sacrificed his life to seize a post office (of all things!). Moreover, he proclaimed himself leader of a then inconceivable Irish Republic—a Republic that shortly and shockingly came to pass, by and through his death. Personally, I think of the likewise very strange, improbable story of St. Joan of Arc and cannot help but wonder if the intensely religious Patrick Pearse experienced, too, a mystical, albeit never-recorded, inspiration.

But let us move on to another noble figure of the Rising. For a single rebel leader was not executed. At the last minute, he was extended a mysterious reprieve, which remains enigmatic to this day. As a result, Éamon de Valera became, in time, the new country's leader, spending more than twenty years as prime minister and another fourteen as president. De Valera was a devout Catholic, going to Mass daily. Indeed, in 1928, he experienced a mystical vision of Christ, which profoundly affected him till the end of his days.<sup>17</sup> He also founded the conservative Fianna Fail party, whose policies, as we noted earlier, markedly differ from Anglo-American conservatism. Few things illustrate that difference better than a speech de Valera gave on St. Patrick's Day, 1943:

The Ireland which we have dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth *only* as a basis of right living, of a people who were *satisfied with frugal comfort* and devoted their leisure to *things of the spirit*; a

land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry . . . whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be a home of a people *living the life that God desires that men should live*. [Italics mine]<sup>18</sup>

Dear Lector, I invite you to reflect a moment on the electoral prospects of conservative politicians elsewhere calling for: frugality; “things of the spirit”; forums of serene wisdom and money “only as a basis” for . . . the “life that God desires that men should live.” Do not phrases like “political suicide” spring to mind? Yet Éamon de Valera was repeatedly elected leader. Plainly, his dream was no solitary reverie. It inspired countless Irish souls for half a century.

Yes, Ireland once actively aspired to be a different society from the colonizing, capitalist colossus to their East, which was widely perceived as materialistic and decadent. In noting these things, I can do no better than turn to an Irish sociologist, Tom Inglis, who, as we shall see, is highly critical of Catholicism. Nonetheless, Inglis admirably captures Irish attitudes of the past in a few deft sentences:

From the foundation of the new state in 1922, the new leaders of Catholic Ireland attempted to shun the new world order by imagining Ireland as a latter-day island of saints and scholars who delighted in a spiritual life based in frugal comforts.

. . .

Compared to elsewhere, the rate of growth of capitalism was quelled by a deep commitment to Catholicism and the Catholic Church. The Church was adamant that Ireland should not become the same as the rest of the

West.

. . .

Politicians and civil servants *were mainly devout Catholics* and, even if they had doubts, they portrayed a Catholic vision of Irish society which gave primacy to family and community and shunned materialism, consumerism and liberal individualism.<sup>19</sup>

The newly-liberated Irish society was not only deeply Catholic, but also Celtic or more precisely Hibernian. The Gaelic language, as well as Gaelic music, arts, and sport would likewise be cherished and protected from outside corrupting influences. De Valera's Eire—the new Gaelic name for the nation—would thus be a land of fierce protectionism: religious, cultural, and economic. Now, this latter sort of economic protectionism has been widely criticized for perpetuating Ireland's long-lasting material poverty and resultant emigration. And today's brash new Irish materialism can be read as a revolt against her former frugal quest for “things of the spirit.”

We will shortly address the tragedy of modern Irish materialism. But before we do, I want to briefly return, one last time, to Hilaire Belloc's understanding of Irish history. For Belloc, it seems to me, rendered a singular witness to the unique situation of Ireland we consider here:

The efforts to destroy the Faith in Ireland have exceeded in violence, persistence, and cruelty any persecution in any part or time of the world. They have failed.

As I cannot explain why they have failed, so I shall not attempt to explain how and why the Faith in Ireland was saved when the Faith in Britain went under. I do not

believe it capable of an historic explanation.

It seems to me *a phenomenon essentially miraculous* in character, not generally attached (as are all historical phenomena) to the general and divine purpose that governs our large political events, but *directly and specially attached*.

It is of great significance; how great, men will be able to see many years hence when another definite battle is joined between the forces of the Church and her opponents.<sup>20</sup>

Well may one wonder what Belloc intended by this last remark, which moves beyond his brilliant Oxford-training as a historian into territory altogether more mysterious. For Belloc possessed a deep, searching spirit that probed the hermetic depths of world history. And in this same vein, he attributes the Irish miracle to the continued protection of Patricius:

St. Patrick inhabits the soil which he rendered sacred. We know that among the marks of holiness is the working of miracles.

Ireland is the greatest miracle any saint ever worked. It is a miracle and a nexus of miracles. Among other miracles, it is a nation raised from the dead. The preservation of the Faith by the Irish is an historical miracle comparable to nothing else in Europe.

...

Ireland is a nation risen from the dead; and to raise one man from the dead is surely miraculous enough to convince one of the power of a great spirit.

This miracle, as I am prepared to believe, is the last

and the greatest of St. Patrick's . . . St. Patrick is still alive.<sup>21</sup>

Belloc is right. A miracle is at work over the centuries—from the remote past of St. Patrick, missionary of Roman Christendom, to Patrick Pearse, Éamon de Valera, and the Irish revolution—or Counter Revolution—which shook off secular British rule and fostered an integral Catholic culture in Ireland for decades.

### **The Tragedy of Ireland**

NONETHELESS, miracles are always met with opposition. Christ was crucified on the Cross after He had worked many miracles. And, today, I witness Ireland crucified. It is my sad duty then to examine how Ireland transited from a Hibernian-Catholic society to a globalized one. Or as Tom Inglis puts it:

The more Ireland became globalized during the latter half of the twentieth century, the more it entered into the global flow of culture, the more it moved from a Catholic culture based on practices of chastity, humility, piety and self-denial to a liberal-individualist consumer culture of self-indulgence.<sup>22</sup>

A word about Inglis is in order here, as we will draw on his incisive analysis and also take issue with it. Inglis has criticized Catholic Ireland in the strongest terms.<sup>23</sup> The man would seem to be a lapsed Catholic with little faith and therefore scant appreciation for the sacramental dynamics of his own culture. He conforms to contemporary academic norms in explaining cultural shifts in materialistic categories. Nevertheless, Inglis's dissection of global capitalism is trenchant. And the fact he is not a Catholic apologist (like myself) may well lend his observations a weight they might not

otherwise possess.

Today, many in Ireland, as elsewhere, celebrate a “multicultural” or “pluralistic” society. Yet Inglis identifies how modern capitalism has yielded a monotone, conformist “habitus” throughout the West, which has now, at last, arrived in Ireland:

In effect, there is a global habitus which has begun to grow on the pond of Irish cultural life. This habitus is . . . an almost automatic, predisposed way of literally being in the world into which we have been socialised and which becomes taken for granted, which becomes second nature to us and which is reproduced in everyday life. There is a similar way of working and living, presenting oneself operating within public and organizational spaces communicating, travelling, working, eating and so forth. This global habitus is structured by a discourse which is developed and promoted by corporations through advertising and marketing. At the center of this habitus is a belief in liberal-individualism.

. . .

There is no society, just rational individual actors who realize themselves as individuals through market choice. The development of a global habitus is closely allied to the spread and development of the world capitalist system and the spiral of ever-increasing production in consumption getting and spending. Consumerism is the cocaine of the people.<sup>24</sup>

Thus was de Valera’s dream of a Hibernian Catholic Ireland, protected against cultural and capitalist contamination, relegated to the tomb. From the Sixties onward, the Irish Republic progressively

opened herself to global forces. In 1973, she joined what later became the European Union, subjecting herself to the arrayed forces rapidly integrating Europe. When the 1980s arrived, Ireland joined the spree of deregulation that characterized governments across the globe—from those of Thatcher and Reagan to Deng Xiaoping. Moreover, she started actively courting transnational corporations with some of the lowest corporate taxes in Europe. This new strategy succeeded. The multinationals arrived in force! Many of these were of American origin, drawn by the low taxes and the fact Irish workers spoke English. All this is a far, far cry from de Valera's cultural and economic protectionism. No doubt he, alongside his fellow (counter) revolutionaries, are turning in their graves.

This is not the place for detailed examination of Irish economic policy. Suffice it to say, the economy was stimulated by both the European Union and newly-established transnational corporations. The result was hailed as the “Celtic Tiger”—evoking the “Asian Tiger” economies that experienced similar rapid growth. For *economically speaking*, the results were nothing short of spectacular. The Republic of Ireland went from being very poor to very rich—very fast. The everyday life of Irish people was revolutionized. Credit became widely available as never before, creating a consumerist society like the rest of the West. A property boom followed. In rural Ireland, all sorts of fairly humble people held land—farms, smallholdings, and such—that, previously, was never worth much. Indeed, this boom was owed significantly to de Valera—his government had aimed to redistribute land as far as possible. Now, however, land prices skyrocketed as property was snapped up for new houses, estates, offices, enterprises, and shopping centers. Once poor people became rich overnight. Of course, all this newfound affluence has been severely dented in recent years—an overheated Irish economy fell badly victim to the global economic downturn of 2008. However, Ireland is no longer the poor nation she once was.

Culturally, Ireland's Hibernian Catholic society was devastated. Not only did new cultural artifacts pour in from every side, but the newly rich Irish could afford them. Whereas humble Irish homes were once dominated by pictures of the Sacred Heart and statues of Our Lady, flashy new secular icons now appeared in their stead. And where a child's room would have once had a crucifix or even a holy water stoup, it now featured Michael Jackson or Homer Simpson.

Clearly, Ireland being Anglophone meant she was more vulnerable to Anglo-American culture. Elsewhere in Catholic Europe, it remains somewhat different. Thus, living in Spain and France it was obvious to me how much less those countries were affected by my own native culture. For example, the shops there were nearly all closed on the Sabbath, whereas Ireland, when I first arrived in 2004, had already followed the consumerist Sunday pattern of America and England. And in Spain or even ultra-secular France, there still persists marked traditional attitudes toward the family and other long-established values. However, in Ireland today, one meets many Irish proud of their new liberal, secular attitudes—without the least idea how much they owe them to the Anglo-American cultural empire! One can only wonder what would have happened if de Valera had truly succeeded in re-establishing Gaelic. Certainly, there would be less parroting of England and America.

Obviously, this has much to do with the media. Unsurprisingly, Ireland is now awash in American and English television like never before. However, the homegrown media in Ireland is no longer respectful to the Church as it was in times past. Rather, it has grown virulently hostile—so much so, that, as I write these words, Irish television offices are regularly picketed by Catholics outraged by the bias against the Church. One now sees in Ireland the selfsame unholy coupling as elsewhere in the West. The media depends on advertising revenue provided by global capitalists, whilst global capitalists depend on media for creating and sustaining what Inglis calls the “liberal-

individualist consumer culture.” Thus, today, Irish media peddles vicious anti-Catholic mythology, according to which the new globalized Ireland has created a freedom and openness unknown in the “narrow, prudish, insular and sectarian” Ireland of yesteryear.

Yet, as even Tom Inglis points out, the “new global habitus” in Ireland is nowhere near as free and open as it claims. Unsettling questions present themselves—even if they cannot be posed without inviting ridicule. What if it is not true Ireland exchanged clerical domination for multicultural freedom? What if contemporary Irish attitudes result from carefully constructed propaganda far more than is ever admitted? What if Ireland exchanged a centuries-old rich Catholic culture for manipulative corporate domination?

Certainly, one can understand why this new global habitus, as it exists now in Ireland and throughout the West, *appears* like unparalleled freedom (at least for those rich enough to afford it). Rich Westerners have all manner of possibilities in our bright, new globalized world. With a couple of mouse clicks, one man downloads English pop songs, whilst another partakes of indigenous rhythms from Peru. One man pursues Chinese martial arts, another New Age shamanism, whilst others are even *trans-global*, studying photographs of Mars.

Yes, vastly expanded consumer choice appears to exist. Yet all this strikes me like the “New Age cafeteria,” which duped me for twenty years. For, like so many others, I genuinely believed I had an eclectic smorgasbord of spiritual possibilities, rather than religious “limitations.” Yet just as that New Age smorgasbord carries a hidden, conformist code, the same is true for the new global habitus in Ireland (and elsewhere). For example, the items on the menu of the global-capitalist cafeteria are positively *saturated* with Enlightenment ideology. Let us return to Inglis talking of this in terms of liberal-individualism:

At the center of [the new Irish global] habitus is a belief in liberal-individualism and the freedom to choose. Happiness is an individual right and an individual pursuit. Morality is an individual responsibility. There is no society, just rational individual actors who realize themselves as individuals through market choice.<sup>25</sup>

Inglis speaks, strangely, of self-realization. Can one *truly* realize oneself through market choice? It is peculiar that Inglis continually emphasizes individual self-realization as a defining feature to the new global habitus, whilst, at the same time, writing sentences so paradoxical his argument all but breaks down: “The culture of the world capitalist system is based on using mostly mass-produced, commodified consumer symbols to create personal identities and an individual sense of difference.”<sup>26</sup> This is an extremely odd sentence! Is Inglis being ironic? Nothing in his book suggests that he is. For he repeatedly speaks of a:

commitment to self-realization through consumer choice. The Irish way of being in the world is now structured more by market and media forces which emphasize the importance of different self-realization and continued self-transformation and which rarely emphasize the importance of self-denial and self-surrender.<sup>27</sup>

What can I say? The values of self-denial were Catholic, yet the market forces that now “structure” Ireland all-too-often stem from the Anglo-American arena (even if Inglis prefers to speak of a globalized capitalist world). At any rate, Inglis elaborates:

We have been sucked into the center of a world capitalist system in which we expect things to get bigger, better and faster, where life becomes increasingly rationalized,

monitored and evaluated. . . . This is what drives business, global competition and globalization. What makes people *the same around the world* is that when it comes to earning a living they are increasingly playing *the same game on the same pitch*. The same terminology is being used all over the world to find the cheapest, fastest, most reliable, predictable, rational way of producing goods and services. No matter how much I try to detach myself from this insidious system I fail. Life becomes an endless task of perfection, of increasing production and efficiency. It invades not just one's work and private life, but one's very sense of self . . . The world capitalist system brings with it a *common way* of being.

. . .

In many respects the everyday lives of Irish people revolve around the habitus and practices that are endemic in the pattern of production and consumption that characterize the world capitalist system. They work to consume. They have become increasingly rational, predictable, punctual, reliable and efficient. The social bonds have become severely strained. [*Italics mine*]<sup>28</sup>

Inglis's last point regarding social deterioration demands further attention. However, for the moment, let us stick to the new conformist habitus in Ireland. This habitus is regularly lauded by its media propagandists as being not only free, but also egalitarian. This is to say, no longer imposed from above by a Catholic hierarchy. For our part, we can only say that an old visible hierarchy has been replaced by a new, largely invisible hierarchy. Even Inglis, as highly critical of the Church as he is, readily admits a new form of dominance has replaced the old:

The history of Ireland during the last half of the twentieth century can be seen as the emergence and *dominance of a new elite* of urban, cosmopolitan cultural entrepreneurs who facilitated the transfer from an isolated, insular island people, into a global culture and society. [Italics mine]<sup>29</sup>

We readily agree with Inglis that Ireland has simply *exchanged one form of hierarchy for another*. However, the way Inglis characterizes the two different hierarchies leaves plenty to be desired. For example, he evidently regards the new hierarchy as one of “global culture,” whilst the older one fostered isolation and insularity! Like many Irish today, he sees the former Catholic hierarchy as closed and the new hierarchy as open. This is debatable indeed.

For the truth of the matter is that *both* hierarchies are closed *and* open—at one and the same time. Each is closed and each is open to different agendas. The old hierarchy was plainly closed to Secular Materialism, particularly as it was imported from the Anglo-American world. The new hierarchy in Ireland is wide-open to it. By contrast, the old hierarchy was open to grace—the transcendent—whereas the new hierarchy is closed to anything beyond its materialistic purview. The new materialistic hierarchy in Ireland does not easily appreciate these issues, however. It is therefore hardly surprising media elites criticize the old Catholic culture as not only insular, but also anti-intellectual. Yet as Mary Kenny writes:

I have frequently . . . heard it alleged by well-informed people, that the culture of Catholic Ireland was essentially “insular” and “anti-intellectual.” Yet the evidence is quite to the contrary. Catholic Ireland was anything but “insular.” It was, indeed, persistently outward-looking, partly in consequence of its great involvement with and concern for the universal Church.<sup>30</sup>

To substantiate her claim, Kenny intensively studied Irish journalism from the past, pouring over archived periodicals from the 1890s onwards. What she found reveals an Ireland in no way as closed or insular as people like Inglis imagine:

An extraordinary debate in 1897 [in the parliament in France was] reported in *close detail*, when the anti-clerical deputies proposed the demolition of the Sacré Coeur basilica in Montmartre. . . . *The Irish Catholic's* parliamentary report must be one of the best archives in the English-speaking world for reporting such debates. It also had detailed and knowledgeable front-page reports from London, Rome and Madrid. . . . Yet the *Irish Catholic* was not a specialist, foreign-affairs publication, but a middle-market Catholic paper aimed at ordinary Catholics who liked a weekly newspaper with a variety of items. Neither was the more populist—some would even say “simple”—devotional monthly, the *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in the least degree insular. It, too, was concerned to defend the universal Church and to look outward toward missionary endeavors.

. . .

It really is a little naïve to claim . . . that the Irish are, for the first time, becoming truly international through the benefices of the European Community. There is much ground for claiming that Irish Catholics were in some respects *more international in the 1890s*, through the benefices of the Latin Church.

The charge that Catholic Ireland was “anti-intellectual” also seems to me to be at least in some senses mistaken. It is true that Irish Catholicism did not

encourage too much independent thought—there was a certain horror of “private judgements”—and it is true that Catholic Ireland was zealously keen on censorship, *a policy wholly supported by the democratic will*, and overwhelmingly market-led. Yet it was not anti-intellectual in the sense of being philistine. . . . There was a genuine, deep-seated love for learning and scholarship. . . . A sermon published in the *Irish Catholic* in 1940 mentions Marx, Rousseau, Croce, Gentile, Voltaire, Darwin, Huxley and Haeckel and uses the word “Weltanschauung” (world-view) quite casually. It also refers to Oscar Wilde as a beautiful example of redemption through suffering.

. . .

The Catholic Church in Ireland was traditionally prudish, repressive and authoritarian, to be sure. It could also be very fierce. But it was not, in my judgement, anti-intellectual, and it was certainly not insular. [Italics mine]<sup>31</sup>

Here is to say, again, Catholic Ireland was not so much closed, as it was open to a different world vision than Secular Materialism. The new materialistic hierarchy in Ireland is not open to that world vision. Portraying Catholic Ireland as insular admirably suits its agenda. And whilst the Catholic vision was replete with the transcendent and miraculous, Inglis and his ilk remain closed to such. When Inglis analyzes religion, his analysis is held in bondage to material factors alone. But this materialistic bondage obviously serves the needs of a new materialistic elite of academics, journalists, media presenters, corporate messengers, and all the rest.

## A Sacramental Perspective

WHILST all this easily satisfies the modern materialistic mind, Catholics of Faith realize that the profound changes in Irish culture cannot be explained away by mere economic and social factors. With this in mind, I now invoke very different factors to explain Ireland's transformation—factors that people like Inglis, I think, dare not imagine. For we have seen how profoundly, even as late as 1973, Irish Catholics once participated in the Catholic Mystery. But whereas the immense majority of the Irish were once steeped in the Sacraments and sacramentals, they are now immersed in the Protestant-turned-secular values of the Anglo-American juggernaut. Whilst a great portion of the population once received the cleansing Sacrament of Absolution regularly, relatively few do the same today. And whereas Irish homes once had holy water fonts at their door, fewer and fewer now believe consecrated water has any effect.

But what *if* it did have an effect—even a small one? What would those small effects *add up to* in a nation with hundreds of thousands of homes *protected* by holy water—as well as benediction from the Sacred Heart of Jesus? O what of the massed cumulative effect of home upon home praying the Holy Rosary each evening—instead of watching television? Once I knew an elderly Irish lady who never tired of repeating: “The Rosary saved the faith in Ireland, the Rosary saved the faith in Ireland.” For she recalled those heinous penal times in Ireland, when the Mass was restricted and the only thing her ancestors had left was the Most Holy Rosary.

Dare we ask questions like these, Lector? For what if the gradual disappearing of these once-cherished aspects of Irish life counted *far more* than even I am suggesting? What if the so-called “spirit of Vatican II” *profoundly* diluted the Catholic faith? What if it deprived it of *life-force*?

Yes, I have read many thousands of words by modern academics

attempting to explain the dramatic loss of Irish faith. But never in all their extended analysis have I read anything remotely like what I have just suggested. Meanwhile, only the much-scorned traditionalists dare to suggest the loss of the sacred liturgy in Latin could have had lasting, damaging consequences.

Let us indulge an exercise of imagination. What would have happened if the sacred mystical power of both the Sacraments *and* the sacramentals had been sustained in the aftermath of the Sixties? What if the Irish Church had *battled* to preserve things like confession or devotion to His Sacred Heart? Or what if the Priests and prelates refused zany masses and urged the faithful to keep to time-honored traditions instead? What if, what if. . . ? My questions—whilst grave and pressing—are in danger of sounding merely rhetorical. And so I simply supply my own sad answer. The de-Catholicization of Ireland is grievously linked to the de-Catholicizing “spirit of Vatican II.” It cannot be separated from the Protestantization of the Church. The new spirit no longer supplied mystagogia, as the pre-Vatican II tradition once did.

### **Sexual Abuse by the Clergy**

SIMPLY to invoke these things is to risk becoming a laughing stock. But there is a more serious danger. I risk sounding callous to the immense suffering of a small section of young people at the hands of a few hundred Irish Priests. In writing these things, I may be castigated. For the popular idea in the Irish mind—at present—is certainly not that Irish Catholicism has been ruined by post-Vatican II de-sacralization! Nor is it that Catholicism is being demolished by Anglo-American driven Globalization. Rather, it is widely supposed that Irish Catholicism destroyed itself by its own criminal behavior. What many Irish will tell you, today, is that revolting sexual abuse by Priests, followed by appalling attempts by Bishops to conceal it, is

what shattered the Irish Church.

Undoubtedly, a pathological evil has operated in the Irish Church in recent decades. No one can or should deny that innocent young people have been violated in a way that scars them for life. Nor can anyone ignore the instances of sick clericalism, which cared more about protecting the Church's reputation than safeguarding the lives of the innocent.

We evoked this depravity earlier and need to say more. Indeed, some readers may feel I have paid too little attention to the evil of sexual abuse within the Church. They may be right. This book mainly emerged during the four and a half year period I spent in Spain and France. In those countries, abuse hardly registered in many Catholics' minds—nor was it uppermost in my own. For, during that time, I regarded it—rightly or wrongly—as a disease chiefly afflicting Ireland, America, and a cluster of other cultures. Certainly, I recall surprise when I raised the subject in southern Europe. The Spanish and French seemed hardly aware of the abuse crisis, whose epicenter has undeniably been the Anglosphere (at least as these words are written in 2014).

Am I suggesting abuse of minors has not happened in those countries? Of course I am not. There will be terrible abuses wherever any large collectives of people—such as the Church—are involved. In a fallen world, a certain proportion of people will always be sick, whoever they are: Priests, doctors, medical staff, care and prison workers, etc. And wherever sick souls have access to the young, the young will become their prey. Inevitably, there must exist abuses by French and Spanish Priests, as well, even if they do not appear to be on the same scale as in Ireland or America.

Yes, what has been jolting about the situation in Ireland, America, and certain other countries is that the *scale* of clerical sexual abuse was shockingly high. Whilst precise calculations of how many Priests abused minors are impossible to achieve, one researcher in

Ireland, David Quinn, has estimated that the Irish Priests accused might be four percent of the total. This would put Ireland in line with the upper reaches of the estimate given in a Vatican statement to the United Nations about worldwide abuse: "We now know that in the last 50 years somewhere between 1.5 percent and 5 percent of the Catholic clergy has been involved in sexual abuse cases."<sup>32</sup>

Given these figures only reflect allegation and accusation, it is impossible to ascertain the numbers actually culpable. Speaking personally, however, I am prepared to believe as much as four percent of Irish Priests might be guilty. I cannot pretend to be an authority here. When one is not an authority oneself, one must turn to reputable people who are. One such person, it seems to me, is Thomas Plante, a professor of psychiatry and psychology who has edited significant studies of the abuse crisis in the United States. Although Plante writes of America, what he says would appear to pertain to Ireland also:

The available research (which is quite good now) suggests that approximately 4 percent of priests during the past half century (and mostly in the 1960s and 1970s) have had a sexual experience with a minor (i.e., anyone under the age of 18). There are approximately 60,000 active and inactive priests and brothers in the United States and thus we estimate that between 1,000 and 3,000 priests have sexually engaged with minors. That's a lot. In fact, that is 3,000 people too many. Any sexual abuse of minors whether perpetrated by priests, other clergy, parents, school teachers, boy-scout leaders or anyone else in whom we entrust our children is horrific. However, although good data is hard to acquire, it appears that this 4 percent figure is consistent with male clergy from other religious traditions and is significantly lower than the general adult male population which may double these numbers.

Therefore, the odds that any random Catholic priest would sexually abuse a minor are not likely to be significantly higher than other males in or out of the clergy. Of course we expect better behavior from priests than from the average man on the street. While even one priest who abuses children is a major problem, we need to keep this issue in perspective and remember that the vast majority of priests do not abuse children.

. . .

80 percent of all priests who in fact abuse minors have sexually engaged with adolescent boys not prepubescent children. Thus, the teenager is more at risk than the young altar boy or girls of any age. Technically, the vast majority of priest sex offenders are not pedophiles at all but are ephebophiles. This may seem like an irrelevant semantic difference but the implications for prevention and treatment are enormous.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, the Irish situation reflects America in the last instance. For here, as there, clerical abuse principally involved male adolescents. Plante is right, though, that the implications for addressing this are important. For example, many Irish think ending priestly celibacy would help. However, given that the problem has been overwhelmingly homosexual, permitting Priests to marry clearly has little relevance. This is significant, inasmuch as many blame the entire edifice of Catholic teaching for the horror of abuse in Ireland. The truth is different. What primarily concerns us is a small portion of active homosexual men who found their way into the Irish clergy and attacked adolescent boys.<sup>34</sup> This is not to diminish the monstrosity of what happened, nor that it was then monstrously covered-up. The fact remains that, over decades, a few hundred Irish Priests abused

thousands of minors and the abuse was hidden amidst vain hopes that pedophilia or more often, ephebophilia, was curable and “it wouldn’t happen again.”

And so, for many people, what I say of Catholic Ireland will seem farcical at best, downright disgusting at worst. How can I celebrate a culture where childhood and adolescence were ruined by perverse men whose crimes were overlooked and who then continued ruining lives? What do I say? For certainly I cherish the great beauties of Irish Catholic Christianity, which has transformed this isle since St. Patrick’s time. This is not the same as saying, however, that every aspect of the Irish Church must be uncritically extolled.

Moreover, there remain further grim corners of Irish Catholic history we scarcely mention. Ireland, like every culture of course, has its dark underside. In Ireland in the past, in addition to sexual abuse, there also existed systematic corporal punishment in centers for juvenile detention and abandoned or outcast youth. Unlike the borstals and reform schools in more secular countries, however, the Irish institutions were run by the Church—and very often by nuns, brothers, and lay Catholics, who came from less educated and poorer, more deprived backgrounds than the Priests. Horrific things sometimes happened to young people in these centers, which, in some cases at least, permitted people of a sadistic bent to operate unchecked. In other cases, there was not sadism, but profound neglect and insensitivity, which, again, reflected the fact that many nuns, monks etc., stemmed from lower socio-economic backgrounds and clearly lacked the psychological sophistication we demand of those in such positions today.

Of course, Catholicism in Ireland, like Catholicism everywhere, casts further dark shadows. For example, hatred and violence between Protestants and Catholics is a well-known historical phenomenon in Ireland, as indeed elsewhere. Yes, Catholics have inflicted every manner of horror on their fellow human beings. We stand in a fallen

world of filth and evil. To be a Christian is to recognize this—to see how deeply it penetrates every human soul and therefore every human structure, including the human side of the Church. As a Catholic, I have a duty to remember our collective sin, whether it be the abuse of the young or the atrocities of the crusades, the inquisition, the wars of religion, and much else besides. However, in terms of the scandal of abuse, Benedict XVI has expressed all this far better than I can myself

That the power of evil penetrates to such a point in the interior world of the faith is, for us, a source of suffering.

On the one hand we must accept that suffering, and on the other, at the same time, we must do everything possible so that such cases aren't repeated.

It's also not a motive for comfort to know that, according to sociological research, the percentage of priests guilty of these crimes is no higher than in other comparable professional categories.

In any event, one must not stubbornly present this deviance as if it were a nastiness specific to Catholicism.<sup>35</sup>

Yes, in addressing sexual abuse, numerous factors must be held in balance. The terrible Irish abuse notwithstanding, it is my own endeavor to *balancing* that impels me to honor Irish Catholic culture.

What am I to say? I am an American, writing from Ireland. I think to my own life growing up in America. I listen to the Irish in Ireland. I read book after book about the Irish experience, and I compare. I compare my own childhood to what these Irish had. I see so many of them had a life materially deprived compared to mine. My own home, growing up in Oregon, was hardly luxurious by American standards. But neither was it cold (even if my Oregon winters were generally colder than Ireland's). And I certainly enjoyed a more varied diet than the monotonous fare many people in Ireland endured. My

early life in America was downright cushy compared to the Irish Catholic experience of the past.

Nonetheless, when I contrast my memories of 1960s and 70s “rich” America to what I hear and read of “poor” Ireland, I cannot help but feel I was impoverished by comparison. For the Irish of my generation were reared in a warm, sacramental and communitarian culture, the likes of which I could never have imagined. When I talk to these Irish about their youth, I get the impression they have often little idea as to how fortunate they were. Rarely do they see the exceptional qualities of Irish culture, which would shock my fellow Americans.

Yet every culture—being fallen—has its own pathology. Whilst I was growing up in WASP Oregon, there were Catholic youth, across the Atlantic, being damaged for life by a small, sick section of the priesthood. At the same time, however, sexual abuse occurred in other quarters of my own American life. In fact, this was viscerally impressed on me in my youth. For as a young man in Oregon, I once did jury duty, where I was compelled to hear instances of sickening sexual abuse in a (secular) juvenile detention center, as well as in the home. This terrible thing exists everywhere—from secular America to Catholic Ireland. But in secular America, one never blames secularism for brutalities in its juvenile detention system. Yet today, in Ireland, one blames the Church, often exclusively.

What am I to say? I cannot join those hordes—understandably outraged, yet nonetheless uncritical—who believe the entire Irish Catholic experience has been forever discredited by the actions of a small, yet terrible, percentage of sick Priests. For I know firsthand the sheer miracle of Irish Catholicism. My duty lies in neither forgetting the real agony suffered by real victims, nor forgetting the real benediction that rained down on real people from the Holy Sacraments. Whilst I am appalled by perhaps as much as four percent of Irish clergy who should never have been Priests, I cannot forget the unfathomable graces the other ninety-six percent rendered this country. My duty—in

other words—is an open heart. And the open heart feels both immeasurably grateful for benediction and appalled by evil.

### **On Being Appalled**

*To appall.* My dictionary tells me it means “to greatly dismay or horrify.” The true Christian will always be horrified by the (countless) abuses and atrocities of Catholicism. Yet what is so disturbing about the new liberal-consumerist Ireland is how little it seems horrified by the (likewise countless) abuses and atrocities of secular-capitalist society—which include, as we have seen, those belonging to a long line of revolutions and wars, as well as present-day abortion, child labor in sweatshops, increased crime, violence, suicide, etc.

Secular Materialism overflows with horrors that pass unmentioned by a media intent on savaging Catholic culture. Admittedly, these ills are not always easy to identify. Part of the problem lies in what we called earlier “Enlightenment Despair.” Increasingly, people despair of trusting things that cannot be empirically proven. Thus, Tom Inglis ably evokes the soul-crushing conformism of the new Irish “multicultural” society, yet it remains impossible to demonstrate with statistics.

Yet certain illnesses can be observed—even from something as superficial as “hard data.” Writing of Ireland since 1971, Desmond Fennell analyzes the fourfold rise in suicides, amidst a sixfold increase of murders.<sup>36</sup> Many also chart the rise of mental illness in Ireland (as indeed throughout the capitalist-consumerist West). However, mental illness is, again, something altogether fuzzier than suicide or murder. In cases of suicide and murder, one is either dead or alive; it does not get more black and white than this.

What can I say, Lector? Plainly, I am horrified by what has happened to Ireland. I am hardly alone. Usually, it is the older folk I talk to, praying and pious, who grieve most. They are also visibly

disturbed by the crime in modern Ireland, because they are not inured to it like the younger generations, for whom it is now “just normal,” just like everywhere else. Still, even amongst the young, exceptions exist. Thus, my heart was torn open by this communication from a young Irish man:

Unfortunately I wouldn't be too optimistic about the faith's prospects in Ireland. And I don't think it's just my gloomy temperament. There is a real hostility to Catholicism here among my parent's generation. It is very rare now to see a priest wear his collar in public. Among my own generation of 20-somethings there is contempt or indifference. Religious education programmes are fatuous. I certainly didn't take it seriously then. Virtually no one of my generation has been catechized in any meaningful way. My friends' ideas about Christianity are often ideas picked up from American TV which actually refer to Protestantism. The notion that Catholicism has a rich intellectual tradition is scoffed at. Our Constitution, with its references to the Holy Trinity and natural law, is regarded in all respectable circles as an embarrassment at best.

[In] the Dublin/rural division . . . there's still a very remarkable difference and it's lovely to see. But Dublin increasingly dominates the country, both demographically and culturally. And even along the West coast of Ireland, which I regard as the last bastion of civilization, the new generation is being mentally and spiritually shaped by Anglo-American media culture.

And I recall what happened to Catholic France. And I have no need of statistics to tell me why Irish people kill themselves or each

other far more frequently than once they did. I see that Irish Catholicism has been beaten down—not entirely unlike the way it happened in France long ago. Admittedly, the tactics are less savage than in France. Nonetheless, the Church has been subjugated to an often-hysterical climate of vicious attacks from media, intellectual and political elites, who have now absorbed the originally Protestant prejudice of the Anglo-American world. Moreover, the post-Vatican II Church has been deprived of the life-force she experienced. Whilst it remains true that a sexual pathology took its awful toll on a small, but terrible, number of innocent young lives, even that toll is possibly linked to the Council's aftermath. (The evidence suggests the greatest abuse was concentrated in the immediate *post-Vatican II* years. Arguably, the relaxation of Catholic discipline after the Council has a great deal to answer for.)

After generations of resistance, Ireland has joined the capitalistic culture of the Anglo-American realm. For my part, the reason is clear. Eire—the Ireland that Éamon de Valera dreamed of—has been stripped of that very thing that once sustained her former exceptionalism. For the Sacramental forces, which previously lifted her high above the morass of sclerotic materialism, have become, if not yet extinguished, at least terribly compromised, in comparison to what they once were.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 33–34.

<sup>2</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *The Contrast* (London: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1923), 33.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*.

<sup>4</sup> John Waters, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Ireland* (London: Duckworth, 1997), 69–70.

<sup>5</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1992), 169.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story*

of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1996), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *First and Last* (London: Methuen, 1911), 94.

<sup>8</sup> Morris, *American Catholic*.

<sup>9</sup> Belloc, *First and Last*, 94–95.

<sup>10</sup> Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever*, ix.

<sup>11</sup> Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland, Easter 1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157, 159.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 160–61.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>17</sup> Sean P. Farragher, *Dev and His Alma Mater: Éamon De Valera's Lifelong Association with Blackrock College, 1898–1975* (Dublin: Paraclete Press, 1984), 155.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev: A Reassessment of the Life and Legacy of Eamon De Valera* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2007), 363.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 12, 14, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Belloc, *Europe and the Faith*, 181–82.

<sup>21</sup> Belloc, *First and Last*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Inglis, *Global Ireland*, 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> Again see: Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*.

<sup>24</sup> Inglis, *Global Ireland*, 27–28.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, 83.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, xiv–xvi.

<sup>32</sup> “Vatican Envoy to UN Defends Church’s Response to Sex Abuse,” [sic] accessed May 31, 2016, [http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2009/09\\_10/2009\\_09\\_30\\_Delaney\\_VaticanEnvoy](http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2009/09_10/2009_09_30_Delaney_VaticanEnvoy)

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Plante, “A Perspective on Clergy Sexual Abuse,” accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/plante.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Although this is the primary matter, it must be said that, whilst the figures in terms of ephebophiles are shockingly high, the sexual abuse of young girls and boys has been nothing like as high, and there appears much less danger compared to other situations where the young were exposed. The term “sexual abuse” also covers many different kinds of behavior. There is a difference between an unrepentant serial rapist and a tortured, self-recriminating priest who once inappropriately touched a teen outside his clothing. Both are vile—yet they are not the same. None of this is to make excuses, but only a plea for a more subtle, nuanced understanding of a complex situation that is all too often portrayed in simplistic, black and white notions like “Catholic celibacy fosters child abuse.”

<sup>35</sup> “Ex-Pope Benedict denies abuse cover-up,” accessed 29, May 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24222951>.

<sup>36</sup> Desmond Fennell, “Why the Steep Rise in Suicides,” *Third Stroke Did It* (Ireland: Publibook, 2014), 140–45.

## Christendom or Secular Materialism?

*One of us steadily, systematically works to inculcate, re-educate, reinforce, invade, and manipulate by every possible means.*

*One of us happily succumbs to all this—as long as he is not “imposed” upon.*

**I**N THESE LAST chapters on France and Ireland, we have witnessed a mighty battle between two sides, with losers and winners. Christendom would seem to be the loser, whilst a materialistic society—whose only acceptable spiritual option is a New Age paganism that scarcely challenges its liberal, capitalist agendas—has triumphed.

Now, in these pages, we have regularly used the compound *Secular Materialism* to describe the triumphal victors. It is clear, I hope, how firmly secularism is tied to materialism—both philosophical and commercial. For, at least in practice, the more the West secularized, the more it developed materialistic values. Theoretically, however, one might still ask whether this is necessarily true: “Yes, I see that, historically, secularism has fostered materialism. But does it have to be that way? Could there be a non-materialistic secularism?” This question is understandable, inasmuch as all sorts of people revere secularism, who are not materialists. Many liberal folk—such as I once was—believe there is no incompatibility between secularism and at least some sort of spiritual ideal.

I believe this must be challenged. For secularism rests on rationalism—rule by reason alone—and the lowest common

denominators we can agree on. Effectively it denies anything that transcends these, including faith. It asks *nothing more* of us as a society. Anything transcendent is restricted to the individual—stripped from the public domain. Inevitably, faith becomes downgraded—if not stigmatized or outright suppressed. A materialistic civilization becomes inevitable in this scenario. Secularism does not build cathedrals, but it all-too-easily erects monuments to materialism.

Meanwhile, secularism claims to be neutral, free, and open—imposing nothing. Clearly, however, it actively fosters imposition by every manner of means. What of that great billboard with provocative feminine anatomy looming over our heads? Only secular philosophy supports this immodesty (whilst ensuring the Cross looms over us as little as possible). What of opening of shops on Sundays? Only secular philosophy denies the Sabbath and decrees every day equal in terms of selling stuff. What of an educational system that treats history as purely materialistic—whilst miracles are only “alleged?” Only secular philosophy restricts our horizons to rationalistic empiricism. What of our banking system that determines the cultural environment by deciding who receives credit? For whether it is Hollywood movies, music labels, advertising, or skyscraper construction companies, the power of the banks to decide our cultural environment is undeniable. Once again, secular philosophy underpins the freedom of the markets—whilst those markets go on crushing freedom. The list goes on.

Yet small public displays of religion—even minute references (e.g., “Christmas tree”)—are increasingly criticized as imposing on people. If this is true, much else ought to be regarded likewise! But whilst people become agitated by a Christian wearing a small crucifix to the office, they scarcely object to the vast, all-surrounding invasive and manipulative capitalist structures that secularism implicitly supports, if not actively encourages. Implicitly, if not always explicitly, secularism and materialism are entirely inter-related. Here is why we speak of Secular Materialism.

Yet most of us succumb to the myth secularism is neutral and tolerant. We capitulate to the forces reducing culture to materialism. We may even take on a growing cynicism, which dismisses anything wholesome or holy. None of this means freedom. Nor is any of it so pluralistic or multicultural as our secular elites would have us believe. For the Irish sociologist Tom Inglis is right about the new *habitus*: a chilling, cynical sameness pervades our increasingly automatic, impersonal life.

The West, it would seem, has made a profound choice between Christendom and the system of liberal capitalism. Yet secular ideologues would have us believe no other credible option ever existed: Westerners merely shrugged off some outmoded anachronisms. Secularism arose ineluctably. It was inevitable humanity would “progress.” I pray the last two chapters on the original French revolutionaries and modern Irish secular elites may give people pause to consider these claims.

For if Catholics believe these claims, they have been hoodwinked. They have forgotten the days when the Church mightily resisted this “inevitable progress.” They have forgotten those faithful souls who refused to believe Christendom was inevitably “against the times,” but who realized—with great prescience!—that secularism was inevitably leading to the dungeon of materialism.

Now, we said the West has chosen a civilization of soulless materialism over that of Christendom. But is it fair to say this? For it is not as if people were ever offered a free, honest choice between the two options! No, nothing so noble as this ever happened. We have seen how secularism was brutally imposed in France—and France is hardly an isolated case. Clearly, what occurred in Orthodox Russia, which then spread through Catholic cultures in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, amongst others, resembles French de-Christianization. Cuba, Mexico, and other Latin American countries witnessed similarly violent revolutions aimed at de-Christianization.

Here are but some of the most brutal, egregious attempts at revolutionary de-Christianization. Elsewhere, Secular Materialism has been imposed by more subtle methods—which may be even more effective, precisely because they operate less obviously and more insidiously. Thus, we considered Ireland where the processes of de-Christianization were less obviously repressive and much more subtle. Still it is clear to many how secular elites, largely inspired by the Anglosphere, finally gained the upper hand in Ireland.

### **The New Hierarchy**

WHETHER in Ireland or elsewhere, secularism cannot be understood without appreciating the large measure by which it has been imposed—whether violently or by “softer,” stealthier means. This, of course, is to say, imposed from above—and therefore from the new bourgeois establishment that emerged in the period after the French Revolution. These secular elites promised freedom, replacing traditional and religious authority with a new egalitarian order. But it is clear to many that all that has happened is that a New Hierarchy has replaced the old—and this New Hierarchy scarcely promotes freedom. As Valentin Tomberg has written:

The impulse of freedom—of hope in emancipated man—has built up and demolished a great deal. It has created a materialistic civilization without parallel, but at the same time it has destroyed the hierarchical order—the order of spiritual obedience. A series of religious, political and social revolutions has ensued. But the hierarchical order is eternal and obedience is indispensable. Now, new hierarchical orders are beginning to be established, replacing obedience by tyranny and dictatorship. For he who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind (cf Hosea ix,

7)—and we and our contemporaries are now reaping the whirlwind.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the New Hierarchy is a plutocracy. A recent Oxfam study of global trends found that, by 2016, one percent of the world's population will shortly own more wealth than the other ninety nine percent combined. Not only does the injustice here cry out to heaven, but the sheer POWER this concentrated wealth leverages is obvious. By virtue of this amassed, concentrated power, an elite hierarchy shapes our toxic political and cultural landscape today. Its advertising incessantly stimulates the materialistic consumer desire that drives the world to impending catastrophe. Moreover, it manages the immense media enterprises, which only reinforce the secular ethos behind unbridled capitalism.

It is hardly surprising these selfsame media enterprises repeatedly criticize the Church. The Church represents the old, displaced hierarchy, which challenges the new hierarchy. For the Church is not plutocratic. She opposes not only unrestrained capitalism and consumerism, just as she opposes the hedonism of modern materialism.

This New Hierarchy is moreover largely invisible. In the old pre-revolutionary structures, the hierarchy could be seen. Likewise, in the Catholic Church today, the hierarchy remains visible. One can demand accountability from a visible hierarchy. It is much, much harder to demand accountability from slippery corporate entities that cloak themselves, employing a media that they themselves control. This media is, moreover, replete with secular propaganda—extolling progress, freedom, equality, and more—which actively diverts attention from the true state of affairs.

For the idea is vigorously promoted that the New Hierarchy is not tyrannical. Indeed, we are led to believe there is no plutocracy pulling the strings—that, instead, we enjoy an age of unprecedented

egalitarianism. Certainly, we are repeatedly reminded how much we have all gained in terms of liberty. Women, we are told, have freedom and rights they never had before. Minorities have likewise made gains with regard to the anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia that have long plagued the West. Now, one should rejoice how much truth exists here. For the very real misery of minorities has been ameliorated, in certain ways, at least. And women have also made real gains—in certain ways, at least.

But are these gains—real as they are—sufficient to demonstrate the West is *truly* freer than before? Dare one ask this with impunity in our “tolerant” society? For *real gains should be set aside real losses*. They must be understood within the bigger picture. This bigger picture recognizes women are not only far more likely to be wage-slaves than in the past, but also treated as sex-objects and less free to walk the streets than they once were. This bigger picture recognizes many poor are getting poorer, which means minorities are frequently getting poorer. This bigger picture recognizes the destruction of the biosphere. This bigger picture recognizes the massacre of the unborn. This bigger picture recognizes the children working in third-world sweatshops to sustain our rich, Western life.

Such things, appalling as they are, have mainly to do with things that are empirically, materially demonstrable. What of spiritual losses? What of the loss of piety and humility I witness in these little old Irish men and women, the likes of which I fear we may never see again? Whilst world poverty and the threat to the biosphere is grim, the threat to humanity’s soul appears no less dreadful.

Is not the price tag of Secular Materialism far, far too high? What end will there be, if we continue this vast global project of indiscriminately stimulating material desire? And what will be the final end of rejecting the Catholic and Christian truth that material things are the least important of all? What will be the final consequence of defining ethics only in the crudest, empirical terms—

thereby allowing the greater permissiveness we have witnessed from the 1960s onwards: pornography, abortion, deregulated capitalism, drug legalization and now the redefinition of marriage to include gay folk, threesomes—who knows what next?

In other words: What will happen if we persist in the selfsame secular-materialistic trajectories, which pose ever-fewer moral objections to lack of self-restraint, leading to hedonistic consumption on a scale that would blow our ancestors' minds? What end—in short—if we in the West continue our descent from Christendom?

Faced with questions like these, one can feel powerless. In my cyber group of old friends, I listen to Michael who suffers acutely the tyranny of the New Hierarchy. Still, Michael remains dubious about my cry for Christendom renewed, for he writes:

I can very much relate to the feeling of powerlessness.

...

The “system” is totally autonomous, it's the economy, stupid, what can I do? I cannot do anything, on my own.

But am I on my own? Is the merciless, robotic mechanism of the “free market,” the “matrix” really the only collective force?

Or is it not that there is also a counterforce? And despite all my unease, are you, Roger, maybe more right than I want to concede that this counterforce may have a lot to do with the Church?

...

One thing is quite undeniable: There are strong indications everywhere that we are drifting toward a totally dehumanised world if nothing substantial happens to

change the course of contemporary civilization (I hesitate to speak of culture).

### **The (Catholic) Road Less Travelled**

“If nothing substantial happens.” What am I to say?! For when I arrived in Catholic Ireland, I recognized the most astonishing exception I have ever seen to this drift “toward a totally dehumanized world.” The Irish are flawed, fallible, broken like everyone else—but, even now, I feel the difference in Ireland. All these extraordinary little acts of kindness, community, and humanity add up to something. Likewise, the once-profound Irish resistance—prior to secularization—to consumer capitalism and materialism counts for something, as well.

In 1997, by formidable Grace, I stumbled upon the Catholic Mystery in secular England. Still, the discovery took me nearly thirty-four years, given the Mystery’s cultural invisibility in Anglo-American society. It was not till I went to live in Ireland that I really saw a culture where the Catholic Mystery was *not* invisible. There I realized a society shaped by that Mystery offered *such different cultural possibilities* than the Protestant Anglosphere I had known. I could not help but ask myself: What if Western culture had taken a different course?

For the West has gone down a route largely dominated by Anglo-American civilization, first the British Empire of the Nineteenth Century and then the American Empire which followed it. But in Ireland—and increasingly in Spain and France—I started asking questions. What if things had been different? What if the West had followed a Catholic course, rather than the Protestant-turned-Secular trajectory pioneered, above all, by the Anglosphere? Might we not experience a far less dog-eat-dog capitalist world? Would we not possibly live humbler, simpler lives—with far less strain on the biosphere?

How Catholic Europe has been criticized by Protestants over the centuries! How frequently Ireland and other Catholic countries have been castigated as backward, mired in superstition and ill-equipped for such “all-important matters” as “first-rate economic development.” But what if the truth of the matter is that whilst Great Britain built a global empire on capitalist prowess—her smaller “backward, priest-ridden, credulous” Catholic neighbor appreciated there was more to life than economic predation? Whilst the biosphere collapses beneath this economic predation, what if the simpler lifestyle inherent to integral Catholic cultures yields what is needed for *sustainable development*?

Here is irony indeed. All my New Age years I repeatedly encountered people who renounced the rat race, returning to a life of greater simplicity. Many of them would live as peasants again—close to the Earth. And yet these neo-peasants refuse that *very thing* that was vital to the European peasant of old: RELIGION. Yes, a new brand of environmental idealists reject materialism, whilst also rejecting the major force that has, over the course of millennia, counter-acted materialism! Yet “the stone the builder rejected” would seem critical to regaining ecological simplicity. For how often I have met “Greens,” who frequently seem baffled that their (very) legitimate issues remain such a minority concern. Plaintively, they cry: “Why do more folk not adopt a simpler means to live?” But like New Agers, the Greens usually remain trapped in Enlightenment ideology. At least, they tend to espouse the self-perfectibility of man, rarely recognizing the Fall. And not recognizing the Fall, they recognize neither the Redeemer, nor His Church.

But what if people stripped of Sacramental Christianity and buried by materialism cannot find *the will* to live simply? And what if a Catholic culture of self-sacrifice, self-restraint, and the supernatural Sacraments once provided the Irish the *wherewithal* to voluntarily accept simplicity? What if all the ecologists and activists who tell us we must simplify neglect *the one thing*—a sacramental Christian

society—which can halt the West’s (accelerating) materialism?

In Ireland one can still see, side by side, the old Catholic culture and the new secular consumer culture. We have seen how Tom Inglis repeatedly contrasts these two, with the latter emphasizing “self-realization through consumer choice” whilst the former stressed “the importance of self-denial and self-surrender.” Clearly, Inglis is not happy with what Ireland has become. Poignantly, he asks:

The question for me, as for many other people in Ireland is whether in moving from living the life of a pious, humble, but poor, Catholic Church mouse, I have become an overstimulated consumption-driven rat.<sup>2</sup>

Inglis would appear to be a lapsed Catholic, severely critical of the Church. But for Catholics of Faith, his question is readily answered: nearly all of us are becoming over-stimulated consumption-driven rats. The biosphere cannot withstand billions of these rats. And, what with increasing despair, mental illness, violent crime, and sexual perversity, it is questionable if the soul of humanity can withstand it either.

In Ireland, another culture, another way of life has been steadily sacrificed. In terms of cultural influence, the Catholic hierarchy has gradually been replaced by a new materialistic hierarchy of corporate elites. And yet the old, sacrificed culture afforded the simplicity and self-restraint desperately needed today. It likewise offered a stronger social and communitarian spirit. Most importantly of all, it offered *sacramental freedom*. The people were proffered *routes to Christ*. But all this is buried and forgotten now. For the New Hierarchy in Ireland, as elsewhere, has now followed in the footsteps of the materialistic West, above all the Anglo-American sphere.

## Some Personal Reflections on New Millennium England

HERE I want to return to the Anglosphere and the decadent civilization she fosters. I have sometimes spoken severely of Britain and America in these pages, pointing out the differences I came to see between the world-conquering countries I grew up in and the vestiges of conquered Catholic Christendom I discovered after living in Ireland, Spain, and France. My book has been born from this unsettling contrast. And, as we draw to our conclusion, it may help to clarify things if I insert some final highly personal reflections regarding this contrast, particularly as I experienced it during a brief return to England, after my life in Catholic Europe.

My years in Catholic Europe have been important, not only because they introduced me to cultures very different from my own Anglo-American heritage, but also because they gave me *recess* from that heritage. This recess provided a time of necessary distancing. This was particularly true in Spain and France, where I had hardly any English-language media. Indeed, it was almost as though I were given recess from the Twenty-First Century.

For in Spain and France, Kim and I knew hard times. We lived either in a van or on rural smallholdings so rustic we had to fetch our own drinking water, for none was available through the mains. Electricity depended on unreliable solar panels; we ended up using gas and candles a lot. In some ways, we became like Nineteenth-Century Catholic peasants and—in our camping van—we even pilgrimaged to the very same places Nineteenth-Century Catholic peasants went: Lourdes, La Salette, and Paray-le-Monial. During this time, we neither had internet nor any other media, and the newspapers I occasionally read were French. And so, in Latin Europe, I was severed from the Anglosphere like never before. But it was almost as if I was severed from modernity in our life as traveling Catholic peasants.

This experience yielded something precious, when we at last returned to Britain. It was a little bit like what T.S. Elliot wrote in *Little Gidding*: “the end of all our exploring” had been to arrive, once

more, in England and to “know the place for the first time.” (It was like it had been with the “New Age cafeteria”—I could only really see the place once I got away from it.) And it was even the same with our brazen new Twenty-First Century civilization. Now that I was no longer swept up in it, I saw it from a very different perspective.

Thus, after pondering France and Ireland in the last chapters, I would now offer some very personal reflections on Twenty-First Century England. In fact, I had been away from England for well over a decade by the time I returned. For we left England for the Swiss borderlands in 1999.<sup>3</sup> Thus, when I finally returned to England, it felt like a foreign country. Clearly, we had both changed, England and I. Catholic Europe made me a different man. I now found England difficult in ways I never had before. Losing the Catholic heritage that surrounded me in Catholic cultures was tough. Indeed, I felt starved of the sacramental cultures I left behind.

For this very reason, Kim, myself, and my teenage daughter (who had joined us in Spain after we abandoned the van) relocated to Liverpool—for Liverpool was the one place in England that resembled Catholic Ireland (at least a little). This was mainly because the Irish had flooded into the city after the famine. As a result, Liverpool no longer quite felt like the rest of England. I took comfort from the beautiful and massive Catholic churches dotted around the city and the still-largely Catholic neighborhood we lived in—something virtually unknown elsewhere in England. Catholicism was clearly the dominant form of Christianity in Liverpool. (Admittedly, this is partly because Protestantism has virtually died-out in England.)

Still, coming back into mainstream British life remained a sobering experience. It appeared decadent now, in ways I did not recall from the last century. The “normal” world of the Twenty-First Century Anglosphere seemed anything but normal to me. All this, Lector, helps to account for a certain tone you will find in this book—one that is shocked, even scandalized. For this is my experience, stepping back

from modernity and looking at it with eyes afresh.

Just a few little snapshots from memory may help to explain. I am standing by a rack of films to rent and a child—four years old perhaps—exclaims to his father with excited recognition: “Freddy Kruger!” Is the slashing, bloody serial killer a family favorite?, I ask myself. Or this: I sit in a cybercafé and, to my right, a youth plays a computer game. He bashes heads in with a baseball bat and blood spurts everywhere. Or this: I walk into a Liverpool supermarket and find DVDs displayed that were illegal in Britain thirty years ago. Back then, they were called “video nasties” and police raided the shops that sold them. Today, they are prominently displayed in a family setting. Now, I mention some of the most egregious things, such as finding *I Spit on Your Grave* in a family supermarket. But most of what I saw was not as jolting as this—just crude and cynical in less obvious ways.

Once I was obliged to wait by a Liverpool newsagent. The wait extended . . . and extended. Bored silly, I flipped through pages of magazines I would scarcely notice otherwise. Sadness welled up in my heart. There was nothing as shocking as “video nasties”—just a crass, terrible parade of numbing mediocrity. Here is how people are “edified” today: by the perfect fashions, the perfect holiday, the perfect sound system, the perfect swimming pool. Or else by titillation: the scandals and sex lives of celebrities.

Returning to England, it was also striking how much more commercialized everything had become. For the first time in thirty years in Europe, I now experienced something commonplace in my native America: people ringing at home trying to sell me stuff. Similar odiousness continued in shops—sales assistants tried to sell me things I did not want. Of course, I remembered things like this from America. Still, it was jarring seeing them transposed into England.

Other new trends in British life were still more disturbing. For example, there was a clear rise of alcoholism and drug abuse. I was

startled to see how much it affected even very rural settings. An aggressive new atheism, exemplified by people like Richard Dawkins, was also on the rise. I remembered Dawkins from the Nineties, but something was different now: Atheism had become *chic*, topping British best seller lists and consumed by millions.

When people despair of God, it is not surprising they despair of other things, too. Still, I was startled by the cynicism I now saw everywhere in the Anglosphere media (after all my years of “fasting” from it). Anti-religious messages abounded. For example, I watched DVDs of recent television series, which my teenage daughter introduced me to. Amongst these was the American medical drama *House* with Hugh Laurie. The sophistication of scripts and acting was striking—and something else, as well. I was surprised to see American programming with such *overtly* atheist or agnostic characters. In my American youth, television kept largely silent regarding religion. At least, I never recall J. R. Ewing or Kojak proclaiming religion. But here were characters who were *not* silent regarding religion. They preached a perspective—articulately and persuasively—that was distinctly anti-religious. More accurately, whereas the older American television never preached religion, *House* was different. It *was* preaching a religion: the new creed of Secular Materialism.

Similar despair featured in other media. I also watched a British series *Outnumbered* about middle-class parents struggling with three chaotic kids. The parents had no faith to pass onto their offspring—but only anti-faith. Perhaps my teenage daughter said it best: The lives of this fictional English family *had no meaning*. Certainly, my daughter was deeply struck by the contrast between England and Spain. For in Spain, she knew Catholic families, who differed markedly from the lost souls we seemed to see everywhere in England.

My daughter was also finishing school in Britain. One day, she gave me a homework handout showing families. At least, it purported to. For not only genuine families were featured, but other

combinations: two women and a baby, two men and a cat. I suspect those crafting the images lacked the guts to show two men and a baby, but the “educational” message remained clear: all these represent acceptable options. It was nothing less than flagrant propaganda.

In England, I could not help but have the impression of a people *spellbound*—all the more since New Age attitudes seemed to have subtly taken hold of English society during my long absence from it. Everywhere, people spouted New Age-isms in a manner I do not recall from the Nineties.

All this hit home in a particular fashion in Liverpool. Liverpool is, of course, home to the Beatles and like, many of my generation, I had been haunted by the Beatles in my youth. But now, in middle age, I became troubled by their hypnotic spell on popular culture. For millions are enjoined to “imagine no religion” or that no heaven exists. Such lyrics are clear forerunners to the anti-religious messages I now witnessed everywhere in England. Back in the 1960s, John Lennon had notoriously criticized Christianity. One can only wonder if he somehow absorbed the strange Anglo-Theosophical ideology of the apostles corrupting Christ’s message:

Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. . . . We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first—rock and roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right, but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It’s them twisting it that ruins it for me.<sup>4</sup>

What can I say? In my New Age youth, John Lennon spoke to my soul. But in Liverpool, I found myself haunted by his son, Julian—strangely because I had hardly listened to pop music for decades. But now the son reached me in a way his father no longer could. I found myself pondering the younger Lennon’s story—even finding it oddly relevant to my musings on England and the New Age. For

Julian Lennon grew up beneath the shadow of a man who called for universal love. Yet he had been abandoned by his father at an early age and would later write: “Dad . . . stood for peace and love in the world. But at the same time he found it very hard to show any peace and love to his first family—my mother and me.”<sup>5</sup>

*All You Need is Love.* John Lennon’s abstract call to love meant something to me as a New Ager. But now I pondered the younger Lennon’s life story—and the darkness of his early years only further revealed how hollow such abstract calls really are.

Now, the cynicism in Hugh Laurie’s *House* or *Outnumbered* depressed me. By contrast, Julian Lennon’s pop was different. It was not cynical, but rather filled with elegiac yearning for a better world. Yet for all his heartfelt sincerity, I could not help but see him caught up in similar English abstractions as his father. His latest 2013 album, *Everything Changes*, took a decidedly New Age turn—with a “positive thinking” spin absent from earlier records. O the irony! Had I been able to listen to *Everything Changes* as a New Ager at Findhorn, I would have thrilled to its messages. Listening today, I remain moved by the man’s aching heart. It serves as a reminder of the noble aspirations that so many New Age types possess.

Still, Julian Lennon’s lyrics sometimes reminded me of what I heard in the Anglo-expatriate community in Spain: positive thinking elevated to magical power. Listening to the younger Lennon’s new album, I heard a man whose bleeding heart ached for answers—yet to whom Christianity was utterly opaque. Too often, all that was left was the faith of Pelagius:

*Free yourself from all the lies*

*Free yourself from what’s inside, leave it all behind.*

Or:

*I can change, you can change*

*Everything wrong with our lives.*

Can we really change everything wrong with our lives? The need for God's grace disappears in these self-help notions— notions I now saw everywhere I turned in England. Now, I am no connoisseur of British pop. I pay little attention to this staggering phenomenon as it spreads out across the planet. But for what little it is worth, Lector, here is my impression. Not much English pop reveals the same soul-searching quality as Julian Lennon's. Very little so nakedly yearns for healing the world. Much of it, I am sure, broadcasts the same cynical messages I saw elsewhere—if not violent, nihilistic ones. For I trust even *House* and *Outnumbered* are relatively innocent compared to much that is now broadcast around the planet.

Yet if British pop stars *do* aspire to anything nobler than modern materialism and despair, New Age-ism is likely to be the only outlet open to them. Where else are souls like John Lennon's son to turn, except modern "holistic" spirituality? The notion that the Sacraments of the Church offer a living, vital alternative to abstract Pelagianism—soul-transforming Grace—would sound utterly surreal to them. Whilst odes to positive thinking can be heard in today's pop music, one is highly unlikely to hear odes to the Holy Sacraments!

Dear Lector, here I venture a few brief comments on Anglosphere pop culture—from *House* to Julian Lennon. For perhaps too little has been said of the media's massive power in this book. This is partly because, truly, I am barely competent to speak, since I have abstained from the media for far too long.

Yet the subject of the media cannot be ignored here. It is of burning relevance. This book has considered the post-Reformation descent into an increasingly materialistic *Weltanschauungen*. But as late as the 1950s or 60s, this remained confined to academic and

cultural elites. Simpler, humbler people largely escaped its corrosive effects. No more. *Everyone* is now bombarded around the clock by popular versions of relativism, utilitarianism, scientism, psychologism—a legion of cynical reductionism.

Yes, from the 1950s onwards, everything began to change with the arrival of powerful new media—most obviously television. But television is not all. The invention of transistor radios in 1954 allowed the youth to carry them wherever they went, listening to “Top 40” hits. Later of course, the youth started *wearing* Walkmans and now iPods. In myriad ways, Westerners became increasingly *insulated* in an all-surrounding “entertainment culture” wherein they might never hear a word of Christianity. I have cited the relatively little-known example of Julian Lennon, literally brought up by the Beatles and now imparting the Beatles’ philosophy to the world. But the Beatles are the tip of the iceberg. Most young people are now *catechized* in pop culture rather than religion—much of which is a great deal darker than the Beatles. Beyond the Beatles, my long media-abstinence means I scarcely recognize the stuff that catechizes today’s young: Black Sabbath, *Beavis and Butthead*, horror films like the *Friday the Thirteenth* series—or even worse. Still, I know enough to realize that Charles Krauthammer is not wrong in saying:

Never in history have the purveyors of a degraded, almost totally uncensored, culture had direct, unmediated access to the mind of a society’s young. An adolescent plugged into a Walkman playing “gangsta rap” represents a revolutionary social phenomenon: youthful consciousness almost literally hardwired to the most extreme and corrupting cultural influences.<sup>6</sup>

Less disturbing and more subtle—but perhaps all the more insidious for that reason—is the ongoing catechesis in sheer cynicism I

discovered in *House* and *Outnumbered*. Some few idealists, like Julian Lennon, may break free from this cynicism—only to find refuge in New Age-isms. Today’s Anglophone pop culture either catechizes its young in a chic new materialistic despair or the facile feel-goodisms of the New Age, but certainly not in Christianity.

But here is the rub: Anglo culture does not simply catechize its young, *it catechizes the world*.

This world-dominant Anglo-culture has been hostile to Catholicism for centuries. Powerful cultural blinkers were formed long ago, and they remain firmly in place. Even I, as a Catholic convert, could not really liberate myself from these blinkers until I left England. Only in Ireland, Spain, and France were my eyes opened to hitherto unimaginable Catholic treasure. But returning to England, my newfound riches were repugnant to many English. The ideology of ages remains powerfully present in the British mentality.

My writing, including early drafts of this book, went out to non-Catholic English friends. Unsurprisingly, what I say of the Reformation was often hard to stomach. Yet it was sobering how little real understanding there was of the Reformation. An English mythos had successfully painted it as nothing but a noble cause, whereby people threw off tyranny. Few English folk seem to realize how profoundly provincial this perspective is. One woman suggested to me that “true Christians” felt no other choice but to follow Luther. Apparently, she never stopped to think “true Christians” might likewise have existed in Ireland, France, Spain, Austria, Poland, etc.—but felt differently. And how little understanding there was, and is, as to how much the Reformation in England was indebted to forced conversion. English Catholics were terrorized by the Tudors and their heirs. Moreover, those I talked to were not committed Protestants. Hardly! They were “educated” secular post-Protestant folk across England’s post-Christian landscape. The Wind of the Tudors blows through English popular culture, even when it no longer remains

## A Wall of Ideology

THE Wind of the Tudors is, of course, a metaphor—a metaphor for how the English Reformation still shapes the imagination of the Anglosphere. But we could also employ another metaphor—that of a wall. For after centuries of effort, a great barrier has been erected: the ramparts of a secular-materialistic fortress. A wall of ideology is now firmly in place, stronger than reinforced steel and concrete. This wall shuts out the Catholic Mystery with ruthless efficacy. For Catholicism, once the lifeblood of the West, has now become nigh-incomprehensible. Even in Ireland, it is no longer understood by a rising generation of secular or vaguely New Age folk engulfed in Anglo-American persuasions.

I write these words after a conversation with an English New Age friend I have known nearly thirty years. For the last sixteen, I have been a Christian and spoken to her many, *many* times about the Church. To this day, she remains baffled by my conversion. Yet she concedes that I still obviously possess “universal wisdom” or some such words. Somewhere in her, I suspect, she thinks the “universal” Roger she once knew, still exists. I have never *really* lost my “holistic” perspective, never *really* fallen for “narrow-minded Christianity”—at least not completely. “He *can't* have; it's not possible.” In any event, her implication is clear. Obviously, I still possess “holistic” wisdom—unlike the Church. Similarly, I recall another friend who told me how good it was that I wanted to heal the Church—with no idea the “boot was on the other leg”: the Church was healing me.

There is a wall—a sheer wall of almost impregnable certainty that the Church has absolutely nothing to offer. For the woman above, I am a sign of contradiction: I am a traditional Catholic, but I am not an

idiot! I still retain some sort of wisdom! But I must be a rare exception, because for her, like many folk, it is axiomatic: the Catholic Church is reserved for non-universal, non-holistic types, narrow and limited in their perspectives.

With folk like my friends above, *whatever* I say of the Catholic Mystery—after all these years—never quite seems to register. When I speak of the Church, they cannot understand I speak of a Sacramental miracle that transforms my soul, day in, day out. Christianity to such people remains the Protestant Christianity they grew up with in the Anglosphere. For I will say it, Lector, one last time: New Agers are much more likely to have Protestant roots than Catholic ones. And if they *do* have any experience of Catholicism, it is almost certainly a highly-Protestantized version of modern Catholicism.

If I have been severe to Protestantism at times, it has much to do with experiences like those above. I see how the Catholic Mystery cannot be glimpsed, even for an instant. Christianity is no longer understood as a soul-transforming Sacramental miracle—but instead as a complex of beliefs, sermons, hymns, and much else besides that New Agers find dull as ditchwater. And compared to the soul-transforming power of the *Mystici Corporis Christi*, I find these things pretty dull as well.

Yes, what the British, Americans, and most other Anglophones generally know about Christianity remains profoundly colored by the Reformation. Here lies the original foundation of the wall. The wall, however, is furthermore constructed from five centuries of opposition to Catholicism in these folk's cultural heritage. To this must be added the Enlightenment Despair that has yielded the cynical reductionism of secular society. Further rows of bricks become added to the wall. It becomes very hard to see the Catholic Mystery. But then, on top of that, comes the new “24/7” all-surrounding, all-pervasive materialistic media culture. To cap it off, today's liberal, de-sacralized or even zany Catholicism renders the final, finishing touches to the wall. It becomes

virtually insurmountable. We cannot blame the people trapped behind the wall. We must open our hearts. It is not their fault they cannot conceive the Catholic Mystery.

### **The Threat to Christianity Itself**

THE grave threat to the Catholic Mystery has been well-rehearsed throughout these pages. Yet as much as we have necessarily emphasized the Catholic dimension, it should be clear that not only Catholicism, but indeed the very future of Christianity, is now thrown into question. For the future of Protestantism in the West would seem even grimmer than Catholicism. Let us briefly consider this.

A Gallup poll of Europeans in 2008 asked, “Does religion occupy an important place in your life?” The “no” responses clearly indicated the failure of Protestant Christianity in Europe. Of the top ten highest “no” responses, ranging from sixty-six to eighty-four percent, only two countries were of Catholic heritage. Unsurprisingly, one was France, the other was the Czech Republic—both victims of terrible religious persecutions. By contrast, the Protestant nations on the list never suffered persecution—only the constant, drip-by-drip erosion that comes with Secular Materialism. The top four countries—where seventy-eight percent or more said religion was not important—were Lutheran Estonia, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Historically, these are all lands where Catholicism was reduced to the very minimum.

The case of Sweden is instructive here. According to some reports, only two percent of Church of Sweden members go to services each Sunday and a 2010 Eurobarometer poll found that only seventeen percent of Swedes believed in God. And many surveys suggest that Protestantism elsewhere in the West follows this Scandinavian path.

Until now, the outstanding exception to this pattern was, of course, America. In many ways, that remains true—however even America now witnesses her so-called “blue states” becoming ever

more like secular Europe. Moreover, many of her “red states” may be trending blue. Christian values, never questioned one or two generations ago, are certainly questioned now.

Given these facts, one may legitimately ask: *Will non-sacramental forms of Christianity be strong enough to survive?* In the West, Christians may find that Christianity is *untenable without the Sacraments*—and therefore returning to sacramental Christianity is necessary, if the faith is to withstand the assault of Secular Materialism. Christians everywhere should remember that, for the first fifteen hundred years, the *only* Christianity that existed was the Christianity of the Seven Sacraments. It was *this* Christianity that built Christendom. Christians, whether religious or laity, were fortified by all Seven Sacraments. For the last five hundred years, we have witnessed the spread of de-sacramentalized Christianity. During this same epoch, Christendom fell apart.

We have seen how Secular Materialism grew, first and foremost, from the de-sacramentalized Christian cultures. Thus, a key aim of this book has been to illumine how resistance to secularism was always strongest in non-Protestant countries. Whether it be Orthodox Greece or Catholic Ireland, Secular Materialism progressed far more slowly in sacramental cultures. To withstand Secular Materialism, Christianity may have *no other choice* but to return to the full sacramentalism of its first fifteen centuries. It may absolutely need ordained Priests, rather than ministers, who are daily fortified by the supernatural Sacraments. Certainly, it will need Catholics with the same zeal as pre-Vatican II Catholicism wherein all Seven Sacraments—including cleansing absolution—still remained common practice.

In the end, Reformation Christianity may turn out to be a five hundred year detour within the larger Christian trajectory—simply because de-sacramentalized Christianity may prove incapable of survival.

Certainly, my recent return to England lent substance to this

notion. I witnessed a Christian wasteland, particularly amongst the young. A 2005 British survey of young adults, aged sixteen to twenty nine, found that if the young have two church attending parents, less than half of them still attend as adults. With one church-going parent, the likelihood of the offspring going is twenty-three percent; with neither parent, that figure becomes reduced to three percent. This led the researchers to conclude: “In Britain institutional religion now has a half-life of one generation, to borrow the terminology of radioactive decay.”<sup>7</sup>

In a generation or two, then, British Christianity, it would seem, will be all but wiped out. All this refers, of course, to a country that has been overwhelmingly Protestant for centuries. It might be added that whereas Catholicism forms less than ten percent of the English population, there are now more English Catholics in church on Sundays than Protestants—even whilst the enormous majority of the English still have Protestant roots. This fact even gave rise to press reports that, for the first time since the Reformation, England might be considered a nation of Catholic majority—simply because the largest practicing form of Christianity was no longer Protestant, but Catholic.

None of this has anything to do with Catholic resurgence—simply Protestant withering. The sad fact is that (a Protestantized) Catholicism is also beleaguered in Britain’s intensely secularized culture. Still, Catholicism is surviving there, whereas Protestant Christianity is clearly going the same way as Scandinavia. Before long, America may be the same.

All this, dear Lector, leads me to conclude the only hope for Christianity, in Europe, at any rate, lies in traditional Christianity—Catholic or Orthodox—whose Seven Sacraments continue to vitalize the faithful. Here is why I emphasize the Seven Sacraments so strongly in this book. Deprived of the Sevenfold Sacramental mystery, Christianity becomes either secular-liberal or New Age.

Either way, it dies.

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg), *Meditations on the Tarot*, 119.

<sup>2</sup> Inglis, *Global Ireland*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, I later returned to Britain for two years in a Welsh Anglican college.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Jacqueline Edmondson, *John Lennon: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Lennon, “Foreword,” *John* by Cynthia Lennon (New York: Crown, 2005), ix.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in George Weigel, *Soul of the World: Notes on the Future of Public Catholicism* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1996), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Allen, *The Future Church*, 61.

## Renewing Christendom

*One of us sees we cannot continue like this.*

*One of us is building a moral, Christian alternative.*

**F**ROM RURAL northwest Ireland, I draw to my book's conclusion. Here one may glimpse the Fate of the West in microcosm. For in Ireland, the danger to Catholic culture is piercingly evident and yet—paradoxically—this land also renders me the only remaining hope I have for the West. Thus, in this final chapter, we continue contemplating the crisis of Christendom as well as the hope for renewing Christendom.

Daily, I go to Mass in Ireland and see this noble people, once catechized in the mysteries of Catholic Christianity. But I see how their young are now catechized in the materialism of secular modernity. Many elderly still attend Mass here, even daily, but they are unlikely to be followed by the youth. The future looks heartbreaking. For generations, the Irish have drawn on the deep Christian roots of their culture. But now, for the first time since St. Patrick, the youth of Ireland can no longer easily drink from these sacred springs. The Holy wells of old are choked with weed and litter. Paganism, which vanished from Ireland nearly sixteen centuries ago, has returned in the form of the Anglo-American New Age movement. If things continue this way, there will be little left in a generation or two. Ireland will be as bereft as the America and England I grew up in.

O strange thing! After arriving in Cambridge in the late 1980s, I started a little New Age magazine called *Sacred Culture*. In it, I

sought to capture my dream of an alternative culture to materialism. Of course, I was incapable of conceiving that culture in anything but “holistic” notions. My horizons were too restricted. But not far away from me, just across a small sea, lay a world unknown. That Ireland of the 1980s was still materially poor compared to England and America, but how spiritually rich it was by comparison! At the very least, even as late as the Eighties, I know rural Irish piety would have been breathtaking. Indeed, it still astonished me when I arrived in its Western hinterlands, fifteen years later. Flawed, fallen, broken, as everyone, everywhere else, these Irish possessed something like nowhere else. How irony can pierce the heart. All the while I published *Sacred Culture* in England, the closest thing I would ever know to sacred culture still existed across the Irish sea.

Once more, I know how naïve this sounds to a cynical world. Do I not see the hypocrisy and begrudging small-mindedness of rural Ireland? It even sounds naïve to me sometimes. Thus, I keep on *enquiring*. I actively ask of older generations—seeking out their memories of the Ireland that has been destroyed. Certainly, I hear bad things about that integral Catholic culture, but the good I hear takes my breath away. In all, I have spent over five years living on this island and here is what I still, continuously, feel. Not only am I not being naïve, but I remain too cynical myself. What has been lost here may be far more precious than I have dared suggest in these pages.

Here, then, is the paradox I mentioned. In Ireland, the death-blow to Christendom is all-but-apparent. Yet the after-glow of integral Catholic culture is not mute. This after-glow *testifies*—it tells us what must be preserved and rebuilt.

First, however, let us remain with the apparent death-blow. In returning to mainstream life in secular England and now Ireland, this deathblow hits home to me like never before. How asleep I have been all these years! But, slowly, I wake to what Hilaire Belloc saw clearly in 1938, when the assault on the Church was nothing like today:

The Faith is now in the presence not of a particular heresy as in the past—the Arian, the Manichaean, the Albigensian . . . nor is it in the presence of a sort of generalized heresy as it was when it had to meet the Protestant revolution from three to four hundred years ago. The enemy which the Faith now has to meet, and which may be called “The Modern Attack” is a wholesale assault upon the fundamentals of the Faith—upon the very existence of the Faith. And the enemy now advancing against us is increasingly conscious of the fact that there can be no question of neutrality. The forces now opposed to the Faith design to *destroy*. The battle is henceforward engaged upon a definite line of cleavage, involving the survival or destruction of the Catholic Church. And *all*—not a portion—of its philosophy.

We know, of course, that the Catholic Church cannot be destroyed. But what we do not know is the extent of the area over which it will survive; its power of revival or the power of the enemy to push it further and further back on to its last defenses until it may seem as though the Anti-Christ had come and the final issue was about to be decided. Of such moment is the struggle immediately before the world.

. . .

The truth is becoming every day so much more obvious that within a few years it will be universally admitted. I do not entitle the modern attack “anti-Christ”—though in my heart I believe that to be the true term for it: No, I do not give it that name because it would seem for the moment exaggerated. But the name doesn’t matter.

Whether we call it “The Modern Attack” or “anti-Christ” it is all one; there is a clear issue now joined between the retention of Catholic morals, tradition, and authority on the one side, and the active effort to destroy them on the other. The modern attack will not tolerate us. It will attempt to destroy us. Nor can we tolerate *it*.

. . .

Either the Catholic Church (now rapidly becoming the only place wherein the traditions of civilization are understood and defended) will be reduced by her modern enemies to political impotence, to numerical insignificance, and, so far as public appreciation goes, to silence; or the Catholic Church will, in this case as throughout the past . . . recover and extend her authority, and will rise once more to the leadership of civilization which she made.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Sleep of the Church**

YES, long ago, Hilaire Belloc was awake, whilst others soundly slept. And so I ask myself if the greatest danger is not the “modern attack” of Secular Materialism, but the fact that we, as Catholics, are slumbering. It is not so much the world is insensate to the fate of civilization stripped of the Catholic Mystery. It is that we Catholics have become insensate ourselves. And thus the Church is failing to do her work in the world. As Benedict XVI has said:

Recent decades have seen the advance of a spiritual “desertification.” In the Council’s time it was already possible from a few tragic pages of history to know what a life or a world without God looked like, but now we see it

every day around us. This void has spread.<sup>2</sup>

Here, from the Holy See itself, is a clear indictment of the post-conciliar Church's failure to make any real difference to the slow death of the West.

We have discussed this failure at length. No need to rehearse it all again: the worldly theology, the effort to be "popular" and please all manner of people, the countless concessions to Secular Materialism, the zany liturgy and ruined churches, as well as spurning the Blessed Virgin, the Sacred Heart and so, so much besides. . . . In short, the (liberal) Protestantization of the Church. Still, in these final pages, I want to reemphasize one thing—all-important, I believe—with regard to the ecclesiastical crisis.

I still can never forget that Catholic Priest who failed, for thirty years, to recognize what he was really doing as a Priest—until, that is, he discovered, at last, the Latin Mass. Evidently, this Priest is far from alone. Many Priests appear asleep to the wonder and miracle they daily transmit. My point is that the liturgy is at the very heart of the malady. The *Novus Ordo* has, by and large, been catastrophic. As Joseph Ratzinger, before he became Benedict XVI, once observed:

When the liturgy is something each one makes by himself then it no longer gives us what is its true quality: encounter with the mystery which is not our product but our origin and the wellspring of our life. . . . I am convinced that *the ecclesial crisis that we are experiencing today is to a great extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy.* [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

Once again, I know many Priests do celebrate the new Mass with dignity. I know, too, the worst offenders—SpongeBob and cheesehead Masses—remain mercifully rare. However, between these two extremes

lies a vast intermediate field. That territory is filled with mediocre liturgy, which, if not downright awful, is neither compelling, nor inspiring. How can the Church afford to allow the Mass—its source and summit—to be anything less than compelling or inspiring?

The answer is obvious: it cannot. Yet for many years, my beloved and I travelled, far and wide, in Western Europe, going to Mass daily in hundreds of parishes. And how frequently we left Mass saying we understood why people do not go to church!

I cannot help but concur with Benedict XVI, the Church's collapse has *everything* to do with the collapse of the liturgy. Now, it would seem too much to hope that the Latin Mass be universally restored, at least in the near-future. But one must pray that the Tridentine Liturgy becomes ever more available. The *Novus Ordo* will thereby be enriched by it and eventually reformed. Personally, I believe one simple reform of the *Novus Ordo* could prove miraculous in itself—the Priest facing *ad orientem*. Thus he might pray at the Altar of God—rather than “entertain his audience.”

### **Being Awake, Being Catholic**

BUT enough of my faulting Priests, whose service to God has transformed my soul! For I am a layman, not a Priest, and I assume most of my readers are laity too. We are in no position to resolve the central liturgical crisis, except by prayer and by doing everything we can to assist those Priests and societies who carry the heavy burden of restoring the liturgy amidst a climate that scorns and even scourges them.

Thus in these last pages we turn to the question as to what, if anything, we laity can do in this grim situation. And we begin with what may seem very obvious indeed. For if the problem of the Church entails a general sleepy malaise, the first order of the day is to wake up! Alas, being awake is no easy task. Modern society is overflowing

—as never before—with a thousand hypnotic forces that would lull us all to sleep. How to remain awake? Prayer, devotion, examination of conscience, loving attention to the needs of others. All these things are indispensable, of course—as they are to every religious and spiritual discipline—e.g., Protestantism or Buddhism.

But we are neither Protestants nor Buddhists. As Catholics we acknowledge these common religious disciplines are *not enough*. Rather, we must add something else to these—union with Jesus Christ and His Church through the Holy Sacraments. Thus, throughout this book, I issue a call. Let your soul be fortified by the Sacred Heart who pours Himself out to us daily in the Mass! Go to Mass as frequently as possible—for you will certainly find there fire to sustain you amidst the deadening forces of modern culture. Also, let your sins be regularly washed away by Absolution’s merciful grace. Immerse yourself in both these Holy Sacraments and any others that are appropriate to your situation. And do not forget the sacramentals. Pray your Rosary and harken to the things Our Lady calls for, including, for example, a medal worn around your neck. Avail yourself, too, of the healing stillness of His Real Presence in Eucharistic Adoration. And of course, in this book dedicated to the *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*, I urge devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Recall the Holy Hour and practice it; observe the First Fridays; help revive the annual feast to His Most Sacred Heart.

### **Toward a New Counter-Revolution**

HERE are mighty things indeed—things given to help us resist the hostile forces transforming the West into a materialistic wasteland. This is because *something happens* in the Catholic soul who practices the Sacraments and sacramentals assiduously. That “something” is not easily describable. Still, it may be noted how such Catholics *take on characteristics* of Catholics in times past. Not only do they become

more pious, but, slowly, they begin to resemble the “intransigent” Counter-Revolutionaries of old, who actively resisted Secular Materialism.

Clearly, something like this happened to me. I started my journey into the Church as a thoroughly liberal Catholic. But I began receiving Holy Communion ever more frequently, including at the Latin Mass. Living in Ireland, I started frequenting her wondrous chapels of Eucharistic Adoration. I placed the Miraculous Medal around my neck as Our Lady requested. And, after visiting Paray, I added a medal of His Sacred Heart. Slowly, I changed—and I began to appreciate the Counter Revolutionary Catholic culture of times past.

I highlight my transition from being one kind of Catholic to another. For in my initial “progressive” Catholicism, I could scarcely care less for the main issues in this book! But, over years, in following these *sacred, time-honored practices*, I became the author of this work.

Saying this, I hope to serve as reminder *that change is possible*. Certainly, one may go beyond the spirit of worldly liberal Catholicism *to ideals that liberal Catholicism never dreams of*. Allow me a moment to digress, dear Lector, for it may elaborate what I mean here. Few things convey the worldly liberal spirit of my former self better than a website I once regularly frequented: America’s *National Catholic Reporter*. As these words are written, the *NCR* runs a banner with labels including: *Accountability, Ecology, Global, Justice, Peace, Spirituality*. None of these would be out of place on any well-meaning left-ish website. These ideas spoke to me in my years of liberal Catholicism. Indeed, they still speak to me today. For the problem here is not the genuine aspiration these words proclaim. Rather, the problem lies in what is conspicuously *absent*. How about including these: *Adoration, Devotion, Piety, Sacrifice, Holy Mystery*? The *NCR* is one of the major Catholic periodicals in the English-speaking world. Is it too much to expect reverence toward the Catholic Mystery? The answer would appear to be all-too-evidently “yes.”

Why is this so? To answer this question, dear Lector, I advance a theory, which, admittedly, I cannot prove. Still, if you know the milieu of liberal Catholicism, you may have little need of proof. For, like me, you may find it difficult to imagine the *NCR's* readership being overly composed of souls who go daily to Mass, regularly confess their sins, gaze in Eucharistic Adoration, wear medals, practice the Sacred Heart Devotion, and regularly pray the Holy Rosary!

What am I saying? Just this—*these old, venerated things are far from ineffective!* They could not be casually discarded after the Council *without enormous cost to the Church!* No, the common pre-Vatican II Catholic practice was something extremely potent. Earlier, we heard Stratford Caldecott speak of mystagogia. Mystagogia means entering further into the Catholic Mystery, traditionally in the period immediately after entering the Church at Easter. But, more widely speaking, it might be said the Catholic Mystery is inexhaustible and mystagogia should never cease! Is it not possible Catholic traditional practice of the past—including the Mass in Latin—supplied the mystagogia so lacking today? It would seem so. For people did not fall away in ennui like they do now and they were far more likely to become zealous.

In invoking the NCR, I point out *two divergent cultural patterns* of Catholic practice. We might even regard them as two opposed *subcultures*. On the one hand, there is the liberal subculture, lukewarm in its faith and barely able to recognize the secular threat to the Catholic Mystery. For this subculture is often so enamored of secular causes, it scarcely recognizes what the Catholic Mystery is! And, whilst many Catholics in this subculture may go weekly to Mass, they do not, as a general rule, take this practice as seriously as Catholics in former times. Certainly, they do not take Confession or the sacramentals as seriously as Catholics did then! Individual exceptions exist, but this liberal Catholic culture is hardly practicing the Sacraments or the sacramentals with the assiduousness of past

generations.

On the other hand, there is a subculture of renewed Catholic devotion. The folk in this subculture not only take the Sacraments very seriously—being frequent Mass-goers and availing themselves of Confession—but they are also returning to things like the Rosary, Marian piety, devotion to His Sacred Heart, and indeed the Latin Mass. In short, the very things we have sought to highlight in this book. Yes, since those dark, euphoric days of the 1960s mania, all these start to be rescued from the tomb into which many hoped to bury them—forever. We are witness, then, to their resurrection.

### Re-Building Catholic Culture

THE past possessed patterns of integrated Catholic devotion, which sustained an alert integral Catholic culture. In other words, Counter Revolutionary Catholics—like Hilaire Belloc—remained *awake*. They recognized how infinitely precious the Catholic Mystery really was. And thus recognizing this, they remained *vigilant* to the threat to the Church.

In this book, we have focused on two integral Catholic cultures of the past—those of France and Ireland. We have shown the vital resistance these cultures once offered to the materialistic oppressor they perceived. In France, the secular regime, born of the Revolution, was once resisted to the teeth. In Ireland, it was the mighty capitalist British Empire, steeped in a Protestant ethos, which was likewise rejected. Both these Catholic cultures may be regarded as Counter Revolutionary—because each said “no” to the revolutions that shaped the West over the last half-millennium. Each, in its own way, rejected the revolutionary current that began with the 1517 Reformation and continued through the devastating European Revolutions of 1789, 1830, 1848, 1917 and the cultural revolution of “1968.”

These Counter-Revolutionary Catholic cultures in France,

Ireland, and elsewhere were not perfect. Far from it. Their protagonists were, of course, flawed and fallen like the agents of every human drama. Nonetheless, they retained the eyes of a hawk to the sickness of materialism—precisely because they were *awake to what they possessed*. Recognizing the infinite preciousness of Christianity, they recoiled in horror at the secular disintegration of Christianity.

What is needed today is the restoration of Christian culture in this vein—one that can say “no” to secular tyranny. Now, it must be admitted that the hope of returning to the integral Catholic culture of the past—in Ireland as recent as fifty years ago—appears muted, for the moment. However, there remains legitimate hope for rebuilding an authentic Catholic *subculture*. Thus, we dedicated an earlier chapter to the “seeds of hope”—the signs of a re-emerging vibrantly orthodox Catholicism. Let us recall the thoughts of the American Russell Shaw at this point:

It is necessary to restore—or more properly create—a healthy Catholic subculture. The old Catholic subculture, with all its strengths and limitations, was the bedrock foundation of American Catholicism until well into the twentieth century. Then, weakened by demographic shifts and cultural revolution, it was tossed aside by Catholic intellectuals and the leaders of the Church. There is no bringing it back to life now, as some Catholic nostalgia buffs apparently would like to have happen. But the need is *imperative for a new subculture . . .* as the underpinning for American Catholicism in the twenty-first century. [Italics mine]<sup>4</sup>

Whilst Shaw calls for “underpinning . . . American Catholicism,” we would extend his summons for a new subculture to the entire Anglosphere (and beyond, of course). I speak, Lector, as

though I believe this subculture is feasible. Indeed, I do, for I concur with Shaw that it is not only possible, but, indeed, nascent:

When I speak of creating a new Catholic subculture, the reaction often is, “That isn’t realistic. What you’re talking about can’t be done.” It’s the skepticism that is unrealistic, for that supposedly unrealistic project is, for better or for worse, already taking shape—right before the skeptic’s eyes, if they would only open their eyes, and see. . . . Signs of an emerging Catholic subculture . . . include . . . proudly orthodox new Catholic colleges and universities (and a few that are not new but have taken serious steps to refurbish their Catholic identity); new, similarly orthodox religious communities; media ventures like EWTN and Catholic radio, along with a growing number of websites . . . periodicals and publishing houses; professional organizations . . . and groups and movements committed to promoting an authentic Catholic spirituality for lay women and laymen living and working in the secular world.<sup>5</sup>

Yes, the outlines of this are clearly visible in America. They may not be so noticeable in places like Northern Europe—but they are there. Certainly, everywhere I travelled in Europe, I witnessed this newly-emergent Counter Revolutionary Catholic subculture. (Perhaps my language sounds dramatic or exotic. But what I see is certainly counter-cultural, if not downright Counter Revolutionary.)

For a new spirit in the Church, very different from forty years ago, now resists the ongoing secular revolution. As noted earlier, this owes immensely to the Papacy from 1978 to 2013. During this thirty-five year period, the Church started finding her “counter-cultural feet” again—after an era when liberal Catholicism reigned almost supreme. Once

again, she dared to resist the cult of popularity—sometimes, at least. Here we must acknowledge a potent collaborative effort between Wotyla and Ratzinger to start reining in the chaos and slowly steer the Church back to orthodoxy.

Moreover, the fruit of Wotyla and Ratzinger's labor is now evident in the new subculture Russell Shaw describes. Let us work to fortify it! Most of us, of course, do not possess means to initiate grand projects. Yet we can still *give*—prayers, effort, finances—to the newly-emergent initiatives around us. Moreover, the unprecedented realm of the internet and social media affords previously-undreamt-of opportunities to network and proclaim Counter Revolution anew.

A new Counter Revolution!—this means a movement *prepared to resist*—prayerfully, charitably, but firmly and thoroughly—the secular attack on Catholic and Christian principles. Here is something markedly different from the *National Catholic Reporter*. For the Catholics I have in mind care little for anodyne labels like “Spirituality” and “Peace,” which, by themselves, mean almost nothing. Instead, they strive for the exact opposite: preserving Christianity from everything that diminishes its uniqueness—including terms barely indistinguishable from New Age-isms. Counter Revolutionary Catholics, then, recognize what liberal Catholics seldom see, that these “politically correct” labels *impoverish* people. They strip them of the knowledge that Christianity offers anything more than a few feel-good liberal tropes.

### **Evangelization—Caring about People**

NIGHT and day, people are being robbed blind. They are robbed of knowing that the Christian Mystery even exists—let alone participating in it. Often unwittingly, well-meaning, liberal Catholics abet this process. For whilst many liberal Catholics evidently care for material hunger—the aching stomachs rich Westerners can barely

imagine—they do not sufficiently care for spiritual hunger—the aching souls denied the *Mystici Corporis Christi*.

By contrast, Counter Revolutionary Catholics *do* care about the people who suffer the hell of Enlightenment Despair. They care, because they know the Catholic Mystery offers something far beyond generic “Spirituality” and “Peace.” In a word, they care about *salvation*. And for this reason, they are *evangelical*—in the true sense of that word.

That true sense, alas, has gone astray in our society. On the one hand, it became lost by being largely associated with Protestant fundamentalists. On the other hand, evangelizing has become a dirty word in secular culture—associated with nothing but invasiveness and imposition. Christianity, it is said, is foisted on people. Now, in its long history, Christianity, it must be admitted, has not always been innocent in this regard. As Catholics, it is necessary to recognize this. Yet this does not mean that Catholics should grovel at the feet of liberals in atonement for our sins. For it is also necessary to remember how much liberal capitalists, secularists, communists, etc., are, likewise, far, far from being innocent!

Still, one cannot exonerate Christians from having sometimes imposed religion on people. We *are* fallen, like everyone else is fallen and it *is* a matter of saying *mea culpa*—whilst never forgetting that secularists, capitalists, liberal revolutionaries, etc., are likewise guilty. Let us humbly say *mea culpa* then, and humbly pray that those of other persuasions will one day also say *mea culpa* to us.

Yet confessing our collective guilt has nothing to do with renouncing evangelization, as some would have us believe. For there is both authentic evangelization and false evangelization. True evangelization means renouncing the fallen desire of our darkened hearts to use violence, whether intellectual, emotional, or physical violence. For violence, in whatever form, cannot be what the Master of Love meant when he said: “Go and make disciples of all the nations”

(Matthew 18:19).

Christianity is about freedom. It follows that authentic evangelization is concerned with restoring freedom. Here is what a renewed Catholic subculture must be engaged in. For the first step in restoring freedom is allowing souls to see this hidden, almost unimaginable, dimension to reality—Christ and His Church. Secular culture has robbed people of their access to the Catholic Mystery—and they deserve to have it returned to them.

Each of us can make a difference. Most of us have friends walled off by secular or “holistic” ideology—friends who *desperately need to see an alternative exists*. And, as Charles A. Coulombe notes, we ourselves may be the *only* individuals who can ever render the Catholic Mystery visible to them in the prevailing cultural blackout:

Practically speaking our non- and fallen away Catholic friends and relatives are the obvious field for us to work in. Once we begin to think of these people not as folk of whom we are fond of and are spiritually secure, but as souls who need the light of faith whom (in all likelihood) *we may be the only ones capable of bringing it to*, all sorts of methods of doing this will suggest themselves.

One of the most obvious is the sending of religious cards to all our acquaintances, Jewish, Protestant, or whatever. Fear not that they will be offended, after all they are not worried about offending you when they send “X-mas” cards bearing pictures of reindeer—which Catholics should find offensive. Similarly, invite such folk to Baptisms, First Communions and Confirmations. There is no better advertisement for the Faith to a non-Catholic than to see someone of whom he is fond participating devoutly in the liturgy and/or para-liturgical customs. [Italics mine]<sup>6</sup>

If I heed Coulombe's words, Lector, I am not imposing anything on anyone. Rather, I am simply daring—as a Catholic—to make my real self visible to my non-Catholic friends. At Christmas, my real self turns toward the birth of Jesus Christ—not reindeer. To reveal one's true self Does not real friendship entail precisely this?

But what cultural pressure exists to keep our faith hidden! How many of us *easily* cross ourselves or say grace in public? To refuse *the pressure to hide my Catholicity*, this is what I attempt with my old friends. Thus, I do not engage in heated arguments, as to why I think freedom is compromised in secular or New Age settings. (Although, of course, that is what I do believe.) Often, it is enough to simply make clear I no longer buy into liberal or New Age dogmas—that something very different now animates my soul.

For my New Age friends, even the slightest suggestion that another spirituality exists—Catholic spirituality—beyond their supposedly all-embracing “holistic” canopy can be disconcerting. They cannot conceive my spirituality entails anything significantly different from theirs. Thus, gently conveying that my new existence as a Catholic gives me something profoundly different from my former New Age existence can be the first step in extending freedom to them.

The secular world will certainly denounce us for proselytizing, if we make the slightest whisper of the Catholic Mystery. But a wakeful Counter Revolutionary Catholicism is alert to the secular proselytizing going on all around us. Charles A. Coulombe is right. Such apparently innocuous things as Christmas cards with reindeer offend the wakeful Catholic heart—for they *trivialize* the Christian Mystery. Such cards represent subtle counter-Christian proselytization, even if those who send them remain unconscious of what they are doing.

What they are unconsciously doing, however, is *colluding* with the secular blackout of Catholicism. Things like the NCR—with its “inoffensive” generic labels—likewise collude with the secular agenda. They help to sustain the wall of ideology that deprives people of

seeing what Christianity really is. For how long? For many people, the answer is: *the whole of their lives*. In other words, Secular Materialism *hurts* people (real living, breathing people). This is why what Charles A. Coulombe indicates is a moral duty for Catholics. It is necessary to stop colluding—if one truly cares about people. Authentic evangelization is not an option, if one “loves one’s neighbor.”

### **Christendom—an Unashamed Supernaturalism**

CATHOLICS of Faith realize the only real alternative to Secular Materialism is a renewed sacramental, Catholic, and Christian culture. This is to say, Christendom—even if it must begin afresh as a subculture. Yet this is what Christianity originally was: a small, alien subculture within the hostile Roman Empire. But the health and vitality of that subculture proved stronger than the pagan empire. And while that empire is long dead and gone, Christianity spreads out across the face of the planet. One day, the contemporary secular empire will disappear as the earlier pagan empire did. Even now, we witness the seeds of its destruction, amidst looming ecological catastrophe. Secular Materialism is unsustainable.

Catholics must begin the work of building a fertile alternative to that desert of Secular Materialism. The more each individual strives—through prayers, speech, action, gifting, etc.—the more these individual efforts can coalesce, forming the lattice for a new, dynamic subculture. This is what will challenge the secular blackout of Catholicism: a clear Counter-Revolutionary presence that stands visibly, distinctly apart from secular society. For such a subculture will witness to—rather than hide—the supernatural, soul-transforming power of the *Mystici Corporis Christi*.

Given the world-dominance of the Anglosphere, this witness appear particularly urgent in English-speaking countries. For as Anglo-

American society exports its values to the rest of the globe, it inevitably fosters a subtly Protestant understanding of Christianity. Thereby, *the mystical nature of the Church* is obscured. And it would help if Anglophones even dimly started to realize that not all Christianity conforms to their prevailing Protestant associations. In other words, things might change in the Anglosphere if only it is recognized that a different form of Christianity exists—one which is *unashamedly supernatural*.

If this were to happen, no doubt Catholicism would be assaulted in ways it is not commonly attacked today. For it would soon be censured as superstitious mumbo-jumbo, whose Priests believe they wield magical powers. Holy water, novenas, relics, scapulars, etc., would be ridiculed—just as they were in the past. So be it. The Catholic Mystery would at least be visible! Anglosphere folk would realize something odd was going on—something that did not easily fit their Protestant stereotypes.

Dear Lector, you may recall how my mother-in-law once asked if Kim was now a Biblical literalist, believing in things like a literal seven-day creation! And Kim's sister once imagined she had become a "Bible-thumper!" Here is how Catholicism frequently remains utterly misunderstood in the Anglosphere. How different things would be in the scenario I envisage. Secularists would not ask questions like: "You don't really believe God made the world in seven twenty-four hour periods, do you?" Instead they would ask: "You're not one of those weird Christians who believe God has a Body, which you eat, are you?" Or: "You don't really believe Priests have supernatural powers to wash away your sins, do you?" But in the Anglosphere, at least, questions like this are seldom asked—because the Anglosphere lacks precisely what we invoke here: a vibrantly *different* Catholic subculture, which unashamedly professes the *Mystici Corporis Christi*.

In the aftermath of Vatican II, Catholics played down their

differences with Protestants. But the new evangelical Catholic subculture will do precisely the reverse. It will *highlight the differences*—not to raise havoc with Protestants, but simply to let people know a different, “alternative” Christianity *actually* exists. In this scenario, many may be surprised by these Christians, who are not Bible-thumping literalists, but something altogether “weirder.” But whilst secular materialists will mock such “weirdness,” some drawn to New Age mysteries might find themselves mysteriously fascinated—and turn to the Catholic Mystery instead.

This is one reason I pay such special attention to the traditional Catholic movement, including small but immensely important apostolates like the *Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest* and the *Fraternity of St. Peter*. However, these still-small societies form but a minor part of the new Catholic Counter Revolution. There are manifold new initiatives, orders, colleges, schools, and more—the likes of which Russell Shaw has evoked for us. And there are also countless courageous diocesan Priests who are unashamed “Young Fogey.” Similar young lay “fogey” likewise play their part, obeying their Priests, upholding tradition and praying, as well as networking through a multitude of Catholic blogs, forums, and forms of social media. Here are the seeds of a new Counter Revolution, which need watering and tending. The secular desert must be reclaimed, inch by inch, foot by foot, if necessary, for the gardens of Christendom.

### **A Farewell from Ireland**

IN concluding my book, I sound a note of hope. For the things I invoke are indeed seeds of hope. We must also note, in passing, the real resurgence of Orthodoxy now evident in Eastern Europe. Whilst Orthodoxy is beyond the scope of this book, we should rejoice that the situation is vastly transformed from what it was thirty years ago under Communism. In this Eastern part of Christendom of old, people are

returning to the Holy Sacraments, rather than fleeing from them.

However, I do not want to encourage a facile, lazy hope—but one that remains vigilant to danger. Writing from Ireland, this is not difficult. What I see here wrenches my heart. I grieve for the children I see today who may never know what Ireland once gave their forefathers. Still, their plight cannot be hopeless.

Something must be done, for the Irish children and children everywhere becoming enshrouded. Secular Materialism must be resisted here in this land, as everywhere. Indeed, this small island assumes a particular importance for the English-speaking world. For it is the one place that once held the Catholic torch aloft in the Protestant-turned-secular Anglosphere. The light from this torch helped to sustain Catholic culture, then, in places like America, Australia, and England. It follows that the destruction of Catholic culture in Ireland is hardly without profound consequence for English-speaking Catholicism. Here, no doubt, is why certain forces have been diligently working to render Ireland thoroughly de-Catholicized, secularized, and thereby impotent in her ancient role as global emissary of Christianity.

Yet Ireland still affords vital signs as to what created and sustained a wakeful Catholic culture in the past—and what can do so again. For as much as Ireland is battered by Anglo-American materialism, the faith, even now, remains stronger here than most places in the West. And why? Part of the answer entails the profound spiritual “capital” this country accumulated in times past and from which she is still living. For example, I see the miracle of Eucharistic Adoration. Up and down the country, Ireland still has these wondrous side-chapels of Adoration. Once, they were built in great numbers and still they nourish the faithful today every day of the week. And here is another example. Not long ago, I spoke with a thoroughly secularized Irish lady. But she noticed my Miraculous Medal. “Oh yes,” she said. “We all had those as kids.” Perhaps wistfully, she added, “There must

be something to Christianity.”

I write these lines, dear Lector, from a culture where children everywhere were given Miraculous Medals and where nearly every Catholic home lit a votive lamp to His Most Sacred Heart. I write these words from a Catholic world where homes had holy water in fonts beside the door and where families prayed *Hail Mary full of grace* beside the fireside. And, of course, in Ireland, a massive portion of the population once went frequently to Confession and daily to Mass, like the prime minister, Éamon de Valera.

Today, Catholic Ireland is being crushed by aggressive secularizing forces. But there is more to it than this. For the Irish also ceased to wear their Miraculous Medals and to light their votive lamps. Hence, I say: Do not scorn the very things Our Lord and Our Lady provided to remedy the illness of modernity.

Many an Irishman or woman will laugh at me, of course, for saying such, just like their liberal counterparts all across the Anglosphere. But wherever they may be, whether in Ireland or not, liberal Catholics like this remain the product of modern Protestantized Catholicism. And such Catholicism, like Protestantism, is ever suspicious of things like Miraculous Medals and votive lamps. What can I do if I no longer wish to be a Catholic clone of Protestant Christianity? I will trust Our Lady’s promises. I will ask my Priest to consecrate my home to the Sacred Heart of Jesus! And living in Ireland, I will work and pray for a time when the Irish will remember their traditional devotions, which, no doubt, once afforded them more protection than they ever realized.

Sacramentals come from Heaven and Heaven obviously provided them for a *reason*. However, they are not Sacraments. Sacramentals alone are clearly not enough. What is needed is the vibrant life of the Sacraments—with frequent, sincere communion and confession. Here, above all, is where the FIRE to resist Secular Materialism can be found.

Thus, I close this book, dear Lector, knowing I must support a Catholic subculture in Ireland that resists—prayerfully and piously—the ongoing Secular Revolution. And I hope that you may feel the same in your own land, wherever it may be. If you are a Catholic of Faith, I pray you will dare to live your faith—*visibly*. Let yourself be a little sign to the world that *Catholic culture exists*. For particularly if you are English or American like myself, you may well represent (to borrow from Abraham Lincoln) the “last, best hope” your friends and colleagues have to see the Catholic Mystery.

And so I encourage you: Be part of the new evangelizing Catholic subculture. Even if you are neither capable, nor called to found a new university or television channel, you can still be an outpost of Christendom in the simple ways you speak or behave. You can reveal the Catholic Mystery in a sclerotic civilization.

Therefore, reveal that mystery. Send signs and signals of Christ and His Church. Neither say “Happy Holidays” when the Christ Mass comes, nor send forth cards with flying reindeer. Dare to reveal the Catholic Mystery. Reveal that world of Sacred Mystery—and *live* it.

Here is what I have to say. The heart of our culture grows mechanical, cold, and rigid. Yet Our Lord and Our Lady have provided means to mend our broken, braced, and hardened hearts. May our hearts begin to soften through the Sacraments and sacramentals they gave us. When the Holy Mass, the Holy Rosary, and the Cult of the Sacred Heart were *lived and cherished*, as once they were in Catholic Ireland and Catholic France, they fostered a vital, flourishing *sacred culture*. It was not the “sacred culture” of my New Age dreams. It was something unimaginably richer.

It is not necessarily easy, even for Catholics, to imagine this, in this arid time. But imagine it, we must. We must do everything we can to foster an authentic Christian subculture. We must provide a *visible, moral alternative* to Secular Materialism. We must begin to rebuild Christendom.

That is, if we, as Catholics, care about our children.

And so from this Isle of Emerald, I would bid you “farewell,” good Lector. But given my profound indebtedness to both Catholic France and Ireland, I shall say something else instead: *Adieu*—as well as *Bail ó Dhia is Muire duit*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *The Great Heresies* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1991), 143–45, 155.

<sup>2</sup> “Homily Of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI,” accessed May 31, 2016, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121011\\_anno-fede.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121011_anno-fede.html).

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927–1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Shaw, *American Church*, 194.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, 196.

<sup>6</sup> Charles A. Coulombe, *Puritan’s Empire* (Arcadia, CA: Tumbler House, 2008), 527–28.

<sup>7</sup> Old Irish blessing: May God and Mary bless you.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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