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INSIDE:

*Homily for the Mass of Christian Burial
of the
Reverend Nicholas L. Gregoris, S.T.D., Ed.D.*
BY THE REVEREND PETER M. J. STRAVINSKAS, PH.D., S.T.D.,

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Duc in Altum

As I sadly noted, ever so briefly, in our last issue of TCR, my beloved son in the Lord and our esteemed managing editor of TCR, Father Nicholas L. Gregoris, died, quite unexpectedly, on August 21.

In place of my usual editorial, I am sharing with you dear readers the homily I preached at Father Nicholas' Mass of Christian Burial.

Also included in this issue is a tribute to Father Nicholas from our regular film critic, Gilbert Colon, reflecting on his relationship with his fellow film buff.

For the foreseeable future, we shall continue to offer our readers the pleasure of Father Nicholas' homilies on various saints and feasts, as we had begun to do before his untimely death.

Finally, I would ask you, our loving and loyal supporters, to remember his noble soul in your prayers and Holy Masses, especially in the month of November, dedicated in a particular way to suffrage for the Poor Souls in Purgatory.

In your charity, kindly remember me as well in this time of profound loss and sorrow.

If you do these things, you will *duc in altum*.



Father Peter M. J. Stravinskias
Editor and Publisher

Cover depiction: *Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill* by Pieter Claesz Dutch, c. 1628

*Homily for the Mass of Christian Burial
of the
Reverend Nicholas L. Gregoris, S.T.D., Ed.D.*

PREACHED BY THE REVEREND PETER M. J. STRAVINSKAS, PH.D., S.T.D.,
ON 26 AUGUST 2024 AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS,
NEW YORK CITY.

Laudetur Iesus Christus! Praised be Jesus Christ!

Teddy and Angel, the Church joins you in sorrowing the loss of your son and brother; most importantly, she offers her prayers for the salvation of our beloved Father Nicholas. Thank you, Father Miara, for the hospitality of this beautiful church and for your decades-long supportive friendship of Father Nicholas. Thanks, in a most special way, to you, Cardinal O'Malley, for your most welcome presence and for your tender affection for our beloved from his boyhood.

On September 27, 1987, as I was vesting for the Sunday evening Latin Mass at Our Lady of Vilna Church downtown, a young fellow approached me, cassock and surplice slung over his arm, and asked, "Father, may I serve?" "It's a Latin Mass," I replied. "That's why I'm here," came the cheeky response. That was the fifteen-year-old Nicholas Gregoris. That was the encounter that launched us on a thirty-seven-year father-son relationship, which we now carry into eternity. Today, I understand much better, the grief of David for his son Absalom.



There's a lot of continuity and fulfillment in today's celebration. When we changed venue for our regular Latin Mass (in what Pope Benedict would style "the ordinary form"), we moved to this gem of a church, so that the young Nicholas served Holy Mass here, both as a high

school boy and a seminarian. It was here that he offered his First Solemn Mass. And it was in this parish that Father Sakano invited the newly ordained priest to assist his first summer. The chasuble he is wearing as he processes toward the heavenly Liturgy is the very one he wore at his First Mass, and the form of the Liturgy we pray today is the very form which brought him and me together.

Our first reader today is John Bigus, a friend of Father Nicholas from grammar school; he witnessed John's marriage and baptized his son. Our second reader is Sister Cora – a member of the wonderful Apostles of the Sacred Heart – who, in fifth grade, gave the young Nicholas his first hand missal.

The big elephant in the middle of our ecclesial living room begs the question, "How come? Why now? Why so soon?" The sage of the Old Testament attempts to give us a halting answer by acknowledging, first of all, "the people saw and did not understand." He suggests, however, that God had enclosed this mysterious event in His plan of Providence. Our very dear Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman penned a reflection on such matters – a reflection on which Father Nicholas often meditated and on which it behooves all of us to meditate frequently:

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his—if, indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

The sainted Cardinal continues:

Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may

throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about.

And then he presents this rousing faith-filled conclusion:

O Adonai, O Ruler of Israel, Thou that guidest Joseph like a flock, O Emmanuel, O Sapientia, I give myself to Thee. I trust Thee wholly. Thou art wiser than I—more loving to me than I myself. Deign to fulfil Thy high purposes in me whatever they be—work in and through me. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.

Indeed, Father Nicholas always sought “to be used” by the Almighty. He accomplished so much good, often despite the institution, not because of it. Which fact saddened him because he was a very “institutional” kind of guy – as all good Catholics should be. He accomplished so much good, generally unaware of his immense influence, exerted through his preaching, teaching, writing, wise counsel, and reverent celebration of the Sacred Liturgy.

When Catholics gather for a Mass of Christian Burial, they don’t assemble to “celebrate the life” of someone. They gather to lift up in prayer to Christ our King and Judge the soul of a sinner, who needs to be united to the once-offered Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross to His heavenly Father. Today we plead for mercy for a sinner, a title Father Nicholas was most ready to carry. We have yet further reason for confidence as we realize that this offering of the Holy Mass is taking place, precisely within the “Hour of Mercy.”

Saint Luke tells us that the sinful woman in his narrative was forgiven much because she loved much (see 7:47). That should be a consolation for us because we know that Father Nicholas was a man of many loves. As I detail his many loves, see if they are yours as well; if they are not, consider making them so.

He loved to reach out to people on their anniversaries, birthdays or name-days. It was his way of giving flesh and blood to Cardinal Newman’s notion of exerting “personal influence” to spread joy and gladness.

He loved the Sacred Liturgy with every fiber of his being. He took very seriously that plaque that adorns many a sacristy wall which urges: “Priest of Jesus Christ, celebrate this Mass as if it were your first Mass, your last Mass, your only Mass.” Which is why any liturgical aberrations caused him much pain and suffering.

He loved the truth. So, it was no accident that he chose for his ordination prayer card the line from Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer, "*Sanctifica eos in veritate*" (Sanctify them in the truth) (Jm 17:17), a reprise of which we heard in today's Gospel. That passion for truth made of him such an ardent apologist.

He loved the Church as the Mother Saint Paul tells us she is (see Gal 4:26). Attacks on her roused him to righteous indignation. The Church's seeming downward spiral over the past eleven years was also a source of great grief for him.

He loved our Catholic schools. Indeed, he was always quick to assert that it was the loving example and faithful witness of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart that stirred up in him the gift of faith and that planted in him the seeds of a priestly vocation. He then shared that faith with his family in that great work of what I like to call "reverse evangelization." Our schools touched him from boyhood to manhood at every level and made him the person of faith and the scholar we all knew him to be. In humble gratitude for his own Catholic education, he then taught at every level – elementary school, high school, college, and seminary – precisely as an act of gratitude for what he had received.

He loved languages, especially Latin in which he prayed and which he was always delighted to teach. He viewed languages as a window into the mind and heart of a culture, of a people. He was quick to greet strangers in their native tongue, to let them experience the Church's welcome and her loving embrace.

He loved the Sacred Priesthood. He was proud to be a public witness for Christ and His Church, which is why the only lay clothes he had were for the basketball court or the beach. He boasted of being a "JP2" priest and wanted to exhibit Saint John Paul's joyful living of the priestly vocation, while the clarity of Benedict XVI was a model for his own writing and teaching.

He loved to play the role of a holy fool, providing light-heartedness and humor everywhere he went. I looked forward to the midnight-knock on my door every evening as I was ready to doze off to be greeted with some silly comment or joke. G.K. Chesterton ends his magisterial work, *Orthodoxy*, with a speculative thought: "There was

some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.”

Father Nick wanted to give folks here below a little fore-taste of that mirth.

He loved Newman as a scholar, a man of faith, a model, a mentor. Which is why he chose to write his doctoral dissertation on Newman, and specifically the Cardinal’s Mariology. That work of his has been acknowledged in academia as the definitive text on the topic.

And, oh my, he loved Our Lady and was imbued with a filial devotion to her, turning to her at the dawn of every day and at its ending. Just as Mary was present at the outset of her Son’s public ministry and stood bravely by Him through the ignominy of the Cross, we have reason to hope that she was with her son Nicholas in his last moments, making good on his daily plea to her, “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.” Is it mere coincidence that today “just happens” to be the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa? I think not.



Icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa

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I have told you of his many loves; now, let me tell you something he absolutely hated – eulogies. I hope I have skirted around that sufficiently, so as not to incur his displeasure! So, let me balance the budget by recalling that, yes, our dear one was a sinner.

His most obvious fault was his Sicilian temper, which could get him into some trouble, but most often it was roused by his keen sense of truth and justice. He wanted truth and justice to triumph in a “New York minute,” which we could euphemize as a “holy impatience.” Not infrequently the justice he wanted to see meted out was more in keeping with that of the Godfather than that of the Kingdom.

He could also be rather self-willed and stubborn. I think he took as a holy corrective the beautiful words of Cardinal Newman in that poem and hymn we have come to know as “Lead, Kindly Light”:

LEAD, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home—

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou

Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path, but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on,

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone;

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

We hope that the first “angel face” he beheld on the other side of the veil was that of his own guardian angel. Happily, we may say, the last article he wrote was on the guardian angels.

Conscious of his sinfulness, he was most devoted to the Sacrament of Penance, which he had received but a few days before his untimely death. Being a good penitent also made him a most valued confessor.

From childhood, we have heard the salutary warning of Saint Peter that “Death comes like a thief in the night” (2 Pt 3:10). That is the final sermon preached by Father Nicholas, the most eloquent of his life, preached from the center aisle of this church. That said, we should remember that the best preparation for a holy death and the best guard against what we traditionally call “a sudden and unprovided death” is the living of a truly Christian life. And thus, Saint John teaches: “. . . perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18). It was that kind of humble confidence that made Father Nicholas choose as his priestly motto, “*Diligentibus Deum,*” the first words of Saint Paul’s assurance to the Romans: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose,” as we heard in today’s Second Reading (Rom 8:28).

Already as youngsters, we were encouraged to pray to Saint Joseph for “a happy death.” That sounds bizarre and even ghoulish to those outside the family of faith. However, if it’s true that Joseph died in the company of Jesus and Mary, what better person to lead us to “a happy death”? Interestingly, the young Nicholas graduated from Saint Joseph School in Little Italy and will be consigned to the earth at Saint Joseph Cemetery in Toms River, New Jersey. His life enfolded in the protecting and strong arms of the Foster Father of Our Lord.

The last book our prodigious author was working on was on the Holy Land. At the end of this Sacred Liturgy, we are going to enlist the assistance of the choirs of angels and martyrs to lead him into the heavenly Jerusalem, where he will see face-to-Face what he celebrated here on earth only in sign.

Yes, Father Nicholas was a man of many loves. In a most special way, he loved Newman; he loved Our Lady; and he loved the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On our sacristy wall is a prayer of preparation penned by Cardinal Newman, which we pray before every offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. As we now approach the altar of this church, which is our touchstone with Calvary, let us make these words our own, as they were of our beloved Father Nicholas:

O Holy Mother, stand by me now at Mass time, when Christ comes to me, as thou didst minister to Thy infant Lord—as Thou didst hang upon His words when He grew up, as Thou wast found under His cross. Stand by me, Holy Mother, that I may gain somewhat of thy purity, thy innocence, thy faith, and He may be the one object of my love and my adoration, as He was of thine. Amen.



The Death of Saint Joseph by Luca Giordano, c. 1696

***Homily preached by the
Reverend Nicholas L. Gregoris, S.T.D.
on Christmas 2016 at the Church of
the Holy Innocents, New York City***

“Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour, vouchsafe, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires, through the merits of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of His blessed Mother.”

Dear friends in Christ, the mystery of the Incarnation, of the enfleshment of God like us in all things save sin, is ineffable and beyond our comprehension, so my brother priests and I can only fall short when preaching on Christmas.

The Book of Wisdom announces this great mystery: “While all things were in quiet silence, and the night in the midst of her course, Your all-powerful Word bounded from Heaven’s royal throne, a fierce warrior into the doomed land” (18:14-15).

We have waited with bated breath for the birth of the Messiah, who is “Emmanuel,” “God-with-us.” The prophet Isaiah announced it long ago, and we are accustomed to hearing these words immortalized too in Handel’s beautiful Oratorio, the “Messiah”: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulder and His name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” The patriarchs and prophets of Israel, all those mentioned in Jesus’ formidable genealogy, longed to see the day of His coming, but most of them did not live to see it, except for John the Baptist, the Lord’s Precursor, and the old man Simeon who embraced the newborn Savior in the Temple of Jerusalem, hailing Him as “a light of revelation for the Gentiles (nations) and the glory of [God’s chosen] people, Israel.”

Lowly shepherds and exotic Magi, guided by angelic hosts, were given the special privilege of witnessing the first Nativity scene. Bowing down, full of humility and rejoicing with exceedingly great joy, they entered through the “door of humility” that today allows visitors to enter the ancient Basilica of the Nativity. Upon entering, they presented gifts, first and foremost, themselves, and then perhaps too their sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels and dromedaries laden with gold fit for a king; incense as used by priests to worship God in sacrificial offerings; myrrh, a prophetic gift, which

would be used to anoint Jesus' Body on Good Friday in preparation for His burial and eventual Resurrection on the third day.

At the first creche, the Shepherds and Magi attended to the Christ-Child with Mary His Mother and St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse and Jesus' putative or legal father, worshiping the Creator of the universe in the guise of an infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Over two thousand years ago in the little town of Bethlehem, a name which translated from the Hebrew means "House of Bread," the Word of God by whom all things were created and came into being, became incarnate and was born of the humble Virgin, Mary of Nazareth, by the power of the Holy Spirit, entering into our sinful world in the fullness of time in order to become its sole Savior and Redeemer, "God from God, Light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father." How fitting, then, that St. Joseph bestowed on Our Blessed Lord the name "Jesus," for this Hebrew word means "God saves!"

After the Fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, God willed to save mankind; to recapitulate all things by sending us a Second, a Better and a New Adam entrusted to the care of a Second, a Better and a New Eve. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in the second century A.D., imagines how God the Father, while forming Adam from the clay of the earth, already envisioned the Incarnation of the New Adam, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. We are still the beneficiaries of the New Adam's saving work for, through Baptism, we became God's own adopted sons and daughters. Jesus, for sure, is God's Only-Begotten Son from all eternity, but through the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son, we are now "sons in the Son" (*"filii in Filio"*). The birth of the God-Man has, thanks be to God, made possible our rebirth.

It is not enough for us to celebrate Our Lord's birth with Christmas parties and family gatherings; we must, so St. Augustine taught, allow Him, who is full of grace and truth, to be reborn in our hearts; to transform our minds; to lift up our spirits; to sanctify our souls; and to refashion our bodies into His own glorified Body. The Word of God cannot remain silent in the Public Square; it must resound ever more clearly and eloquently through our own words and more importantly through our deeds of charity, especially toward those who, like the Holy Family of Nazareth, find themselves poor, excluded and marginalized.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem, in a stable where animals ate and slept, has now become our Eucharistic food and drink. He invites us to His Sacrificial Banquet, the Holy Mass, as to a new Bethle-

hem and a new Calvary. Saint John Henry Newman proffers this Eucharistic meditation:

I place myself in the presence of Him, in whose Incarnate Presence I am before I place myself there. I adore Thee, O my Savior, present here as God and as man, in soul and in body, in true flesh and blood. I acknowledge and confess that I kneel before that Sacred Humanity, which was conceived in Mary's womb, and lay in Mary's bosom; which grew up to twelve, wrought miracles, and spoke words of wisdom and peace; which in due season hung on the cross, lay in the tomb, rose from the dead, and now reigns in Heaven. I praise, and bless, and give myself wholly to Him, who is the true Bread of my soul, and my everlasting joy.

Dear friends, at Holy Mass we are not mere passive spectators but actual participants who, through our sincere devotion, humble prayer and silent adoration on bended knee, join the Shepherds and Wise Men in recognizing the Babe of Bethlehem as the chief Shepherd and Guardian of our souls, the very embodiment of all wisdom for all ages unto ages of ages world without end, for every culture, for peoples of every time and place, for all angels and all men, indeed for all creation. Together with our Blessed Mother Mary and with St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, each one of us approaches the Lord's crib with fear and trembling because we know that when He comes again He will not come as a helpless Baby but as the Son of Man, the universal Judge of the living and the dead.

The majesty and awesome power of Christmas Night and the luminous clarity of Christmas Day are only surpassed by the blessed night of the Easter Vigil and the brilliant light of Easter morn, for God's light is already penetrating through the wintry darkness and the Rising Sun of Righteousness who, from the cradle to the Cross, from Mary's virginal womb to the unused and empty tomb (the Holy Sepulcher), longs to become the Morning Star rising in our hearts.

We must continue to prepare the way for His coming in our midst. Our great God and Savior made His appearance in the flesh and will come again on the clouds of Heaven on the Last Day but, in the meantime, we must welcome His Advent as He comes to us disguised not only as a babe in a cradle but truly and substantially present under the simple forms of consecrated (transubstantiated!) bread and wine. The Eucharistic Lord and Savior wants us to make each of our souls His new cradle. He seeks to dwell in us more fully through the mystery of the Holy Eucharist,

which is the prolongation and perpetuation of the mystery of the Incarnation even as it is the prolongation and perpetuation of the Paschal Mystery of the Lord's Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven. The same Holy Spirit who hovered over the waters of the abyss in the beginning of time, before God created "from nothing" (*ex nihilo*) the heavens and the earth; which Spirit made fecund the virginal womb of Mary and raised the Lord Jesus' Body from the slumber of death; in this and every Mass transforms mere bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Son of Mary, the Son of God.

Here, we may make our own the words of Vespers sung in the Byzantine Liturgy on Christmas:

O Christ, what shall we offer You for your coming on earth as a Man for our sake? Every creature gives thanks to You: the angels offer hymns of praise, the heavens give a star, wise men present gifts, the shepherds, their wonder, the earth provides a cave, and the desert a manger. As for us, we offer You a Mother, a Virgin Mother. O God who are from all eternity, have mercy on us!

What then should be our response?

It shall be to exchange once and for all the "*mysterium iniquitatis*" (the "mystery of iniquity") for the "*mysterium fidei*" (the "mystery of faith") or the what St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy calls the "*mysterium pietatis*" (the "mystery of godliness"). The wisdom of the Fathers of the Church and the Sacred Liturgy teach us that at Christmas there takes place an "*admirabile commercium*" (a "wonderful exchange"). What is this "Wonderful Exchange"? It is the exchange by which, in the words of St. Athanasius of Alexandria, "God became man, so that men might become gods." The Incarnation – you see – is the beginning not only of our redemption and salvation but even of our divinization. Our celebration of Christmas is not merely an exchange of presents with our loved ones and friends, but it is first and foremost the welcoming of the greatest gift of all, which is Christ the Lord, and asking Him to make us resemble more His holiness and goodness, His meekness and mildness in our everyday lives as Catholic Christians.

This is why we need to resist mightily the ongoing secularization of Christmas. We must "put Christ back into Christmas" as the "real reason for the season," not only by wishing each other "Merry Christmas," rather than "Happy Holidays," but also by making sure our focus is not primarily on material realities like the hustle and bustle of shopping for Christmas presents and the preparation of elaborate meals but more so on spiritual realities



Adoration of the Magi by Gentile da Fabriano Massi, c. 1423

like having recourse to the Sacrament of Penance; attending Holy Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation; receiving Holy Communion in a state of grace, that is free of any and all mortal sins; reconciling with our enemies; loving our neighbor as ourselves through acts of kindness that transcend this “season of giving” to touch the lives of others throughout the new year and indeed throughout the rest of our lives.

The joy of Christmas cannot be contained under a Christmas tree. We must exude this joy ourselves by being cheerful givers who recognize each person’s inherent dignity and the inviolable sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death. The light of Christmas cannot be merely superficial lights decorating our homes and Christmas trees but must be authentic supernatural light that permeates every aspect of our society. This light must transform all those dark and empty recesses of our society and souls marred by sin and overshadowed by death and destruction, so that they may become happy dwelling places

in which God's Will and Law are wholly embraced and His plan for our salvation becomes our plan of action.

The material abundance we enjoy should not be hoarded. Rather, we should feel compelled by the love of Christ who, as St. Paul writes, "became poor that we might be rich by His poverty," to share with others out of that same abundance, so that they too might have a reason to be joyful at Christmas time when otherwise they might experience sadness and depression because they have been left out in the cold, ignored and forgotten even by those who were once dear to them.

The forgotten man and woman may not always need a helping hand in the material sense but may in fact be longing for someone to share with them the joy of the Gospel message, pure and unadulterated. Christmas is not an invitation to reinvent the Gospel but to re-present the splendid fullness of truth, which is our Catholic and Apostolic Faith, doing so with all due respect and charity, especially for the sake of those among us who have not been properly evangelized and catechized.

The unity and purity of the Holy Family of Nazareth is a reminder that we individually, and collectively in and with our families, need to be more unified and purified of all that separates us from the love of God and mutual love; from all that sullies our pathways to His eternal Kingdom. The sacredness of the indissoluble marriage bond and the beauty of the family as God ordained them from the beginning should not be merely themes we hallow in our lovely Christmas cards and carols, but sacred truths bidding us to embrace the holiness of marriage and the family wholeheartedly and unreservedly as integral to the fabric of our lives, for indeed the family is the "domestic church," and we are called, as St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI consistently exhorted us, to transform the human family into a civilization of love and truth as God Himself wills it.

St. Gregory of Nazianzen, a fifth-century Father and Doctor of the Church, taught that what has not been assumed has not been redeemed. Thus, we know from the Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul, that in becoming man God assumed our human nature with all its weakness and sinfulness, in all its wonder and complexity, so much so that "He who knew not sin became sin that we might know the righteousness of God."

And so, as the priest commingles water and wine in the precious chalice during the Offertory of the Mass, he prays a marvelous prayer that is actually taken from an ancient Collect for Christmas: "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we



*Miniature in the Grandes Heures
of Anne of Brittany by Jean
Bourdichon, c. 1503–1508*

come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.” This is my Christmas wish for each one of you present here today. I wish, better yet, I pray and offer this Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for you and your families, because I desire that each one of you enter into that “wonderful exchange” in a way that is most personal and most meaningful.

Pope St. Leo the Great, in arguably his most famous Christmas sermon, wrote: “Remember, O Christian, your dignity!” And this, dearly beloved brethren in Christ, is your dignity that the Creator of the universe became one of us to save the everyone in the universe – one at a time, you and me and all those entrusted to our care.

Permit to conclude this homily with a poem composed by Christopher Smart, who lived from 1722 to 1771.

Where is this stupendous stranger,
Prophets, shepherds, kings, advise;
Lead me to my Master’s manger,
Show me where my Saviour lies.

O most mighty, O most holy,
Far beyond the seraph’s thought!
Art thou then so mean and lowly
As unheeded prophets taught?

O the magnitude of meekness,
Worth from worth immortal sprung!
O the strength of infant weakness,
If eternal is so young!

God all-bounteous, all-creative,
Whom no ills from good dissuade,
Is incarnate -- and a native
Of the very world He made.

A most blessed and merry Christmas to you and your families!

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At the Movies with Father Nicholas Gregoris: A Reminiscence



GILBERT COLON *has written for Catholic World Report, Mercator, Strand Mystery Magazine, Cinema Retro, Filmfax, the St. Martin's Press newsletter Reactor, and others. He served as a researcher on the Gauntlet Press edition of Taxi Driver: The Screenplay published to commemorate the film's 40th anniversary. He can be reached at gcolon777@gmail.com.*

I should have suspected something was amiss when the Reverend Nicholas L. Gregoris did not text my family a name-day greeting for my son Louis, whom he knew from infancy. Such was his custom, as the Reverend Peter M.J. Stravinskias noted in his Holy Innocents homily at Father Gregoris' Funeral Mass. This thoughtful custom extended to greetings for Father's Day, Mother's Day, and any number of civic holidays, birthdays, and holy days. In the case of my son, it was probably not difficult for Father Gregoris to remember since, as he told me, "I'm glad to hear that my namesake (my middle name is Louis) is doing well ... He has a powerful protector in St. Louis IX, King of France."

Needless to say, I was devastated to discover news of Father Gregoris' sad, sudden, and untimely passing. I was only to learn this through a Holy Innocents parishioner the night before the funeral, enabling me to call out of work at the last minute so I could attend. The news was shattering. It is almost impossible adequately to put into words what Father Gregoris meant to our family, but I intend to try.

For the past ten years, I have served as film columnist for *The Catholic Response*, and it was at the recommendation of Father Gregoris that I was welcomed aboard Father Stravinskias' esteemed publication. His advice at the time, when writing about film, was that I help readers "to understand its inherent value from both a cinematographic and Catholic-Christian perspective." He also encouraged me to "also write an occasional negative review of a film. We want our readers to be informed on all fronts." I like to think that I have lived up to some of that. I have at least tried.

But what led to my role as contributor here goes back further, to the friendship I shared with Father Nicholas for almost fifteen

years, which truly began in full when we discovered we were both film buffs and started going to the movies together. In fact, most of the time I wrote in *The Catholic Response*, I wrote as if I were writing for him to read. I imagined my words as things I might have said back in the days of our leisurely evening walks together after taking in a moving picture.

We first met at downtown St. Andrew's, near the Manhattan courthouse where I work, when he was newly assigned to that parish. His homilies captivated me immediately. They were erudite, yet down-to-earth, and full of practical devotional suggestions and illuminating tidbits on the lives of the saints. I was instantly struck by the beautiful reverence of his every weekday Mass which he celebrated with Sunday solemnity.

In fact, once friends, I always imagined that it would be *he* who would someday sing *my* funeral Mass. I told him that once, and said if he would imbue my funeral with the beauty of holiness, my only other request would be that I be present for it, a little like Robert Duvall's character in *Get Low*.

We both shared a love for the smells-and-bells of Catholic worship, and a disdain for when denominations used high church pomp and pageantry like plainchant and incense as a smokescreen to obscure doctrinal deformation, heterodoxy, and outright error.

It must be admitted that Father Gregoris, in his old-school zeal, could be quite blunt when discoursing. The way he put across his thoughts and feelings reminded me of when Pope Benedict XVI quoted the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos at his Regensburg address, saying that "[t]he emperor...expressed himself so forcefully," as so many did in those days. The Emperor Manuel was a man of his time, and Father Nicholas was indeed a man out of time. Never one to lose his sense of humor, it must be why he once signed one of his e-mails, "Father MC Hammer of Heretics."

Besides being a fierce and fiery defender of orthodoxy, he at the same time possessed a soft and very personal pastoral touch, in my experience a rare combination you do not often see. I witnessed him as a priest in action like this many a time. As such, he was a friend to many at St. Andrew's, to many at the courts where I worked who heard Mass there, including a mutual friend of ours, a court officer by the name of Larry Muldoon, who died an early death. Father Gregoris gave him steadfast friendship and support during that time and saw him through the days when Larry served as his dying brother Arthur's caregiver, despite not being his parish priest.

Perhaps it is not proper to say so, but no matter what parish I belonged to or where I was attending Mass, like Larry, I always regarded Father Gregoris as my true parish priest. And also my unofficial spiritual director of sorts, recommending to me prayers and devotions and answering my every question about Church doctrine, history, liturgy, you name it. Whether in Manhattan or New Jersey, he was always a missive or phone call away. Father Gregoris remained in touch with a wide circle of past parishioners, friends, and acquaintances, always keeping in constant contact after leaving his various assignments through e-mail, texts, social media, the telephone... I have no idea how he found the time, what with his many book and article projects.

I cannot precisely remember how our movie outings began, but it was upon his arrival at St. Andrew's that it became apparent, from our chats after Mass, that we shared many of the same interests, especially the cinema. We liked the same films, directors and actors; appreciated much of the same classical music and art history; shared a certain sensibility and outlook on life, not only about the Church and its role in the Public Square, but her mission for civilization itself. Eventually, we would wind up spending our after-hours time catching movies and the occasional play, dining beforehand with my wife and infant son. We even had the same culinary taste for Mediterranean cuisine in common. This routine lasted for many years before his departure from St. Andrew's. Like Father Nicholas, many of those places are now gone, most notably the Spanish restaurant El Paso where we regularly enjoyed dishes of paella. We never did make it to the now-closed Pulino's down in the Bowery, where we always meant to go.

It is hard to believe that our friendship was only fifteen years because at times it felt like we had grown up together. My wife remarked more than once, "You two are like long-lost brothers separated from birth." She would know, after all, as she and my newborn son were part of my movie rituals with Father Gregoris prior to showtime. We would catch the early bird specials whenever possible, weekly patronizing lower Manhattan's many Italian, Spanish, and Greek restaurants over the years. (My son was too young for movie-going then.)

I remember the very first time we ate out together before a movie. Father Gregoris carefully selected a Greek restaurant because it featured a live classical guitarist who, he thought, would engage baby Louis, and he was correct – my son was mesmerized by the guitarist's playing and preoccupied with the plucking of the strings, allowing us adults to converse amongst ourselves, uninterrupted.

Often I have heard it said that how someone treats service industry workers, like waiters and waitresses for instance, tells a lot about the character of the person. If so, the always-gracious Father Gregoris was a living saint. I cannot remember a dinner with him where, if the waitstaff spoke another language, he did not try to engage them in their native tongue in the warmest of ways and make friendly small talk.

Those times for me felt like a throwback to a past that one sees in old movies and television shows where the family priest dined and socialized with parishioners outside of Sunday Mass, back when Hollywood and network TV respected faith and men of the cloth. It was a warm feeling that lasts till this day. The feeling must have been mutual. Of those times he wrote me, "I'm grateful for the joy that you and your family have brought to my life. You have helped reinforce my priestly identity and bolstered my priestly mission." If true, in turn, he certainly encouraged me in my role as a new father.

By his own admission, Father Gregoris was always very reserved, adding that "once some confidence is established, I open up and perhaps too much." On our last outing, he broke form and, after dinner, impetuously whisked Louis off his feet and held him aloft to give him a brief ride in the air like an airplane; that must have been his farewell to my son.

Father Nicholas was always coming up with whimsical monikers for my son like "Louis, the Sun King of Union Square," "chip off the old block Emperor Louis the Good, the Bad, and the Blunt," or "King Louis the Short, Pope of Union Square" (a reference to *The Pope of Greenwich Village*). I remember his writing me, "I have an idea for Oct 4, the Feast of St. Francis. Ask [Louis' mother] Carolyn to bring baby Louis to the Bronx Zoo. If, when, Louis becomes a priest, then he'll be able to return to the Zoo and bless the animals." Once he even went further and wrote, "He's a wonderful baby and resembles Karol Wojtyla (aka Pope John Paul II) as a baby. I'll pray that Louis becomes a future pope." Father Gregoris had high hopes for my son, or at least a high regard.

Sadly, my son, now in his teen years, does not really remember these idyllic days, just as he does not remember the New York City he loved in his childhood before it turned into an open sewer, compared with its better days. I wonder if Father Gregoris would even recognize his Manhattan these days. Yet it is good to have planted the seeds in Louis' formative years that it is perfectly natural and normal for laity to befriend priests and break bread with them at table outside of Mass.

One of the other things we had in common was our shared love of Father Stravinskias and his writings. I was not aware of this until we had made plans, in celebration of my birthday one year, to see a “Wedding of Cana” multimedia art exhibit at the Park Avenue Armory. As a surprise guest, he brought along Father Stravinskias. I said, had I known, I would have brought my volumes of *Catholic Answers* with me for him to autograph.

Father Gregoris once described Father Stravinskias, age seventy-something at the time, as strong as an ox and still going strong – stronger than he, he was quick to add, considering the many health complications that plagued and ultimately caught up with him. Without Father Peter, he remarked at another time, he said he would be adrift. “Father Stravinskias is truly a remarkable priest, a rock much like his namesake,” he wrote. “He is constant as the Northern Star ... I’m very grateful for his friendship, mentorship and hospitality. God only knows where I would be right now had he not welcomed me into his life.” It serves as a reminder that good priests are hand-made by good mentors, not just rolled off a seminary assembly line. In this the many who knew and loved Father Gregoris and benefited from his priestly ministry and friendship probably owe Father Stravinskias more of a debt of gratitude than they realize.

On October 13, 2022, only two years ago, Father Gregoris wrote me this: “2022 has been a never-ending roller-coaster ride challenging my own physical well-being. Consequently, it has been a very unproductive year for me albeit not uneventful from a medical perspective. Furthermore, many friends and acquaintances of mine have passed on this year – and in recent past years – in an unexpected fashion leaving me at times to contemplate my own mortality perhaps more than one would consider normal at age 50. That having been said, I plow forward with the hope, perhaps more illusionary than realistic, of better times ahead.” He also once told me that his paternal grandfather died tragically in his fifties. Father Gregoris was only 52 when he left us.

Distance and domestic duties made it hard to return to where we were once Father Gregoris left St. Andrew’s. I had harbored hope, even the belief, that some turn of events would bring him back to Manhattan, however occasionally, where we could resume our dinners and movie-going, and that he could watch my son grow up. They would have loved following basketball, baseball, and soccer together. I felt so sure that by some twist of circumstance our paths would cross again in more than a fleeting way, but alas my hunch proved to be wrong.

As said, he remained always an e-mail, text, or call away, always ready with a prayer or Mass intention for a sick or suffering friend or family member in need. "Please know that I pray for you and your family in good times and bad," he would write. Whenever I lost someone I knew, there was never a name I gave him that he would not offer up at Mass for me, be it for my father or parents-in-law or even just the neighbor down the hall. Elsewhere, he wrote me, "I celebrate Mass daily and always pray for my friends, especially those who are sick and suffering, so I've got your many intentions covered." We have all lost a stalwart friend and spiritual ally.

When my father died this past March, Father Gregoris sent several messages, by text to my wife, by e-mail to me, then called and spoke to me at length over the telephone and offered his indispensable condolences and assurances that my father's soul would be remembered at his Masses. I did not expect that Father Gregoris and my father, who died months apart from one another, would never see my son, entering his first year at Regis High School, begin a new chapter in life.

After his Manhattan days, when we were no longer a stone's throw from the many movie houses and eating establishments we once frequented, came the copious correspondences and telephone calls. I rarely get to the movies nowadays, but when I saw *Godfather* director Francis Ford Coppola's *Megalopolis* in the theater, I wanted to write and ask Father Gregoris what he made of the film's New York-as-ancient Rome setting. I wondered, when in the film Mayor Cicero and his daughter Julia speak classical Latin to each other, if he would have corrected their Latin; he once volunteered himself, unsuccessfully, to provide Latin corrections he detected in the original cut of *The Godfather Part III* to Coppola and his production crew when they were recutting the film for its 30th anniversary.

Our last communiqué was an exchange where we swapped documentary recommendations by our favorite filmmakers, and where to watch them, all of them about Italy or Little Italy. My wife and I will miss his many missives with headlines ranging from the intellectually serious "The Cultural Revolution and Us" and "The West Is Falling. Cardinal Müller Has a Solution" to links to articles like "Evil monks didn't realize the sweeper monk they bullied was a peerless kung fu master!" and "Cat roams university campus for 4 years, gets doctoral degree." It is going to be hard to do without his friendship.

It is barely an exaggeration to say how hardly a conversation or correspondence would go by that did not eventually include

some *Godfather* reference or quote. The two of us even collaborated on a *Catholic Response* essay on *The Godfather Part III* (TCR, March-April 2021) since it seemed like we were the only ones in the world who liked that sequel. His well-known infatuation with the *Godfather* films is why Father Stravinskias invoked it in his homily at the funeral Mass, saying, “He wanted truth and justice to triumph in a ‘New York minute,’ but not infrequently, the justice he wanted to see meted out was more in keeping with that of the Godfather than that of the Kingdom.”

Before anyone gets the wrong idea, it should be said that Father Gregoris approved of Pope Francis’ admonition and informal excommunication of mafiosi in 2014. I agree with Father Nicholas that “the timeless appeal of the *Godfather* films is not so much captured by the violence portrayed as by the intensity of the familial relationships that somehow resonate with Americans from all walks of life over the course of several decades.” What attracted him was the fact “that these films are suffused with a great deal of Italian beauty, especially in the scenes depicting life in Sicily: authentic Sicilian dialect, food, family gatherings, music, opera, etc.” He concluded by making me an offer I could not refuse, that “[s]omeday we should watch these films together, so that I can share my commentary with you more effectively, if you’re truly interested.” I never was able to find the time to take him up on his offer, and now it is forever too late.

Father Stravinskias invited mourners to gather after the Funeral Mass at Arno Ristorante, the same Italian eatery where a banquet was once held in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of *The Catholic Response*. I vacillated, but in the end I decided against joining everybody, not feeling up to food. Walking home, I fretted whether I had made the right decision, but then I heard the familiar and distinct strains of Nino Rota’s music from *The Godfather*. At first, I thought I was imagining it but, as it grew louder, I determined it was coming from Madison Square Park. I rushed into the park and came upon the street musician blaring the film score with his trumpet. Father Gregoris said he did not believe in coincidences, and neither do I. A woman from Venezuela at a retreat I recently attended called such coincidences “Diosidencias.”

When I think of Father Gregoris, I am reminded of the friendship between Lieutenant Kinderman and the Greek-American priest Father Karras, and later Father Dyer, in William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist* and his sequel novel *Legion*. They hit it off when they discover a joint love of movies, Kinderman saying to

Father Dyer, in a quote from *Casablanca*, “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.” Ever after the pair trades movie quotes, quips, and trivia as if it were their own secret lingo, in between their loftier talks about God’s existence and the problem of evil and suffering.

But more than film and food, it was most of all the Cross that Father Gregoris and I had – have – in common, for I know it will be the only way our mutual paths will one day cross again.



Madison Square Park After the Rain by Paul Cornoyer, c.1900

Is There a Right to Have Children? Part Two

BY MATTHEW LEE ANDERSON

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Good and Gracious Gifts – Gone Wrong

The tragedy of childlessness is real, and unspeakably deep. Childlessness means gaps in the common life of friendship with other parents, whose all-consuming kid activities are a reminder of what we are missing out on. It means confronting loneliness in old age and wondering who will bury us if we outlive our siblings. More than those, though, it means the absence of a lineage, of descendants who carry on the name we were given and that we forged through our character and life. The one with children stands proud “at the city gates,” Psalm 127 says, because children form the reputation of their parents as no one else can. The command to honor parents is tied to living long on the earth, which secures a name for both the parent and the child; in this sense, children are an “inheritance from the Lord” (Ps 127:3). Begetting a child is an assertion, in deed if not in word, that it is good to be ourselves, together with the one we love, and that we need not be ashamed of such goodness. To face infertility soberly and honestly is to address squarely the question of the value of our own existence and life.

Theologians have sometimes met these frustrations with blunt appeals to the Gospel, which in their reading more or less demands that childless couples get over it. Karl Barth offers the glib (even if true) word that childless couples “must set their hope on God and therefore be comforted and cheerful.” More recently, theologian Michael Banner’s antipathy toward the unmet longing for children prompts him to argue that moral theology should “deny the existence of (and repudiate) the desire for the child of one’s own,” and “deny the tragedy of childlessness which that child is intended to relieve.” Unlike Barth’s position, Banner’s view has the misfortune of being both callous and false. The goods of nature are real goods, and we cannot so quickly move past our sorrow for not receiving them.

While the tragedy of childlessness is real, though, it is of a peculiar sort. It is not the tragedy of being denied what we are owed, of not receiving our due. We have no more a “right” to conceive a human being than we have a right to marry one. The way a relationship begins shapes its character, and framing the parent-child relationship through the language of “rights” distorts it from the outset. The nature of parental love is sacrificial: to give gratuitously and to endure the long, joyful, and sad series of goodbyes as the child enters the mature freedom of adulthood. To consider children an entitlement introduces a possessiveness into the relationship that is antithetical to such a love and inimical to both parties’ flourishing. Through the deep struggle to set aside these unfulfilled desires and trust the kindness of God, childless couples (paradoxically) learn to cultivate the very form of sacrificial love they long to share.

It is better to think of children as a gift. The paradox of procreating is that it involves so many limits on our agency – that there is so much beyond our control. It is plausible to think that all we can do is try to procreate, as the success of any particular act of intercourse in generating life is highly contingent; so much luck and so many inefficiencies are involved in forming human life that one might reasonably doubt the intelligence of the process’s designer.

The advent of artificial reproductive technologies might seem to correct this design flaw. But in doing so, IVF suggests that childlessness is a disease. If IVF is a “therapeutic” intervention on par with dialysis machines or other medical treatments, then there is something wrong with the couple who has not conceived. Many infertile couples already feel “broken.” Medicalizing the creation of a child inherently reinforces that perception, making childlessness even more of a burden than it was before.

Instead, in relinquishing control, a couple may find that the luck and contingencies involved in bringing life into the world also bind them together: to attempt conception requires, after all, the frequent and successive uniting of a couple in love. Theologian William May once wrote that sex must be “intended to be open to the gift of life,” which is an odd formulation. After all, it is rare to think we intend to be open to a gift. We generally think we intend what we can bring about ourselves. What child, after all, “intends to be open” to receiving a gift at Christmas? Yet the vulnerability within the process of generating human life puts sharp limits on what we can do in bringing new life into the world. We can be the occasion for God’s action in generating a life who bears the image of God – but we cannot compel Him to do so.

Such an approach allows for genuine grief when such a gift is not given. The blessing of the Lord precedes, accompanies, and surrounds Genesis 1:28's exhortation to be "fruitful and multiply." Whether command or something else (and I think it is not a command), the generativity of a people is a mark of divine favor upon them. It is a fine thing to seek blessings from the hand of God, and an occasion for sorrow when we are not given them. Yet that grief is intrinsically qualified by the limits on our agency, and the claims we can make in light of them: because we cannot bring about a child, we must release ourselves into the hand of God.

Childlessness is not a pathology in need of a remedy, but rather a disclosure of the deepest truth about human life: that it comes from God. In the unfulfilled desire for children, couples come face-to-face with the fundamental core of human existence, the sheer givenness of our life behind which we simply cannot go and for which we must simply be grateful – that we live and move and have our being only as the gift of God. Such is the cross and calling of childless couples.

The Household and the Cross

Every Christian couple who uses IVF has their reasons. Finding the grief of infertility intolerable and the hope of IVF irresistible is more than understandable. It takes either masochism or heroic strength to oppose the temptations to satisfy the longing for children by making life within the laboratory. These parents are as much victims of the lordless powers as willing participants in their regime. In a world where getting what you want remains the only principle, it seems especially unjust to tell the childless that they must live with unfulfilled desires. No one else is, after all.

If we look beyond the industrialization of fertility, though, we will find that we are all implicated in the impulse to escape the limits of our flesh of which artificial reproduction is only the outer edge. This issue merely makes the refusal to honor our bodies more transparent.

Western society's widespread desensitization to the body has made it increasingly indifferent toward other, more violent forms of manipulating nature. What began with efforts to help infertile couples has culminated in the wildly unregulated use of surrogates, an exploitative practice that threatens to sever the link between birth and parenthood. Stranger forms of making life lie on the horizon, too, as gametogenesis will enable us to make human beings out of stem cells from any combination of humans, and artificial wombs promise to free women from the

burden of gestation altogether. This seamless, anti-life garment of “control” extends to the end of life as well; we increasingly pursue medical treatment to the uttermost in order to forestall death, on the one hand, while turning toward the euphemistically named “medical aid in dying” on the other. The reshaping of our society’s imagination on matters of life and death seems to know no limits.

The first step to forming Christian imaginations in the realm of sex and marriage is to expand their horizons in a different direction. The Gospel offers an account of the human family that is less simple and more inclusive than the odes to the blessing of procreation may suggest.



Hannah giving her son Samuel to the priest by Jan Victors, c. 1645

Even the Old Testament qualifies the value of a biological lineage in palpable and sometimes shocking ways. Hannah’s song after birthing and releasing Samuel not only offers hope to the childless but issues judgment on those with children: “The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn” (1 Sm 2:5). That song is echoed in Psalm 113:9: God “gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.” “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear,” the Lord says in Isaiah 54:1, “Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married.”

The desolation of childlessness has its home on the Cross, and its hope in the Resurrection. The childlessness of Jesus remains

the great qualifier and challenge to any pro-natalism, as His life opens up the possibility of a kinship that transcends (without destroying) the value of procreative bonds. While Mary is the biological Mother of Jesus, Joseph (who some sources suggest was an adopted son himself) willingly takes the role of His earthly father. Then, on the Cross, Christ reconfigures His household by giving His disciple John filial responsibilities to Mary and offering Mary maternal privileges over John. These endorsements of “fictive kinship” pervade the Gospels.

The vision of the New Testament must be embodied, though, through the retrieval of the Christian household. To speak of the household means looking beyond the “nuclear family” – a stunted, insular vision that limits the dimensions of family life and our solidarity with others outside our homes. As a “place of mutual and timely belonging,” in Brent Waters’ words, the household is a gathering place for a wide variety of social relationships in which the joys of marriage radiate outward in a form that is adverbial – through parental relations, rather than parenthood. And it is a place where care and support can be given in ways not bounded by biology, but by the responsibilities we accrue to one another within the providential care of God’s kindness. Whoever does the will of God is Christ’s mother and brother and sister (Mk 3:35). In the same manner, we may be father and child and uncle to all those whom God calls us to love.

No book has modeled this vision so well as C. S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*, in which the Director’s house at St. Anne’s on the Hill becomes a refuge for the intentionally childless Jane and the involuntarily childless Dimbles. Jane’s troubled marriage and determination not to have a child – “One had one’s own life to live,” she thinks to herself – collide with the Dimbles’ generous love, which is parental without being smothering, and which bears fruit for the Kingdom through their obedience.

While Cecil Dimble had been Jane’s tutor before her marriage, Mrs. Dimble “had been a kind of universal aunt to all the girls of her year.” Their house had been a type of salon, yet of all Dr. Dimble’s students, his wife had felt for Jane “that kind of affection which a humorous, easy-natured and childless woman sometimes feels for a girl whom she thinks pretty and slightly absurd.” Mrs. Dimble feels the sorrow at the empty rooms in her house, yet embodies maternal virtues toward Jane all the same. The childless Dimbles had the luxury of a ready supply of young people to fill their home regularly, which not all couples do. Yet they embody the expansiveness of love that is necessary to overcome our tacit

or explicit demands to meet our “right” to have a child. Indeed, the whole household at St. Anne’s is a picture of the fruitfulness of chastity – in marriage that is open to children, whether or not God gives them, and in a singleness that is faithful in celibacy. Through encountering this chaste love, Jane eventually becomes willing to bear children.

The form of this world is passing away, Paul writes, enjoining those who “have wives to live as though they had none, and those who mourn [to live] as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing.” (1 Cor 7:29–31). Paul’s exhortation incorporates Hannah’s inversion of the sorrow of barrenness. The declaration of the Gospel in the realm of procreation not only offers hope to the childless, but places a great qualifier over the joy of the fruitful; Baptism is our entry into the Kingdom of God, not the blessing of fertility.

A world that rejects God will reject creation. Yet the paradox is that we must look beyond creation itself if we wish to renew its authority and goodness within our communities. Life in the Kingdom of God both confirms and disturbs our love of creation. To paraphrase Lewis, those who focus on the family rather than the Kingdom will eventually have neither – but those who look to the kingdom shall have family given to them as well. We announce the Gospel in the realm of sex and procreation only when our exhortations to marry and procreate honor the fact that the children who bear our name are “not the good things of the eternal Jerusalem,” but are the “good things that belong to the land of the dying” – as Augustine once wrote.

The abundance of St. Anne’s on the Hill is born out of the Christian tragedy of childlessness, which confirms the goods of creation by looking toward what they point to – a life of participating in the works of charity toward all those whom God gives us to love. The endlessness of love never fails, though our hopes and dreams for our lives in this world sometimes might. God’s good gifts sometimes come in strange and severe forms, yet each of them is ordered toward the perfection of our joy in the gift of our lives to God and each other. Within the economy of God’s love, the barren will someday wear their crowns of triumph at the city gates. They, too, will no longer be ashamed.

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Contraception: Why have so many Catholics rejected Church teaching? Part Two

D. J. MULLAN

*Editor's Note: On July 25, 1968, Pope Paul VI promulgated his landmark encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, dealing with artificial contraception.*

“Theology of the Body”: an insightful approach to Church teaching on marriage

In a remarkable series of more than one hundred talks at weekly audiences between 1979 and 1984 (including a months-long break in the series after May 1981 when the Pope was shot), Pope John Paul II broke new ground in the catechetics of marriage by setting the discussion in the context of what he called “the Law of the Gift.” Starting with what we know about the inner life of the Trinity, the Pope suggested that Father and Son continually give themselves to each other in “*agape*” love, i.e., in a selfless gift. With that as a starting point, the Pope suggested that God made humans “in His image, male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27) such that, in the spousal embrace, each could make a donation of self to the other, thereby participating (to some extent) in the Law of the Gift expressed by the Trinity.

The Pope suggested that God’s plan for spousal union is a way for humans to “proclaim” a love that mirrors (of course, in a minor way) the love which God exercises within the Trinity. When the spousal union operates in accord with God’s design, and each participant gives and receives the Gift of Self to and from the other completely, then the Pope suggested that the spouses are indeed “proclaiming God’s truth” to each other by means of their bodies.

Unfortunately, since the fall of man, human beings do not always and everywhere automatically “proclaim the truth”: it has to be admitted that people are also capable of “proclaiming lies.” In the case of spousal union, the Pope suggests that withholding an essential part of self would in effect be “proclaiming a lie.” Such a withholding of self will certainly occur if the “union” is contraceptive. As a result, the use of contraception involves the couple in “proclaiming” a lie by means of their bodies. Moreover, since the spouses in effect called upon Christ on their wedding day to be a witness that each would give him/herself totally to the

other, contraceptive unions *cannot* be considered to be merely a “harmless” or “white” lie. Instead, the “lie” which the couple proclaims in a contraceptive union rises to such a high level as to be as serious as perjury.

In view of this, it is clear that contraception is by no means a trivial (i.e., “venial”) matter. The matter is sufficiently grave to fulfil one of the conditions for a mortal sin. This is a critical reason why the Church teaches Catholic couples to avoid contraception.

A two-way street: The Church as the Bride of Christ

After the Second Vatican Council ended, serious deficiencies developed in the Church for a variety of reasons regarding the catechesis of both children and adults. To address this, the Synod of Bishops in early 1985 called for the development of a compendium of Church teachings in the form of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). More than ten years were required before a formal (Latin) version of the CCC was published. It was hoped that Catholics throughout the world would refer to the Catechism in order to be well-informed about Church teaching.

In agreement with the Vatican Council teaching, the CCC included a section entitled, “The Church as the Bride of Christ” (n. 796). In this section, we read: “The theme of Christ as Bridegroom was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist (Jn 3:29). The Lord referred to himself as the Bridegroom (Mk 2:19). The Apostle [St Paul] speaks of the whole Church and each of the faithful members of his Body as a bride ‘betrothed’ to Christ the Lord.”

Also in the CCC (n. 808), we read: “The Church is the Bride of Christ: he loved her and handed himself over for her. He has purified her by his blood *and made her the fruitful mother of all God’s children.*” Although the CCC does not in fact italicize the last ten words of n. 808, I have done so here in order to emphasize the fruitfulness of the union between Christ and the Church. This fruitfulness is also hinted at in *Lumen Gentium* 7 with the statement that “the Church may increase [in numbers] and attain to all the fulness of God.”

Typically, the analogy between Christ/Church and husband/wife is used to encourage married couples to model their relationship on that between Christ and the Church. For example, a husband is encouraged, in view of Christ’s sacrifice, to lay down his life for his wife.

But I suggest that the analogy might usefully be considered as a *two-way street* in an attempt to persuade married couples to avoid contraception. Specifically, if it were in fact a part of God's plan for married couples to contracept, thereby preventing a new child from being brought into existence, the following question would arise: How would that activity between spouses manifest itself analogously in the context of the relationship between Christ and the Church? In contrast to the teaching in *Lumen Gentium* 7 (“[Christ] fills the Church with his divine gifts so that it [the Church] may increase [in numbers] and attain to all the fulness of God”), the analogy with contraception could lead to the (strange) suggestion that Christ (or the Church, or both) at times might decide *not* to bring a new member into the Church. Such a conclusion seems incompatible with the scriptural teaching that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

If this conclusion could be talked about and discussed more widely in pre-Cana classes in parishes or in homilies, it might be easier for the “man/woman in the pew” to recognize the baleful seriousness of contraception.

But what if ineffective teaching is *not* the real problem?

In the final analysis, however, it may turn out that the method which has been used by the Church to teach about contraception is not principally at fault. It *could* be that the laity do in fact understand the teaching quite well *at an intellectual level*, but they simply do not *want* to follow Church teaching because (analogous to John 6:60) “this is a hard saying.” If this is the case, then even the best teaching methods will be inadequate to improve the disastrous statistics.

Instead, what may be needed is a renewed discussion of the some of the specifics required for Catholics to live a virtuous life.

It is, after all, in the area of virtue that battles of a practical nature rise up to confront us in everyday life. St John refers to a triad of enemies we all have to face: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 Jn 2:16). These enemies are hard enough to deal with in everyday life. But St Paul adds to this list another powerful adversary: the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2), that is, the Devil, Later on, St Paul also adds that we are up against a multitude of powerful enemies: “principalities and powers” (Eph. 6,12) (i.e., fallen angels). And St Peter also refers to the deadly role the Devil plays in “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pt 5: 8). These references to the Devil are not merely rhetori-

cal flourishes or abstract theological statements: however much we would wish it were otherwise, they indicate that the Devil is actually at work in our everyday lives.

The first reaction that many people (including Catholics) might have to hearing about the intrusion of the Devil and his minions into our lives is: “Surely you are exaggerating; no one believes that stuff in the modern world!”

Nevertheless, we need to ask: Why might Catholics support such a reaction? Based on my personal experience, I can suggest one obvious reason: Reference to the Devil’s active operation in the world today has been rarely (if ever) the subject of sermons in any of the several thousand Masses I have attended over the past six decades.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to read words written by Father Louis Bouyer, who served as one of the French team of scholarly experts (“*periti*”) at Vatican II. Bouyer’s *Christian Initiation* is available on-line at <https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/43801/Christian%20Initiation%20by%20Louis%20Bouyer.pdf>)

In support of what I wrote in the opening paragraph of this section, the following statement (taken from page 60 of Bouyer’s text) is relevant: “The way towards the full religious truth” *cannot* “be reduced to an *intellectual* process.” That is, intellect *alone* is not sufficient for living a Christian life. So, we ask: What else is required? Bouyer provides an answer which goes on for several pages in a discussion of the *problem of evil*. He writes (on pp. 65-67): “Satan and demoniacal forces [are at work]...Exorcism...is the Church’s concrete affirmation that she has no illusions about the fearsome size of the invisible forces which she must fight in order to free man.”

In support of these claims, Bouyer states: “The divine Word shows us what we are involved in... *whether we like it or not* [my emphasis].” Although it would certainly be “nicer” if we lived in a situation where we did not need to deal with Satan, we do not have a choice: Even if *we* might not want to deal with the Devil, *he* is (or his minions are) surely committed to dealing with *us*. Bouyer continues: “We are the prisoners of nefarious powers which transcend us...our true position has been revealed to us for the first time in its full scope...*as a battle* being fought by Christ and the Church on our behalf...”

These are eye-opening words. Can they really be true? Yes, they can. And Bouyer will not let us escape from the main conclusion: “The crucial question that arises [now] is whether or not... we are going to make it [the battle] our own.” In other words, are

we going to recognize the Devil as a clear and present danger in our lives? This is by no means an abstract *theological* problem; on the contrary, it is a *practical* problem in the most literal meaning of the word.

In practical terms, what might the Church do to assist the laity in their struggle against the powerful foes arrayed against us? Bouyer suggests that “Christian prayer is the supreme weapon in the struggle in which we are called upon to take part.”

In the present context, Father Bouyer’s words about a battle/struggle obviously raise the specific issue: How can we combat the Devil when he comes at us in the guise of temptations *to use contraception*? Praying every day to Our Lady for the virtue of purity could be a first step; this practice can be started in a person’s life at a young age before the child even knows fully what the word “purity” means. And when temptations arise (as they inevitably will from time to time), the use of short prayers such as, “Jesus, mercy; Mary, help” can bring immediate assistance. In our sex-soaked culture, there is also a need to be reminded that custody of the eyes is essential for practicing the virtue of chastity. So also is a conscious decision that I should avoid the places, persons, and things which are (for me) occasions of sin. St Paul spells out in graphic terms (Eph 6:11-17) how we should proceed to arm ourselves with various defenses of a spiritual nature in order to combat the Devil. For each item of defense, St Paul draws an analogy with one of a series of military “accoutrements”: helmet, sword, shield, breastplate, and shoes. To these, St Paul also adds the necessity of a further defense: the truth. In other words, as Bouyer would agree, the intellect (which allows us to recognize truth) *does* have a part to play in the battle; it is just not the *only* part.

How can we learn more about the threat the Devil poses in our lives?

One of the ways that Catholic lay people have traditionally learned about ways to live the Catholic life more effectively is by means of the sermons that our shepherds offer us from the pulpit. In this regard, my own experience has been that we rarely (if ever) hear sermons which mention the Devil’s working in our everyday lives. One contributing factor to this fact can be found by consulting the schedules of scripture readings in the Mass which have been selected for all Sundays, solemnities, and major feasts. Why is this important? Because Vatican II taught (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 52): “By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded *from the sacred text* [my emphasis added].”

Evidently, Vatican II wished that the subject of the homily at Mass should be based on the contents of the Scripture readings *which are read during that Mass*. So, the question that is relevant here is the following: How many times in the course of the three-year cycle labelled as A, B, and C does the Church include at least one of the three readings listed above as being relevant in everyday life (Eph 2:2; 1 Pt 5:8; Eph 6:11-17) concerning the Devil's operation? The answer to this question can be found by referring to the web-site <https://catholic-resources.org/Lectionary/Index-Sundays.htm>

The answer turns out to be disappointing: Only the First Sunday of Lent whose entire Gospel in all three years deals with the Devil and his temptation of Christ (and, therefore, with us)). That is, the number of times that even a single one of these three key "everyday life readings" is scheduled to be read at Sunday Mass on any one of the 150+ Sundays, or solemnities, or on major feasts which occur in the course of the Church's three-year cycle of readings, is exactly *zero*.

To be sure, each of the three "everyday life readings" we mentioned above is scheduled to be read at a *week-day Mass* on one particular day each year: specifically, the three readings cited above are read on Monday of Week 29 of Ordinary Time [O.T.], on Thursday of Week 30 of O.T., and on April 25. However, realistically, most Catholics do not attend many weekday Masses, so the chances are small that most members of the laity will hear what Scripture says about the Devil in everyday life.

In view of this serious lacuna in the scheduled Scripture readings, how will lay people be equipped to fight against a strong enemy if that enemy is never even mentioned in the homilies that most Catholics are likely to hear? As Bouyer (p. 65) writes "The modern man who refuses to entertain these [demonic] possibilities is like a child afraid of the dark."

At this point, what comes to mind is a quote from Winston Churchill regarding a certain aspect of battles in the worldly sphere: "Renown awaits the commander who first restores artillery to its prime importance on the battlefield" https://artilleryhistory.org/documents/quotes_artillery.pdf.

Paraphrasing Churchill, I suggest that the Church could do a signal service to Catholics today by working to "restore awareness of the operation of the Devil to its prime importance in the battlefield of everyday Catholic life". If lay people had a clearer view of those realities, then they could at least be forewarned that they are faced in everyday life by a shrewd and cruel enemy, an enemy

who is continually maneuvering us into the sights of his “artillery,” seeking to do us real spiritual harm, even to the extent of killing the life of grace altogether in our souls. Once again, as Father Bouyer stressed, this is simply a fact *whether we like it or not*.

I hope that the teaching Church, in an effort to win back the large majority of Catholics who use contraception, will seriously consider developing a program to publicize the truth about the Devil’s activity. To be sure, the temptation to use contraception is



Temptation of Christ mosaic in St Mark’s Basilica, Venice, c. 12th-century

only one of the weapons in the Devil’s arsenal: Catholics also need to hear that the Devil attacks us with other weapons as well. But with the contraception weapon alone, the “artillery shells” which the Devil has lobbed since 1968 have apparently succeeded in endangering the life of grace in as many as 92% of Catholics. When will Catholics be told in forthright terms that we are living in the midst of a real battle? When will we learn that we need to think seriously about putting on appropriate armor for protection against the mortal weapons which the devil uses against us?

And may God come to protect us especially when we are tempted.

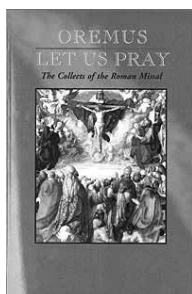
As far as homilies are concerned, it should be noted that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not require exclusively lectionary-based preaching; it also encourages preaching on the liturgy itself – and any other aspects of the Catholic Faith. Therefore, the door is wide open to address the issues highlighted here.



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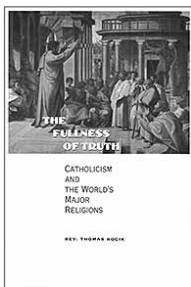
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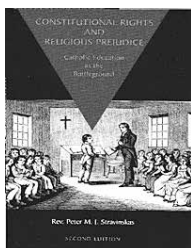
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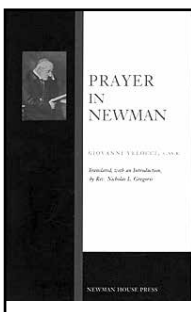
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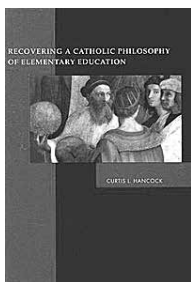


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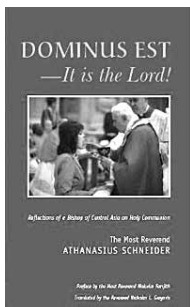
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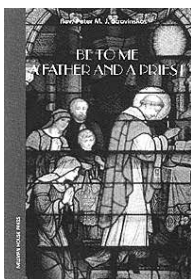


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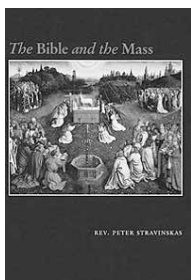


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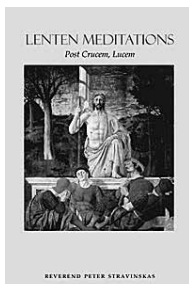
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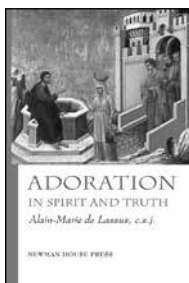


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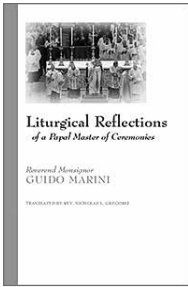
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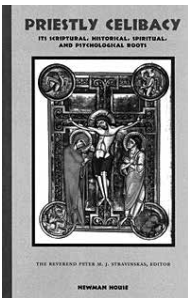
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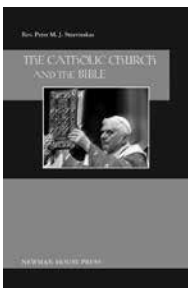
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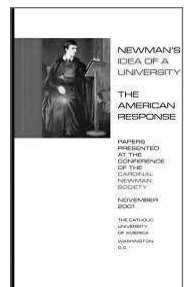
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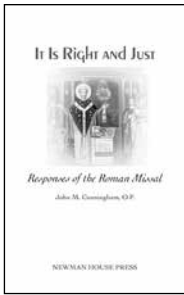
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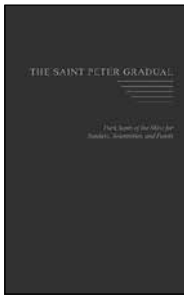
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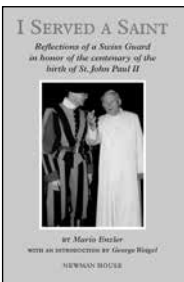
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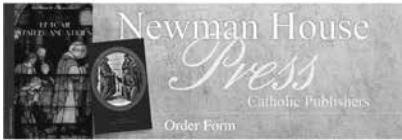
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The Miraculous Features of the Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe

BY DAVID CLAYTON

Editor's Note: This article originally featured in The Angelus, reprinted here with their gracious permission.

Many readers, I imagine, will be familiar with the famous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. It is an image “not made by human hands,” which was given to St Juan Diego, a poor Aztec man, in sixteenth-century Mexico, and which caused millions to convert. It influenced both the Aztecs and the occupying Spaniards who were convinced of its validity, and it continues to draw devotion today from Christians from all over the world.

In this article I thought I would point out some features of this image that are not generally well known and offer some personal thoughts as to what the implications of these are.

It contains some details clearly derived from Aztec culture and others from traditional Christian culture and amongst these, interestingly, some not normally associated with the Spanish Christian culture of the day. What is remarkable about this image is how these disparate aspects are combined, so as to form a unified image that has great appeal through centuries.

The aspects that relate to Aztec culture are as follows: Our Lady's hairstyle, with the central parting, was the



sign of a maiden, a virgin. The ribbon and bow around her waist signified that she was pregnant. And then the quatrefoil roses articulated in sepia lines on the pale brown-ochre shawl signify royalty. The Aztecs looking at this would recognize immediately the meaning of these features.

But this image spoke to the Aztecs of more than their own culture because it has elements that come from traditional Christian culture, too. These are universal in that they speak in some respects to *all people of Christ*. It is these elements that were noticed by the sixteenth-century Spaniards and have connected with so many Christians from all over the world since. We can see, for example, the blue shawl, a common color for Mary's outer robe. It is said to denote royalty, and Marian chapels often have their walls painted in this color.

Similarly, the eight-pointed stars represent her connection with the "eighth day" of Creation, her Son, Jesus Christ who rose on the eighth day of the week. Stars are not the only heavenly bodies represented. The moon is portrayed as well. This is in accord with Scripture in that it shows Our Lady as the woman of the Apocalypse (Rev 12:1-3), with the upturned crescent moon.

Another feature which interests me greatly is the nimbus of light around her. The account of the woman in the Book of the Apocalypse describes her as being "clothed in the sun." The golden nimbus around her whole person might correspond to this. However, this is more complicated. I suggest that its presence here is to indicate the presence of Christ within her womb. It is not there so much for Our Lady, the "God-bearer," but rather for her Son, who is God!

Take a close look at the gold envelope that surrounds her — called a mandorla. This is not, as one might first suspect, a series of bright gold darts emanating from Our Lady. Rather, it is a series of *dark* darts emanating from her on a gold background, the outer limits of which describe the mandorla shape, which is a *smooth* almond. In other words, this mandorla is getting *darker* the closer it is to her. If you were to examine a traditional icon of Christ at the Transfiguration, such as that by Theophan the Greek painted in 1403 in Russia, you would see a mandorla that gets darker towards the center. This indicates that this is God who is a mystery and only known and seen directly through His decision to reveal Himself to us. This feature is reserved for the Divine Person.

So, what do we conclude when we see the nimbus around her getting darker? This is the Christian way of indicating that Our

Lady is with child, the Divine Child which complements the visual symbolism of a woman with child that accords with Aztec culture. Remember that if this image had not spoken to the Spanish occupiers, too, none would have taken St Juan Diego seriously.

It is interesting to note that some copies of the Our Lady of Guadalupe icon get this detail wrong and invert the direction of the lines. For example, here is one painted around 1700:



The presence of all of these symbolic elements from different cultures and from different times creates a strong argument for the divine authorship of the image: for if the artist is not divine, then we have indeed a remarkable mortal artist, one who is simultaneously aware of Aztec culture, Scripture, and the Christian iconographic tradition that was not fashionable in sixteenth-century Spain. I suggest that someone of this profile would have been hard to find in Mexico in 1530, considering the style of the image. Although it would never be mistaken for a Greek or Russian icon, it is nevertheless pretty much in accordance with the iconographic prototype. This would make sense theologically, for the iconographic style is the style of eschatological man. Our Lady is in glory in Heaven, and so it would be the most appropriate style for her apparition.

Thus, for example, in accordance with the iconographic tradition, there is no strong cast shadow, the image is defined predominantly by line rather than tone. Again, if this was not a revealed image, then our artist aside from all else already mentioned is also a theologian of insight. He understood that the best artistic tradition to represent her should be iconographic, and then had sufficient familiarity with it to apply the principles of that tradition, so as to create legitimate modifications of style that would make it more accessible to the local population, both Spanish and Aztec. In the case of the representation of the mandorla, this artist was seemingly more familiar with the iconographic prototype than many, at least, of his contemporaries (judging from the flawed copies made of it by other artists).

If on the other hand, we accept tradition and this is an authentic icon “not made by human hands” and painted, so to speak, by the hand of God, then the remarkable degree of conformity to tradition, tells how authentic and true that tradition is. This, I suggest, is the evidence, (along with all other *acheiropoieta*) for the authenticity of the style of icons. Historically, the iconographic tradition was developed by faithful Christians in the first centuries of the Church, and we have to believe that they were divinely inspired in this work.

Q & A

Dear Readers,

This is really your column, for you direct it by the questions you send me. I want to encourage you to do so for many reasons, not the least of which being that without your questions, there is no column!

Here are a few simple notes to keep in mind:

1. Your letter may deal with any topic connected to the Church and her theology; you may “piggy-back” on previous questions to seek further clarification or take issue with a response I have given.
2. It is necessary that you keep your inquiry or comment to a single page.
3. To qualify for inclusion in the column, a letter must be signed, however, you may ask that your name and/or address not be published—and that will be honored.
4. Due to the volume of mail, it is impossible to respond personally to our inquirers. Obviously, not all letters can or will be used. Look for a reply in a future issue and realize that a response may take several months to make its way into print.

Questions may be emailed to: fstravinskask@hotmail.com

Thanks for your continued interest and support.

Father Peter Stravinskask, Editor & Publisher

Are Catholic Charismatics “kosher”?

Q. May I ask for some help in evaluating the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? I am deeply distrustful, but have been scolded by some well-meaning and seemingly straight-arrow Catholic women that any criticism of this runs counter to the Magisterium. However, I have done some Internet research and I can find no official Magisterial confirmation or endorsement, just a general statement in *Lumen Gentium* about the Holy Spirit guiding the Church through various gifts and charisms, and a few remarks from the Pope or others that seem very bland to me, not enough to constitute official Church doctrine. I have read some of Fr. John Vennari’s works online, and he portrays the “renewal” with about the same view that I see it. Is there a direct and official authority available detailing the Church’s stance on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? And if not, what should a good Catholic position be? I am having a very hard time believing that the behavior exhibited by these Charismatics is truly the work of the Holy Spirit, but I don’t like to think I am out of synch with Rome. Your thoughts would be most appreciated.

A. If you had asked me this question in 1968, my answer would have been an unqualified negative. The movement, at that time and for a number of years following, lacked a Catholic sensibility, for the most part, largely due to malformation or no formation at all, as well as the lack of clerical guidance. Thousands upon thousands of Catholic Charismatics found their way out of the Church and into various Pentecostal communities.

With some stronger guidance from priests, bishops and the Holy See itself, things began to turn around. A prime mover in that “catholicizing” process came through the leadership of Ralph Martin. I think it fair to say that most Catholic Charismatics today are thoroughly orthodox and usually exhibit a strong devotion to Our Lady and the Holy Eucharist. There is a bishop in the United States responsible for oversight of the movement and also one in Rome for the same purpose, but for the whole Church.

While the charismatic spirituality does nothing for me personally, I know many who have profited greatly from their association with the movement. One of the biggest problems in the early days was an elitism that more than suggested that if you wanted to be a real Catholic, you had to go the charismatic route. The Catholic umbrella of spirituality (e.g., Franciscan, Dominican, Salesian, Jesuit) is a very large one. As long as people stay under the umbrella (by maintaining the true faith) and do not seek to impose their particular brand of spirituality on everyone else, things go well.

The bottom-line answer to your question is that this is not a matter for a “Magisterial” response but a pastoral one, and the Church has given a green light on that score, as long as the concerns I just raised are attended to.

What does the water have to touch?

Q. The apologetics site I contribute to got a question about a rather unorthodox way of baptism. They submerged the baby’s bottom in the water but that was it – no contact was made with the head. Was this valid? Was it licit? We’ve been unable to come up with a certain answer.

A. It seems they hit the wrong end! Infusion (pouring), immersion (“dunking”), and aspersion (sprinkling) are all valid forms of Baptism – as long as the water makes contact with the head. Without that, the ritual would be invalid.

Was Paul really necessary?

Q. I have wondered why we got a St. Paul when we did. Weren’t the Apostles in a better position to start the basics of our

Church, having been directly with the Lord? Why in those early formative years did an “outsider” have to be brought in to give fundamental counsel, do missionary work, etc. when the very first followers of Our Lord were still there? What am I missing?

A. In defending his ministry, Paul repeatedly tackled head-on the accusation that he was an “outsider” or “Johnny-come-lately.” Indeed, he makes the point that he is directly called by the Risen Christ and is, on that account, equal to all the other Apostles.

It would seem that the Lord saw qualities in Paul (e.g., zeal, intelligence, cultural openness) that would be especially suited for bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles. Although he had no identity problems and a rather healthy ego, he did not go off half-cocked. He prayed and studied hard and also consulted with Peter, to ensure that his preaching was on track.

Paul’s Apostleship is a reminder that God can call whomever He wishes, whenever He wishes and that He raises up certain men and women to address unique situations in the Church, including today.

Getting Started with the Liturgy of the Hours

Q. I am interested in praying the Liturgy of the Hours. I have the book *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours*. It doesn’t tell what week we are in, so that I may begin using it. It seems rather difficult to use, though. I think that is why I purchased it a few years back but lost interest in it because of its being so confusing. I guess I just don’t know where to begin. I trust you can offer some valuable instructions on this subject.

A. Congratulations on your desire to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. May your tribe increase.

Your difficulty is not so much the book you are using as the resource you are lacking. You need what is called an *Ordo*, which is a guide to the liturgical cycle. Look up the current date in the *Ordo*, and you will be told what (if any) feast is being celebrated, what the Mass readings are for the day, and what week of the four-week cycle of the Psalter you should be using that day. Once you know that last piece of information, you can dive into the Psalter and then keep on moving forward from day to day and week to week.

To be sure, there are some intricacies in “navigating” through the breviary (a name for the book encompassing the Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours), and a tutorial usually resolves things. Why not ask your parish priest to give you thirty minutes of his time to provide you with the initial instruction?

Can Angels intercede?

Q. I find what I believe is an unanswerable paradox – that the Angels have the power of intercession.

The Angels can pray for us, can they not? Is not prayer a form of intercession? From where do they derive this power of intercession? Intercession presupposes a union of mind and heart – such that a husband and wife have – not just friends. The Angels do not have union with the Church nor God in this way. (This, after all, is the reason Satan is Satan – he is jealous.)

The way I see it, the intercession of the saints can be justified based on the fact that they have perfect communion with our Head and Lord Jesus Christ. We also in the Church Militant have this power of intercession, based on our communion with Our Lord and Head, though imperfect due to sin. In any case, it is our communion with Jesus in which all of the “merits” and prayers of the saints can be made present to us. The intercession of all the saints is really just an extension of the intercession of Christ. Christ’s intercession is present in the saints. Hence, when they intercede, they exercise the intercessory power of Christ present within them – it is a divine and human act. This is only possible because we as the Church are betrothed to Christ as His Bride. We have communion with Him.

The Angels lack this communion. They are not the Bride of Christ. They do not have “sonship.” Our “sonship” is where the power of intercession comes from, as I said above. How, then, can they possibly intercede for us? They are not in communion with us, and they are not in communion with God – at least as His Bride. Furthermore, they cannot even be considered to be “saints” in the strict sense since a “saint” by definition is one who has been puri-



The Adoration of the Lamb by Jan / Hubert van Eyck, c. 1432

fied of all sin and is in full union with God. Loosely, they can be considered saints if all one means by “saint” is “holy one in Heaven.”

In any case, how do we answer this? From where do Angels derive their power of intercession? They are not in communion with God in the unique and exclusive way that we as the Church are. After all, they can’t even receive Communion! Communion presupposes exclusive union! So here we have Angels that cannot receive Communion, yet can intercede?

How is this possible?

A. Let me back into this question.

First of all, I don’t know where you find your definition of a saint. Using that, Our Lady isn’t a saint, either, since she was never purified of sin since she never had any!

Second, nobody in Heaven receives Holy Communion; sacraments only for the Church on Earth. The Eucharist is, as the hymn teaches us, the *esca viatorum* (food for wayfarers, not for those in the Homeland). The Angels and Saints enjoy the Beatific Vision, which is direct and immediate access to the Triune God. The Eucharist (and other sacraments) are mediating realities, but not the Reality Itself.

You are, of course, correct that all intercession ultimately finds its efficacy in the intercession of Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation tells us, however, that prayers of adoration and intercession are offered unceasingly in the Liturgy of Heaven, and those offering them are the Angels and the Saints – a point made as the Preface of every Mass concludes in its lead-up to the Eucharistic Prayer. In other words, the Church’s preeminent work of intercession is done, precisely, in communion with entire Heavenly Court – Angels included.

Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar!

Q. I received the following comments about rubrics in the Roman Missal. Are you aware of the subtlety which caught his notice? Do you think he’s making too much of it?

“*Versus ad Populum*” *Mistranslated in New 2008 Order of the Mass*
The 1966 English Roman Missal translates “*versus ad populum*” as “turns to the people.” The 2008 English Roman Missal translates “*versus ad populum*” using an English idiom “facing the people.” Why has ICEL decided to change “turns to the people” with the English idiom “facing the people”? This idiom does not explicitly convey the sense of turning or a change in orientation as expressed in the participle “*versus*.”

Versus ad populum is found seven times in the 1966 English Latin Roman Missal, listed below. *Versus ad populum* is also found seven times in the *Ordo Missae* of 2002, listed below with the new English 2008 Order of the Mass mistranslation.

Verb:

1. *verto, vertere, verti, versum* – turn; change

Perfect, Passive Participle of *verto*: *versus* (-a, -um)

2. *converto –vertere –verti –versum* – to turn round

Perfect, Passive Participle of *converto*: *conversus* (-a, -um)

English-Latin Roman Missal 1966, p. 574

After the *Gloria*:

11. Deinde, versus ad populum, dicit:

11. Next, turning to the people, he says:

Reading the Epistle:

13. In Missa solemnī, oratione expleta, subdiaconus librum sumit, ambonem ascendit vel accedit ad cancellos et, versus ad populum, Epistolam cantat vel legit;

13. In solemn Mass, after the collect has been completed, the subdeacon takes the book and goes up to the ambo or to the edge of the sanctuary area. There, turned to the people, he chants or recites the Epistle.

Munda cor meum

14. ...Stans deinde in eodem loco, ad altare conversus et profunde inclinatus, dicit *Munda cor meum*, et ad populum iterum conversus, Evangelium cantat vel legit.

14. Then, standing in the same place but turned toward the altar, he bows deeply and says *Munda cor meum*. Turning again to the people, he chants or recites the Gospel.

After the Creed

18. Symbolo itaque expleto, celebrans versus ad populum dicit:

18. At the end of the Creed, the celebrant turns toward the people and says:

Pray Brethren

29. Postea osculat altare et, versus ad populum, extendens et iungens manus, congrua voce, dicit:

29. Afterwards he kisses the altar and turns to the people. Extending and joining his hands, he says in an appropriate tone of voice:

Communion

53. ...et versus ad fideles communicandos clara voce dicit:

53. ...turned toward the communicants, he says in a clear voice:

Final Blessing

58. ...et versus ad populum, benedicens, prosequitur:

58. ...and, turning toward the people and blessing them, he continues:

Ordo Missae 2002, p. 515 and English Translation of The Order of the Mass 2008 ICEL, p. 12

Introit

1. Cantu ad introitum absoluto, sacerdos et fideles, stantes, signant se signo crucis, dum sacerdos, ad populum conversus, dicit:

1. When the Entrance Chant is concluded, the Priest and the faithful, standing, sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross, while the Priest, facing the people, says:

Pray Brethren

29. Stans postea in medio altaris, versus ad populum, extendens et iungens manus, dicit.

29. Standing at the middle of the altar, facing the people, extending and then joining his hands, he says:

Sign of Peace

127. Sacerdos, ad populum conversus, extendens et iungens manus subdit:

127. the Priest, turned towards the people, extending and then joining his hands, adds:

Communion

132. Sacerdos genuflectit, accipit hostiam, eamque aliquantulum elevatam super patenam vel super calicem tenens, versus ad populum, clara voce dicit:

132. The Priest genuflects, takes the host and, holding it slightly raised above the paten or above the chalice, while facing the people, says aloud:

133. Et sacerdos, versus ad altare, secreto dicit:

133. The Priest, facing the altar, says quietly:

Prayer after Communion

139. Deinde, stans ad altare vel ad sedem, sacerdos, versus ad populum, iunctis manibus, dicit:

139. Then, standing at the altar or at the chair and facing the people, with hands joined, the Priest says:

Dismissal

141.. Deinde fit dimissio. Sacerdos, versus ad populum, extendens manus, dicit:

141. Then the dismissal takes place. The Priest, facing the people and extending his hands, says:

What do you think of all this?

A. Your friend has certainly done his homework! I suppose his point is to suggest that the newer English rubrics are trying to get away from the idea that the liturgical presumption is that, for the most part, the priest is *not* facing the people during the Mass. Whether or not that is part of the agenda, I don't know, but I don't think the alternate translation advances that cause.

To explain, we need a little Latin grammar lesson. "*Versus*" is the perfect participle. A literal translation would be "having turned." Ergo, "turning to the people" (the earlier version) is not actually grammatically correct although it gets the sense of what is being said. Similarly, "turned toward the people" (the newer version) can actually be grammatically defended or its equivalent ("facing the people"). Either way, however, it should be clear that the priest has changed his position, which prior to the rubric would have been *away* from the congregation. My summary reaction? A distinction without a difference, for both versions presume the celebrant is facing liturgical east and then turning to face the congregation for various dialogues.

Theologians at Mel's Diner

Q. About once or twice a month a handful of Catholic families get together for supper at Mel's Diner or some other high-class eatery. We talk about politics, sports, local friends who have died, our respective illnesses, technologies, TV and religion. They sort of look to me on the religion subject. Three of them read different articles on this subject and they all came to this conclusion.

It sounds like a priest/bishop can walk away from his ministry by just ignoring the Church's rules. After a while, he gets "off the hook" with no problem. Meanwhile, a layman who wants to get out of his marriage by annulment has little chance unless his name is Kennedy. It sounds to them like there are different rules for the religious and the powerful. They felt that a priest/bishop's Holy Orders were equally, if not more important, than the Sacrament of Marriage.

What triggered this particular discussion was the news report of the Latin American bishop who violated canon law by running for the presidency of his country (and winning), resigned the episcopate, and then Rome gave him a decree of laicization before he assumed office, so that he would not incur the penalty of excommunication.

A. I am in rather strong sympathy with your dinner club on both scores, but a theological question has to be entered into the equation also.

First, let me say that I was absolutely astonished at the way the Vatican handled the bishop you cite. Although Father Robert

Drinan, the Jesuit and Democratic congressman from Massachusetts for many years, was a source of grave scandal because of his pro-abortion votes, when he was given the choice by Pope John Paul II to relinquish his seat in the House of Representatives or be expelled from the Jesuits and be laicized, he immediately resigned his congressional post. The bishop in question knowingly disobeyed the law of the Church by running for public office, for which he was suspended from the exercise of any priestly or episcopal office. Upon election, the nuncio of the country congratulated him and then said he hoped a speedy laicization could be accomplished, so as to avoid his excommunication when he was inaugurated as president! This is lunacy.

Now, in regard to priests giving up the active ministry, one must recall several things. First, while a priest may cease to function as a priest for a time or even permanently (even being returned to the lay state, canonically speaking), he never ceases to be priest. His return to the lay state is done by the Church either for his personal spiritual welfare or that of the community of the Church – or both. And this has been done throughout the history of the Church. Up to and including the time of Pope Pius XII (and probably even John XXIII), such decrees of laicization were given, but insisting on the man's holding fast to the two obligations he assumed at subdiaconate, namely, celibacy and praying the Divine Office daily. Pope Paul VI dropped the maintenance of those two obligations, and I think that is where the resentment comes in on the part of many lay folk, as well as not a few priests – and I would count myself in that number. At the very least, it opens the Church up to the accusation that we clerics who make the laws bend the laws for our own kind, while holding fast when hard laws affect the laity (e.g., the indissolubility of marriage).

Now, where I part company with your gathering is their impression that lay people are treated somewhat unfairly in the so-called annulment process. Most people (including many officials of the Holy See) would argue the very opposite – that procedures for granting decrees of nullity (the technical and more proper name) in the United States are very loose and that almost anyone can obtain such a decree. I don't believe that is the case, but I do not believe that only the rich and powerful can obtain such, either. This I know from personal experience of having shepherded dozens of these cases through over my years in the priesthood. At the same time, we should not have a kind of reverse double standard, which would deny a legitimate decree of nullity to someone, just because he is rich or powerful.

Commingling the Water and Wine

Q. When I mingle the water with the wine at Mass is it necessary, when more than one cup is used and assuming the water and wine was not mingled in the flagon, to mingle water in all the cups of wine? Or is it sufficient to mingle water solely in the cup of the celebrant?

A. Since the mingling of water and wine has merely symbolic value and does not affect validity, it need only be done for the principal chalice – and that is my personal preference as well, lest the mingling process become a distraction and become a rite unto itself.

I would also offer a linguistic caution. We should be referring to liturgical items by their proper names. Hence, not “cup” but “chalice.” Sacral language is needed to maintain a sense of the sacred throughout our liturgical experience.

“Fidei Defensor” Revisited

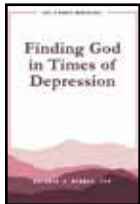
Q. Readers of one of your issues should understand that the title “*Fidei Defensor*” granted by Church authority to King Henry VIII was later withdrawn. It was then granted by secular authority.

Pope Paul III deprived Henry of this title granted in 1521 by Pope Leo X. It was an Act of Parliament that then confirmed the same title on him in 1544. It has indeed been used by the English sovereign since, appearing on coins as “FID DEF” or “F D.”

A. Thank you for the clarification.



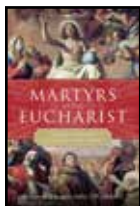
Short Reviews by the Editor



Kathryn J. Hermes, FSP, *Finding God in Times of Depression*. Pauline Books and Media, 2024. 80 pages; \$6.95.

Sister Kathryn guides her readers through bouts of depression, which seem to afflict us more today than in past times, perhaps because a transcendental horizon is missing from the lives of all too many people today. Each section begins with a scriptural passage dealing with some aspect of depression, followed by the author's practical and sane reflection. The little, but valuable, work ends with a number of prayers and rituals that can aid in banishing this demon.

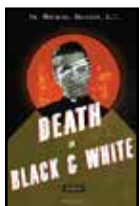
Very helpful for one suffering from depression or for those engaged in pastoral counseling.



J. Francis Sofie, *Martyrs of the Eucharist: Stories to Inspire Eucharistic Amazement*. TAN Books, 2024. Hard cover; 171 pages; \$24.95.

One of the most poignant memories I have from my boyhood is that of a priest rushing into a burning church to rescue the Blessed Sacrament. Father Sofie presents the stories of dozens of such heroes of the Eucharist. He offers details of the life situation of each martyr (some not canonized) and follows up with a reflection and application to the reader's Eucharistic spirituality.

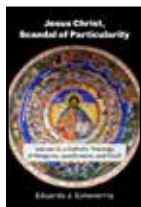
This book needs to be in the library of every Catholic school; the stories can and should be shared with children as young as third or fourth grade. This will also serve as an invaluable resource for priests in their preaching and confessional praxis. That said, every Catholic must ask himself if the Blessed Sacrament means enough for him to die for It; this volume will assist one in forging the correct response.



Michael Brisson, LC, *Death in Black and White*. Ignatius Press, 2024. 366 pages; \$18.95.

This novel was my bedtime reading companion for a month or so. Father Brisson knows how to tell a story in a most engaging way. The protagonist of the novel is a priest, into whose ministry and personal life we are granted access. The author's excellent knowledge of ecclesiastical and liturgical terminology is impressive (surpassing that of the average priest).

My only reservations are that the second half of the novel is somewhat contrived and a bit too (unnecessarily) racey (reminding me of some of the novels of Father Andrew Greeley). That said, I think the average TCR reader would enjoy a romp through this work.



Eduardo J. Echeverria, *Jesus Christ, Scandal of Particularity: Vatican II, A Catholic Theology of Religions, Justification and Truth*. En Route Books and Media, 2024. 519 pages; \$34.95.

Dr. Echeverria is an eminent theologian and prolific author. His current effort does not disappoint as he tackles a central sticking point in ecumenical and interreligious conversations and relations in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which he handles deftly and masterfully. This text comes at a most opportune moment due to the many confusing and hard-to-reconcile statements and actions of the present Roman Pontiff on this very topic.

This is not a read for the faint of heart, but it is a necessary read.



Joseph Pearce, *Classic Literature Made Simple: Fifty Great Books in a Nutshell*. Ignatius Press, 2024. 227 pages; \$17.95.

With the great push toward recapturing a classical curriculum for our Catholic schools, this latest product of the prodigious Joseph Pearce is most welcome. These short but informative vignettes serve as an enticing appetizer leading one to devour the main course.

For someone embarking on a journey into classical literature, this work can serve as a great time-saver: Does this description grab my imagination and attention? Similarly useful in a school setting to assist students in navigating the menu of the classics.

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