

Believe, believe, believe!

by: Douglas Lockhart

The Church's belief that its traditional answers are true to reality, that answers found outside of the Church must necessarily be inadequate, and the fact that there are now two distinct Christianities in existence

There is no democracy in heaven, and if Catholicism's God had his way there would be no democracy on earth either. At least that is how it seems in Jesuit Father Malachi Martin's grand vision of Catholicism rejuvenated. There are only inferiors and superiors, a hierarchy within which self-perfecting individualism (Martin's description of the world's alternative to Christianity) is replaced by submission to authority without question. Subordination is the name of the game. There is a mystical union of hearts and wills, an ever-ascending scale of being where unquestioning obedience to authority is accepted as natural and wholesome. Supernaturalisms are the fare of the day - God is in control and absolutely anything is possible.

This description of divine hierarchy is Martin's description of the Jesuit Order in *The Jesuits*, and we are to assume the same structure throughout the Catholic Church when it is functioning as a true extension of the will of God. And he views the cosmos in the same fashion, all the way from "lifeless stones and earth up through plants, animals, and humans, angels and archangels".¹ Everything is part of an hierarchic principle of being ending in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through the prophets, the Children of Israel were first made aware of God's divine hierarchy, and as the "Christ", Jesus later instructed his Church in the same multi-levelled system of checks and balances. Everything is in its place by divine fiat. All beings have their place in this pyramid of spiritual authority, and at the interstices of heaven and earth stand Christ and the pope.

Exercising this divinely sanctioned authority, Pope John Paul II reasserted the doctrine that Jesus had no brothers and sisters, and that his mother was a virgin before and after Jesus' birth. Richard Owen observes that this statement was made by John Paul to his regular Vatican audience, and adds that this clarification of a long-standing historical problem was "clearly intended to put to rest centuries of speculation that Christ was not Mary's only child."² Biblical scholarship is unnecessary, all we need is the papa's inspired consciousness.

John Paul must have felt the cool breath of reality on his neck to have made such a pronouncement. Backing away from the fact that the Gospels speak openly of Jesus' brothers and sisters, he is quoted as having said that the words "brothers" and "sisters" are used *loosely* in the Gospels. Does this mean that the Gospels do not always mean exactly what they say, and that sometimes one has to read between the lines? Or does this word only refer to the numerous passages where Jesus' brothers and sisters are mentioned? And what of his statement that this "looseness" has resulted from the fact that there is no word for "cousin" in either Hebrew or Aramaic? Does that solve the problem? Is this something scholars have overlooked? I think not. The Gospels came down to us in Greek, and Greek did not lack the word "cousin". As the Gospel writers are presumed to have had firsthand knowledge of Jesus' family situation, why botch such an important fact? Why allow such ambiguity when the whole heady business of Jesus' divinity and Mary's virginity were at stake? Or were they not at stake at all.

To complicate matters, Richard Owen also informs us that John Paul believed the mother of Jesus to be responsible for saving his life after the assassination attempt in 1981. The bullet was fired on *The Feast of Our Lady of Fatima*, and he considered that significant. Convinced that Mary had been involved, John Paul donated the bullet taken from his body to the Fatima shrine, confirming, by default, that the divine hierarchy was all of a piece and that Jesus' mother had been added to it for good measure. There is of course no reason to doubt John Paul's sincerity in this matter, but it should be pointed out that such an idea blissfully carries the Catholic mind further along the path of medieval credulity. This is also evident in what appears to be the unrelated business of Mary's *other* children, for if Jesus' mother was capable of such a feat in 1981, then it follows that she really had been a virgin, was

now enthroned in heaven along with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus could not possibly have had brothers and sisters. *Ergo*, the problem is solved.

For most Catholics, conscious identification with Jesus became the key-element in interpreting the will of God; special devotions and feast days became the conduit through which the transformative energy of redemption flowed. With the redemptive energy came "insight" and "revelation", God's confirmation that the hierarchy was functioning in his name. In 1670, for instance, at the Paray-le-Monial convent in France, it was revealed to Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque that Jesus' love for humanity was being neglected by the Church's general flock, and that the faithful ought to make reparation on their behalf. Asked by God to make the physical heart of Jesus the centre of a special devotion, this nun of the Visitation Order spread the news, and in 1675 caught the attention of Claude La Colombiere, a young Jesuit who would soon confirm her revelations through revelations of his own. Malachi Martin tells us that Claude "conveyed the divine wishes to his Superiors, and through them to the Roman authorities"³

Claude's and Alacoque's interaction with God take on the quality of an unrecorded telephone conversation in Martin's hands; we are left with the impression that God is in the habit of contacting individuals with specific requests. It is the New Testament all over again; God the "puppet-master" is working behind the scenes. With Alacoque's revelations accepted as authentic in the late 17th century, Rome is said to have loosed "a fresh aspect of theological thinking", the Jesuits being chosen to spread this new devotion to the community.

Jesuit fidelity to this special devotion evaporated as a result of Modernism's onslaught in the 20th century, Martin noting that in 1972 Father General Arrupe had declared the Jesuits to have "lost interest in devotion to the Sacred Heart".⁴ The shock of "revelation" came when those supposedly dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus spurned it as "childish, primitive, unsophisticated, repellent (and) unworthy of a modern mind."⁵ Described as "gross" by some, this divinely commissioned devotion fell out of favour with the intelligent. So had God changed his mind? Was devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for one age, but not for another? Or was it, perhaps, that no such commission

had ever been received? Malachin Martin supplies another reason: this reaction by the Jesuit Order was the result of a silent and deadly process working within the Order itself, a process of estrangement from God dressed up in the fancy workings and wordings of an age seduced by Modernism's claims.

Father General Arrupe had been fatally flawed in character and succumbed to the twentieth-century illusion that God was in favour of a spiritual democracy. Teilhard de Chardin's influence can be detected in this; he had rejected supernaturalisms as "monstrous" and advocated "full self-consciousness" in their stead. To Martin, this was a travesty of everything sacred; God desired individuals to submit their wills to him through the priestly hierarchy of the Church, not further estrange themselves through conscious self-aggrandisement. Self-perfecting individualism was unacceptable as a route to God.

In *Hostage to the Devil*, Malachi Martin defines this process of self-aggrandisement through his study of possessed individuals, and through the general drift of Western society towards a philosophy of personal meaning replaced by mere usefulness. Unwittingly under the influence of diabolical forces, western society is said to have fallen into an unconscious rejection of God's plan of salvation because of science. Behind the death of meaning lay a set of scientific propositions which, if accepted as "fact", or even as "probable", automatically annulled the idea of God initiating a process of salvation for all human beings. Jesus' death on the cross as a saving act simply melted away in the face of human beings having "a remote ancestry during which not merely his body formed but what was called his mind and higher instincts were fashioned."⁶ This was the intellectual Rubicon we were each forced to cross during our lifetime, the creed of science initiating a slow, but certain diminution of religious belief and feeling.

Conscious of the gap between Church teaching and scientific theory, Teilhard De Chardin had attempted to construct a bridge between the one and the other, but his formulation had resulted in God becoming part of the cosmos, Jesus no more than the peak of the evolutionary process. This was to say that "The thrust that would finally bring forth Jesus was an evolutionary accident - a kind of cosmic joke - that started over five billion years ago in helium, hydrogen gases, and

amino acids".⁷ Such a view made an utter nonsense of what the Church taught, for it heralded as cosmically automatic the completion of human development minus divine revelation. In such a scenario the crucifixion of Jesus was no more than a grotesque scene of physical torture, the life of Jesus an ordinary life, the creation of a universal Church in Jesus' name a political stunt. Useful in the past, perhaps, but not at all applicable to human needs and sensibilities at the end of the twentieth century. The supposed divinity of Jesus was irreconcilable with evolution, and as such it had to be jettisoned on behalf of a vision of the world firmly grounded in scientific fact rather than religious fancy.

Malachi Martin sees such reasoning as diabolical at source; not just because it flies in the face of Church doctrine, but because it springs from the dark heart of Satan disguised in the world as dispassionate intellect: there is an inner darkness of which we are unaware. Intellect is in itself not diabolical, but divorced from the Church it cannot help but fail to comprehend the complete cosmic picture and fall into error. The Devil is real, evil is on the loose, our inability to understand and accept this horrifying fact at the root of social collapse and personal disintegration. We are in constant danger of Satanic attack, oblivious to that fact, and unwittingly engaged in strengthening Satan's grasp on our world. Every page of *Hostage to the Devil* is laden with this kind of thinking, and it is powerful testimony to the fact that some Catholic intellectuals are unwilling to throw the diabolical baby out with the doctrinal bath water.

But why a Devil at all? Why such an all-consuming sense of evil? Why such rampant opposition to all that is good and wholesome, true and beautiful in human beings? How in the name of everything sensible did Lucifer manage to fall into rebellion when he was so close to the divine source? No matter how one rationalises, theologises or mythologises the situation, that remains the question that cannot be answered. Which rather suggests we are asking the wrong question, for only questions inadequately formulated result in such an impasse. For if evil has its root in a being, in an entity, and God made that entity, and there is, as Malachi Martin believes, an ideal hierarchy of entities through which the self-substantiating power of God flows, then any alternative hierarchy of value must have arisen by divine fiat. Locked within God's orbit, within his love and beauty and consistency, his angels and archangels were incapable of evil intention, incapable of willing anything

other than what their creator willed. At least that is how the story reads until the unthinkable happens, Lucifer rebels. Against what, I wonder? What is this myth trying to tell us about ourselves?

Crisis

In his challenging article 'A Western Crisis of Belief', the sociologist John Carroll recognises that individualism has failed. Unlike Martin, however, Carroll does not advocate a return to traditional Christian doctrine; he asks instead for a second Reformation, a repeat performance of the courage that first broke the stranglehold of a corrupt and corrupting Catholicism. The continuous gratification of personal needs, wants and desires does not satisfy the seeking mind, but neither do tired old doctrines dredged up from the past. There should be "an overarching theology or metaphysics" to hold the whole picture in place," Carroll suggests, but it should be "a credible picture of the whole" where Christianity is revitalised, not marginalised.⁸ David Powys, an Anglican vicar, paints a different picture in 'The Unpopular Path of Truth'. Mentioning John Carroll by name, he drives us back into Malachi Martin's arms with the words "The Church must remain true to its calling, not the spiritual fashions of modern society."⁹ The Church's confused sense of mission should be replaced with words of truth, he believes, not words of comfort. The old values should be reinstated; both sin and humanity's obligation to the Divine should be brought to the fore, not the contradictory spiritual notions of a society seduced by modernism. Heaven help us if the Church abandons this task, for not any old belief system will do; it has to supply "the saving truths it has from God" whatever the cost. Christians seduced by modern ideas will just have to return to the fold cap in hand - *truthfulness* is the key.

David Powys' point of divergence with Carroll is over the nature of the meanings offered to a disillusioned world; he rejects as inadequate meanings "at odds with orthodox Christian convictions", and asserts that popular spiritual ideas do not help people come to terms with earthly and heavenly realities.¹⁰ There is, he tells us, an almost avid willingness among people to have faith, to seek spiritual things, but the range of beliefs accepted mostly go against the Christian revelation, and as such are intrinsically valueless. Popular spirituality may be very attractive,

indeed seductive, but the Church cannot afford to side with such approaches for the sake of saving its own neck. It may be comforting to believe that everything is divine, that people are inherently good, that evil is an illusion, that only the self matters and all religions boil down to the same thing in the end, but that is a travesty of the Gospel message. The reality of sin is being overlooked, humanity's obligation to divinity for Christ's redeeming death sidestepped, Christ's future return abandoned as a promise.

A second article by John Carroll deals with such a charge. In 'Time for a Recovery', Carroll states what everyone knows: the search for meaning has extended beyond the Churches. Traditional answers have evaporated and we are obliged to find new ones, not just serve up the old ones with a set jaw and gritted teeth. The age-old questions are real enough, but the age-old answers fall short of satisfying the modern mind. The first Reformation struck when the Catholic Church lost touch with its own time, and a second Reformation is required for the same reason. Luther and Calvin had the courage to rethink the old doctrines, so making them applicable to modern life, and we have to find the courage to do likewise. This is to say that Christianity has to pull up its spiritual socks and learn, yet again, how to offer authentic reassurance to an age at the end of its spiritual tether. Humanism has failed in its attempt to replace the religious view with a person-centred equivalent, so it is up to Christianity to surprise itself and supply a vision capable of creatively encompassing the modern world.

But what does that mean? What does it mean to *creatively encompass the modern world*? Does it mean selling out to Darwinism, Big Bang theory and Artificial Intelligence? Does it mean abandoning Jesus' saving power for so-called scientific fact? John Carroll's reply derails the literal quality of such a response by pointing out that the more insecure Christianity became, the more it turned to secular answers. Citing the German sociologist Max Weber, Carroll reminds us that after the Reformation "conscience" became the sole mediator between God and individual, and that "work" was awarded a sacred status. A relocating of the sacred came about, an infusing of the "everyday" with a sacred glow that formed an *ever deepening connection with the world*. A Church in flight from theology is however a danger to society, its attempt to blend philosophical utilitarianism with scientific Darwinianism beyond

its capacity. Powys agrees, but not for the same reason. Carroll the sociologist wants the Church to respond to the issues of our time with a new metaphysic, a reworking of the old doctrines into a sturdier, more sensible rebuttal of modernism's soulless claims, but that is not what is happening.

Speaking of the Christian churches and their growing failure to attract and convince, Carroll says there is no surprise in this "given that they resolutely avoid rethinking central doctrines in terms that might have some affinity with modern life."¹¹ This is the platform on which the churches will perish, he tells us, David Powys being of the opposite opinion. Enter Malachi Martin at full tilt with his theory of the "winsome doctrine", his belief that dark, malevolent forces are undermining our sacred sensibilities through the factoids of science. Reduced to no more than biological robots with an illusionary sense of self, we are fast generating an overview capable of overpowering our most sacred understandings of self and world.

All three writers are in agreement that such a view will be disastrous for Western civilisation, but Carroll is the only one to come out batting for a reinterpretation of key Christian doctrines. Taking the metaphysical bull by its horns, he suggests, with some dexterity, that the Gospels contain "elements close to the view of the divine as an encompassing energy or consciousness, such as Christ's 'I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.'"¹² That is a valuable observation, but it will not fit too well with the traditionalist approach. And that in spite of Professor Douglas Geivett's suggestion in *Evil and the Evidence for God*, that the human mind may be "a nonmaterial substance or a form of energy that can cause events in the physical world."¹³ In this context it is interesting to read Karen Armstrong's *A History of God* and contemplate the fact that we are presently engaged in a humanist experiment that may or may not work out. Religion has been with us since the beginning of civilisation, so in historical terms it is quite a new thing to live a life unplugged from religious influence.

Karen Armstrong knows from experience what this means; she was brought up Catholic and eventually entered a religious order, only to leave it in search of the very thing she had entered it for - God. Carrying the God of her childhood into adult life without much modification she

was later shocked to realise that her life had moved forward on almost all levels, but that her ideas about God had not developed at all. Manufacturing religious experience out of music she began to notice how the Church's God was hardly ever talked about, and that Jesus was a purely historical figure embedded in his own time. She had a sense of God throughout all of this, but only as a taskmaster interested in her infringement of rules; he had been blankly absent otherwise. It had taken years for her to realise that this doctrinally fixed God did not exist, and that God in real terms could not have objective existence. *That*, she realised, was the key to the whole affair. Discarding her "taskmaster" conception of God she then "deliberately create[d] a sense of him" for herself. God could not be discovered through the rational processes, but he could be found in the creative imagination.

Back to the Siblings

The German historian Uta Ranke-Heinemann systematically dismantles the doctrinal edifice of the Church in *Putting Away Childish Things*, a book that reveals a paternalistic Church unwilling to admit that its early teaching stories have been allowed to harden into never-to-be-questioned dogmas. In a showdown with the Church, this first woman Professor of Theology at the University of Essen was declared ineligible to teach and forced over into the history department of the same University. As a student of Rudolf Bultmann's in the 1920s, and a convert to Catholicism in the 1950s, Ranke-Heinemann is of the opinion that a Christian has the right, indeed the intellectual obligation, to say "No" to fairytale doctrines masquerading as eternal truths. In this vein Catholic "truth" is a censored truth, "the God whom we meet at the end of a series of ecclesiastical middlemen ... a censored God."¹⁴ Called on to believe, but not to think, Catholics practice "mental gymnastics" and studiously avoid the kind of questions they would quite naturally ask under any other set of circumstances. The Church "isn't interested in understanding or enlightenment: every variety of enlightenment strikes it as suspicious, if not worthy of damnation."¹⁵ Unconcerned with the pain it inflicts on religious intelligence, it punishes for hurt caused to its own feelings, distrusts doubters and blesses the unquestioning. Ranke-Heineman adds

caustically that "Jesus lies buried not only in Jerusalem, but also beneath a mountain of kitsch, tall tales, and church phraseology."¹⁶

One such tall tale is Pope John Paul's argument that Jesus' mother was a virgin before, and after Jesus' birth, and that he had not had blood-related siblings. Relegated to being step-brothers and sisters around 150 by the *Protevangelium of James*, and into cousins by Jerome in or around 400, the problem of Jesus' immediate family members was made to vanish. And for very good reason as Ranke-Heinemann observes: "The whole centre of gravity of Christian faith rests on the fact that Mary conceived and gave birth as a virgin ... Everything that has been subsequently taught and believed about the deliverance from sin and liberation of the human race through the blood of Jesus Christ ... is based on this fact."¹⁷ Hence the title of *Aeiparthenos* (ever-virgin) bestowed on Mary by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Allow the virgin birth of Jesus to be seriously questioned and the whole edifice of the Christian faith is open to attack. Hence John Paul's linking of Jesus' mother with the failed assassination attempt on his life: such a link defied and defeated the absurd elements of the virgin birth story.

The absurdity starts with a girl of around twelve years of age being led by God into a situation of public disgrace and dishonour due to being engaged to a man of mature years and found to be pregnant. As engagement counted as marriage - it was *de jure* marriage - this kind of thing could happen, and in Mary's case it *did* happen. *That* is the bottom line of this story, and it should not be put aside on behalf of the fairytale eventually built around it: Mary was found to be with child *out of wedlock* in spite of it having happened within what was termed a virtual marriage! As such she was guilty of adultery, the penalty being either death by stoning or, if older, strangled or burned. It all depended on the husband who wasn't actually a husband. If he took her to court to save face then the very worst might happen, if not, then only the girl's moral reputation would suffer.

In Mary's case two stories emerge, one scandalous, the other miraculous. The scandalous aspect is that Joseph admits to being the father, so pointing to irregularity rather than adultery, the miraculous that what Mary claimed to be true *was* true, and that Joseph accepts her implausible explanation in spite of his doubts. The problem for the

Gospel writers in handling this situation was even more acute, for in hindsight Mary's pregnancy had to be explained in alignment with the natural facts *and* the theologically developed view of Jesus as *Son of God*. As Mary's manipulated reply to the archangel Gabriel reveals, she knew that sexual intercourse was required if children were to be conceived, but is made to feign innocence and accept what is not credible: pregnancy *without* penetration. Penetration is nevertheless in the story, for we are told that she was "overshadowed" by Gabriel, and *that* is the act of penetration couched in the language of myth. Mary's question: "How shall this be, since I know no man?" (Luke 1:3-4) is not astonishment at the angel's pronouncement; it is the compiler's awareness that the story's sexual irregularity has to be reconstructed along miraculous lines. And what a reconstruction it is: the story literally hums with imagination and hyperbole, the proof of another text threatening to surface detectable in the anomalies and contradictions the story contains. *Loose*, indeed, and shown up for the nonsense it is when Mary, with the help of Jesus' brothers and sisters, later accuses her son of being mad - she has apparently forgotten Gabriel's assessment of her child and turned into a mother fearful for a son's sanity.

Two Christianities

The problem of who is telling the truth about Jesus' death on the cross, God's supposed plan of salvation for the world, or Mary's perpetual virginity comes into sharp focus in Douglas Geivett's conservative study of John Hicks' progressive approach to theology and the existence of evil. In *Evil and the Love of God*, Hicks propounds a universal theory of salvation that blatantly challenges the Church's major doctrines of sin, redemption and eternal punishment for the wicked; whereas Geivett's weighty response in *Evil and the Evidence for God* seeks to prove that Hicks' universalism has no place in Christian doctrine. Hicks does allow for a redemptive process of sorts, a "soul-making" process of evolutionary flavour reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin, but that is about as far as it goes: he does not believe in a God who periodically breaches natural law. Geivett, on the other hand, is not so sure; he argues that manipulations of this sort are probable given the nature of God. God is after all concerned about human beings; so it is to be expected that he

will communicate with them from time to time - he is in fact ubiquitously *meddlesome*. Although not arguing directly for visitations of the angelic kind, Geivett does argue for the production of "certain virtues in the life of a believer", and for the fortifying of the mind with "confidence and peace" during times of crisis. In other words, God sometimes *rewards* believers.

As Associate Professor of Philosophy at Biola University in La Miranda, California, Geivett's response to Hicks' progressive vision of life and afterlife is worth looking at - he argues with flair, is seldom boring, and on many occasions enlightening. Arguing from the standpoint that God exists, and that he is more probably omnipotent than not, Geivett talks of God's power, intelligence and goodness, equates these traits with a "person", and asks that we not rule out the possibility of miracles "involving the manipulation of nature contrary to ordinary regularities".¹⁸ To firmly cement this intellectually provocative point in place (angelic visitation and much else), he adds: "[R]egularities themselves might well depend upon the ongoing participation of God in the operation of 'natural' processes." Such regularities are of course the laws governing the cosmos, Geivett's argument stemming from an acceptance of the anthropic principle where the universe is conceived as specifically designed for the emergence of human beings.

As a philosopher of religion, Hicks also believes in God, but not quite in the manner as propounded by Geivett - Geivett is a stickler for approaching God in the right way. It is not enough to believe in God; we have to define our theism in relation to the set revelation of Christianity. Whatever one might think of Geivett's approach, *his* God is definitely *there* somewhere, whereas Hicks' God is ambiguous in his thereness. Geivett's God is susceptible to "devotional experiment"; Hicks' God is more a proposition that one either accepts or rejects. Geivett's God is benevolent in that he wants to make meaningful contact with human beings; Hicks' God is a hidden God, a "possible" God within or behind the universe as brute fact.

Taking these mental pictures as they stand, Geivett's God sounds the more attractive of the two. But there's a catch, for his God is not averse to condemning human beings to eternal punishment. Not only do we have to believe that God exists, we also have to *desire* to be in his presence and willingly participate in acts of adoration and worship. For it

is not unreasonable to assume that beings in rebellion against God will be unable to take part in such worship, and that God in his unqualified goodness will congregate them in a domain where the demands of worship and adoration will not be made, namely, in *hell*. Hicks rejects this *approach* to God as "repellant",¹⁹ and in saying so reveals himself to be enamoured of what Malachi Martin calls *the winsome doctrine*. How Professor Geivett would finally define hell and punishment is unclear, but I think Hicks accurately describes the gulf between their God-formulas as spawning two distinctly different Christianities. God has given us free will and intelligence, but if we are then forced by a foreordained and inflexible plan to accept logic-defying doctrines, then our intelligence and our will has been forfeited. *If* that is how God wants things to be, then we have in fact no option but to rebel, the Catch-22 being that our rebellion is due to having sufficient free will and intelligence to create other ways of defining God, his purpose, and the reality at large. In Hicks' account it is "morally incredible that a perfectly loving Creator should devise a situation in which millions of men and women suffer eternally."²⁰

Uta Ranke-Heinemann tells us that Hell "serves the purpose of cradle-to-grave intimidation",²¹ and that, in terms of Catholicism, is the whole situation in a nutshell. The Judaic underworld (*Sheol*) had slowly evolved from Ecclesiastes' place of dust and darkness (250 BCE) into Daniel's more hopeful underworld (165 BCE) where resurrection was possible, *Sheol* having been a silent kingdom that accepted man and beast indiscriminately, and within which there was no trace of punishment. Influenced by the Greeks and Persians, there was a stirring in *Sheol*, a movement away from the belief that the dead slept forever. Influenced by the death of the Maccabean martyrs, the Jews evolved the idea of "heaven" in much in the same vein as the German Valhalla, retained the dark and dusty *Sheol* for the rank and file and created what Heinemann refers to as a "twofold military division ... between good and evil."²² This military division subsequently turned into a moral division, and from this sprang the assumption that "virtue" and "morality" were the warriors by right, war and religion having always been "a harmonious pair."²³

But what of Satan and his angels? Has "progressive" Christian scholarship anything to say about them? Arguing that Satan and his minions have "permanent value as a vivid symbol of gratuitous evil perpetrated in society", Hicks nevertheless remains doubtful that any appeal can be made "to the reality of demons to explain the existence of some evils."²⁴ This suggests that demons do not exist, but that they can be talked about *as if* they do for religious purposes. Geivett, in contrast to this, tells us that Augustine attributed "most natural evil to Satan" (floods, earthquakes and such like), and that Alvin Plantinga, the celebrated philosopher of religion has "appealed to the logical possibility that what we call natural evil is due to the free action of Satan and his cronies."²⁵ Natural evil can be attributed to "nonhuman free agents of superhuman power", according to Plantinga, but in relation to those who defend the Augustinian position, this is not to assert that such an arrangement is *true*, merely that it is *possible*.²⁶ Geivett then quotes Richard Swinburne (another eminent philosopher of religion) as saying that the assumption that fallen angels have subjected the world to natural evil "will do the job ... and is not clearly false.? Not necessarily "true"; just "possible". What all of it comes down to in the end is whether we believe God has delivered a revelation to the world in Jesus, and that everything attached to that revelation (the existence of Satan, the perpetual virginity of Mary, or the miracles of Jesus) should be accepted without question.

According to Cardinal Newman, human beings became morally imperfect through the use of their free will - they *chose* to disobey rather than obey God. No unease here. This means that we are not, as Hicks would have it, creatures created imperfect so that we might be improved through a process of earthly soul-making, but that we are *rebels* who have to lay down our arms. So thought Cardinal Newman; so thinks Douglas Geivett. And behind them, as it were, is Malachi Martin with much the same point of view. Ever the original thinker, Hicks has a universalist approach where everyone will be perfected in the end, earthly life functioning as a refining fire that death will complete in a series of *other* lives *not* related to the theory of reincarnation. This is Geivett's breakdown of Hicks' spiritual system, and I have to admit to

being as surprised by it as I am by Geivett's willingness to accept the idea of eternal punishment for human beings.

What I am not surprised by is Geivett's insistence that what really matters is "how one comes to the conclusion that God exists."²⁷ If one's belief in God comes via Christianity's basic argument of rebels in need of salvation, then sin, evil and Satan are realities, If one accepts Hicks' notion of everyone making it in the end, then the appeal is not to God's saving power, but to the character and quality of human existence. Evil, in this scenario, ceases to be a destructive force and becomes an integral factor in the salvation process itself, and that "cancels out the prima facie evidence for religious belief."²⁸ This is what divides Geivett from Hicks, and it is with this division we have to stay if we are to glimpse the mystery of good and evil in conjunction

Abraham's Dilemma

Tradition has it that Abraham's remains lie buried alongside those of his wife Sarah's in the Cave of Machpelah, at Hebron, and that in adjacent twin tombs repose his son Isaac and his daughter-in-law Rebecca. As founder of the Jewish religion and father of the Jewish nation, Abraham stands out as the man willing to obey God even when asked to kill his own son. In a curious twist of history and theology this links Abraham as a "father", with "God the Father", for it is as "Father" that God sacrifices his son for a sacred purpose.

German scholars of the 19th century did not interpret Old Testament stories as historical events, but as symbols or metaphors. Awarding them the status of myth, they argued for their having been carefully edited and adapted "to provide historical justification and divine sanction for religious beliefs, practices and rituals of the post-Exilic Israelite establishment."²⁹ So writes Paul Johnson in his *History of the Jews*, and he goes on to examine the tendency of these scholars to undermine the achievements of Mosaic monotheism and reinterpret both the Jewish and Christian revelations as nothing more than "a determinist sociological development from primitive tribal superstition to sophisticated urban ecclesiology."³⁰

So what of Abraham and his attempt to sacrifice Isaac? Was it just a beat-up for historical and religious purposes? Or do we have to look beyond what Johnson terms the *deformations professionnelles* of 19th century textual historians to the discoveries of modern scientific archaeology and accept that Abraham did exist, and that the story of God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac may have had some basis in reality? Could it be that the Abraham-Isaac story carries within it the rudiments of an answer to the Geviert-Hicks problem with evil? The findings of 19th century German scholars, although dismissive, may still be valid for reason other than those presented at the time. The inner world of a human being can express itself in dream, reverie or vision, such expressions carrying symbolically deep comprehensions not yet grasped by the conscious mind. To speak of symbol and metaphor in relation to these stories is then actually valid, not in the sense of their being nothing more than historico-religious concoctions, but in the sense of their having expressed the inner world of the human in the process of moral and ethical transition. I would contend that it is for this reason that these old stories have survived, and that it is up to us to carefully interpret and preserve their archetypal content.

The word "archetype" derives from *archetypos* in Greek, and it breaks down into two parts, *arche* and *typos*. *Arche* means "foremost" or "chief", and can be found in its slightly abbreviated form at the beginning of such words as "archbishop" or "archangel". But it is *typos* that is of greater interest, for it translates as "a blow or a mark left by a blow, an impress, or mold",³¹ and can be detected in such words as "type" or "typical" - hence "archetype" in English. Archetypes are autonomous by nature; they are governed by their own sovereign laws, and although subjective, can reflect themselves onto the screen of external human affairs. This is to say that archetypes are not only present in our subjective inner world, but also sometimes detectable in the outer, objective world. Capable of interacting with us through dreams, reveries and visions, archetypes in the form of internal *pressures* drive us hither and thither in search of our own depths, and in moments of psychic distress sometimes penetrate the hard shell of our conscious awareness. Here then is the blow that leaves its mark, the blow from *within* that leaves a deep impression on our minds.

In primitive psychology the sacrifice of a child symbolised the stopping of time; the child's ritualised death delayed the future. Held magically within the psychic spell of youth offered up to the gods, those making the offering warded off both old age and death. Chronos kills his children because they remind him of his age, Oedipus is exposed on a mountain through the same impulse, and Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia for political reasons. This opens up the idea and allows us to realise that acts of ritualised murder were committed on behalf of "ideas" believed to be of social, economic or religious significance. And so with Abraham, for whom the impulse to murder his son Isaac was felt to spring from God himself; but in a peculiar fashion. The text says that God *tempted* him to commit infanticide (Genesis 22: 1), and that allows us to look into the depths of Abraham's mind and feel the presence of an old pagan brutality not yet fully rooted out.

There is no surface emotion in the story of Abraham's attempt to murder his son Isaac at God's request, but one can feel the emotion bottled up inside the story at every step. The pressure is on from the first descriptive word, and it does not diminish until Abraham makes his leap of faith, his leap *away* from old literalisms and into the arms of the symbolic. The wood is stacked, Isaac is tied down and the knife is in the air, but the blow is never struck because Abraham wakes up to what is going on in his life and makes a choice, a choice that revolutionises his whole conception of God. A three-day journey in silence has given him time to think and ponder on the meaning of what he is about to do. Yet it is only at the very last minute that these deep ruminations take effect and he creates a new way of relating to the circumstances of his life - the way of "covenant" in place of human sacrifice. The killing of the ram instead of Isaac is not an imposed answer to his problem imposed from heaven; it is the transferring of a method of contractual binding from one situation to another. As Paul Johnson observes: "Abraham, as we know from contemporary archives, came from a legal background where it was mandatory to seal a contract or covenant with an animal sacrifice."³² *That* is the clue required to properly understand this story, for it signals not only that psyche "holds within it the means with which to confront and transform its own blind and brutal forces",³³ it also informs us that our inner world of culturally-driven thoughts, fears and habits can be

challenged and changed by psyche itself. Abraham, in a moment of creative insight, not only sees a way out of his dilemma and seizes on it, he also changes the trajectory of thought around the ancient idea of human sacrifice and annuls it. Or, as H. Weston so accurately suggests in *The Springs of Creativity*. "The war of opposites ends and the opposites are revealed as harmonious: God and Satan stand together in the sacred precinct; Abraham, the man, stands between them."³⁴ That is the whole point of this story, the image we should carry from it if we are interested in human freedom: it was not Jesus' God who let Abraham off the hook; it was an inspired Abraham who let go of his old, tired and inadequate idea of God.

Our problem is that we have argued God, as we have argued Jesus, into a state of unblemishable purity governed at every step not by divine revelation as we so smugly suppose, but by our own devastatingly limited understanding of human consciousness and the creative process. The archetypal depths of consciousness create the tensions and pressures that mold and shape us, these pressures being born out of our need to take risks. We are quite simply stuck "timeside" of the equation of life, and have to be literally blasted out of our intellectual and spiritual complacency before anything other than stereotypical beliefs and ideas can emerge. Content with our narrow, verbally hide-bound view of God, universe and self, we imprison our creativity in surface certitudes and deny the possibility that God's dance of life can be anything other than how we describe it. *Tempted* by this inadequate God to sacrifice *our* Isaac, we bring the knife down with relish and look around for applause. This is to say that Hell is Isaac knifed to the bone, and that a God who would either demand human sacrifice or engage in it is, as history attests, the man Jesus struck through with nails for having had the audacity to question the religious orthodoxy of his day.

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