

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 God had his way, there would be no democracy on earth either. At least that's how it seems in Malachi Martin's scheme of things, in this Jesuit's grand vision of Catholicism rejuvenated. There are only inferiors and superiors, a hierarchy within which self-perfecting individualism (Martin's carefully worded 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, for the whole structure is obviously more than the sum of its parts - God is in control and absolutely anything is possible.

This description of divine hierarchy is Martin's description of the Jesuit Order as it ought to be, 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 Martin views the cosmos in exactly the same manner, 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. So 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. As reported in *The*

Australians, Richard Owen of *The Times* observed that the above statement was made to his regular audience at the Vatican, and added 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 Well, isn't that a relief. It really does take the tension out of a day to know that such problems can be removed in such a manner, and that those once thought best able to handle such problems can close up shop and rely wholly on the papa's inspired consciousness. Well, it would if such a claim to inside knowledge was at all sensible, which it is not.

There is a lot at stake in such a question, and John Paul must once again have felt the cool breath of reality on his neck to have made such a feckless pronouncement. Backing away from the disturbing fact that the Gospels speak openly of Jesus' brothers and sisters, John Paul is quoted as having said that the words "brother's" and "sisters" are used loosely in the Gospels. 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? Is that what "loosely" means in this context? Or does this interesting word only refer to the numerous passages where Jesus' brothers and sisters are mentioned? And what of his holiness's other 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 overlooked by scholars? I think not. The Gospels did after all come down to us in Greek, and ancient Greek was not lacking in the word "cousin". This fact cannot be brushed aside. The Gospel writers are presumed to have had firsthand knowledge of Jesus' family situation, so 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, we're also told by Richard Owen that John Paul believes that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was responsible for saving his life after the assassination attempt in 1981. Why? Because the bullet was fired on *The Feast of Our Lady of Fatima*, and that is considered significant. So convinced was he that this connects the shooting with Mary that the Pope apparently donated the bullet taken from his body to the Fatima shrine. By doing so he confirmed not only that the divine hierarchy was all of a piece, but that Mary really had been added to it for good measure. Now I do not doubt for a moment that John Paul II was perfectly sincere in that belief, but it must be pointed out that by holding

such a belief the Pope blissfully allowed himself to confirm one extrusion of pontifical hot air with another, and by doing so carried the Catholic mind one step further along the path of medieval credulity. Such witlessness is fully evident in what appears to be the unrelated business of Mary's other children; if John Paul's life was saved by Jesus' mother in 1981, then it follows, as night follows day, 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. And with this redemptive energy came "insight" and "revelation", God's conformation of the hierarchy 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 similar revelations of his own. Martin tells us that Claude "conveyed the divine wishes to his Superiors, and through them to the Roman authorities"³

This is Martin sleight-of-hand at its best; Claude's and Alacoque's interaction with God take on the quality of an unrecorded telephone conversation, and we are left with the impression that God is in the habit of contacting individuals with specific requests. It's the New Testament all over again; God is the grand puppet-master behind the scenes. Accepting Alacoque's revelations as authentic in the late seventeenth century, Rome is said to have loosed "a fresh aspect of theological thinking", and the Jesuits found themselves officially chosen to spread this new devotion to the community.

Alas, as a result of Modernism in the 20th century, Jesuit fidelity to this special devotion seems to have evaporated, and Martin notes that in 1972 Father General Arrupe discovered that "Jesuits on the whole and in the majority had simply lost interest in devotion to the Sacred Heart".⁴ Yet no one seems to have noticed this radical change in the making; it

seems to have come as a shock when the Order most dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus spurned it as “childish, primitive, unsophisticated, repellent (and) unworthy of a modern mind.”⁵ Described as “gross” and “sensuous” by some, this divinely commissioned devotion was now seen as more suitable for children and peasants, and as such no longer applicable to intelligent individuals in the modern age. So what had happened? Had God changed his mind? Had he decided to cancel this special devotion through rank and file rejection? Was devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for one age, but not for another? Or was it simply that no such commission had ever been received? Or again, was this astonishing reaction simply the result of a silent and deadly process working within the Jesuit Order itself, a process of estrangement from God dressed up in the fancy workings and wordings of an age diabolically seduced?

In Martin’s opinion, the latter, and not the former, was the case - Father General Arrupe had been fatally flawed in his character from the very beginning. In the habit of bowing to majority opinion, he had proved himself unable to wield Jesuit authority and succumbed to the twentieth-century illusion that God was in favour of a spiritual democracy. Teilhard de Chardin’s influence could 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 the will of God; God desired that individuals 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*, Martin carefully 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. For behind the death of meaning lies a set of scientific propositions which, if accepted as “fact”, or even as “highly probable”, automatically annul the idea of God initiating a process of salvation for all human beings. Jesus' death on the cross as a saving act simply melts away in the face of the fact that human beings have “a remote ancestry during which not merely his body formed but what was called his mind and higher instincts were

fashioned."⁶ This is the intellectual Rubicon we are each forced to cross during our lifetime, and the result of accepting the creed of science is a slow, but certain diminution of religious belief and feeling - if indeed such a sense of God and his loving plan for all human beings has ever managed to grow in the first place.

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, and Jesus no more than the peak of the evolutionary process. Which 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, all this religious double-talk, but not at all applicable to human needs and sensibilities at the end of the twentieth century. The supposed divinity of Jesus was ultimately irreconcilable with evolution, and as such had to be jettisoned on behalf of a vision of the world firmly grounded in scientific fact rather than religious fancy.

Malachi Martin is in no doubt that such reasoning is diabolical at source; not just because it flies in the face of Church doctrine, but because he quite literally believes it to spring from the dark heart of Satan disguised in the world as dispassionate intellect - there is an inner darkness of which we are unaware. Intellect in itself is not diabolical, but divorced from the truth of the Gospels, and seduced away from the revealed truth of the Church it cannot but fail to comprehend the complete cosmic picture and fall into error. The Devil is real, evil is on the loose, and our inability to understand and accept this horrifying fact is at the root of social collapse and personal disintegration. We are constantly in 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 as a religious tract the book is powerful testimony to the fact that some

leading Catholic intellectuals are unwilling to throw the diabolical baby out with the doctrinal bath water.

But why a Devil at all? And why Evil? Why such rampant opposition to all that is good and wholesome, true and beautiful from a being said to have been the apex of God's angelic creation? So how did Lucifer manage to fall into rebellion when he was so close to the divine source in the first instance? That's the puzzler, and no matter how one looks at it, rationalises it, theologises or mythologises it, it remains the question which fundamentally cannot be answered. Which rather suggests that we are asking the wrong question, for only questions inadequately formulated result in such an impasse. And so we must find a new question, or approach, and ask exactly where in the hypothetical cosmic hierarchy of being Lucifer, as a concept, can be placed. For if evil has its root in a being, in an entity, and God made that entity, and there is, still, an ideal hierarchy of entities stretching from heaven to earth through which the self-substantiating power of God flows, then any alternative hierarchy of value that arose must necessarily have arisen by divine fiat; that is, within the mind of God himself. For his angelic creation need not be understood, in the first instance, as having been a separate creation, as "objects" somehow separated from God in space and time, but as God expressing himself to himself within his own divine orbit. Locked within God's orbit, within his love and beauty and consistency, his angels and archangels were in fact incapable of evil intention; but they were capable of willing what their creator willed, and it seems that he eventually willed creative disruption.

As a word, "evil" has taken on the virtually unconscious connotation of diabolical influence, of being somehow the result of a disembodied malevolence in the world to which human beings succumb. To be "evil" is therefore much more than being "bad"; it is to be so out of control that control is picked up by forces other than the self. The self is overcome, subdued, made subservient to the wishes of spirits or demons whose *raison d'être* is the disruption of human life. And the whole business centres on the human will, on a teasing of the human will towards decisions which will cause pain and suffering on an ever-ascending scale of intensity. We do battle, it seems, not just with other human beings, or with ourselves, but with invisible powers greedily awaiting a moment of weakness. That's the story line, and it has stuck. Why? Because Christianity has successfully personalised both the holy

and the unholy. This, we are told, is the great Christian contribution to religion, and not to believe it means that the evil one has got us in his grip. When not attached to this set of beliefs, to this anciently inspired vision, the whole modern world is no more than an empty shell - a shell from which the mysterious sound of the sea has been cunningly removed.

Crisis

In his challenging article 'A Western Crisis of Belief', the sociologist John Carroll recognises (along with Malachi Martin) that individualism has failed, but that's where the agreement ends. Unlike Martin, this sociologist 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, and wants and desires does not in the end satisfy the seeking mind, so much is admitted by Carroll; but neither do tired old doctrines dredged up into the present from the distant past. Yes, there should be "an overarching theology or metaphysics" to hold the whole picture in place; but it should be "a credible picture of the whole", a Christianity revitalised, not further marginalised.⁸ In contrast to this, Dr David Powys paints a quite different picture in 'The Unpopular Path of Truth'. Mentioning John Carroll by name, this Anglican vicar 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. And 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.

Powys' point of divergence with John Carroll seems to be over the nature of the meanings that should be 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 Yes, there is 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 overlooked; humanity's obligation to divinity for Christ's redeeming death is sidestepped; Christ's future return abandoned as a promise to be kept.

A second article by John Carroll more than adequately 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 had lost touch with its own time, and a second Reformation is required for exactly 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. Which 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 exactly does that mean, Powys would ask. 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 probable response by pointing out that the more insecure Christianity has become in its own doctrines, the more it has turned to secular issues. Citing the influential 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. And so their came about a relocating of the sacred, an infusing of the "everyday" with a sacred glow, and the momentum of this change of attitude is still with us in the form of an *ever deepening connection with the world*. But he is well aware that a Church in flight from theology is in a dangerous state, a vulnerable and unenviable state as it attempts to blend philosophical utilitarianism with scientific Darwinianism and abandons its calling. Powys agrees, but not quite for the same reasons, for Carroll the sociologist would have the Church 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.

Speaking of the Christian churches and their growing failure to attract and convince, Carroll says that 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 According to Carroll's gospel, this is the platform on which the churches will perish; according to the gospel of David Powys', exactly the opposite is true. Enter Malachi Martin 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 by "definition" 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 ultimately be disastrous for Western civilisation, but Carroll is the only one who comes out batting for a reinterpretation of key Christian doctrines such as Christ's divinity. Taking the metaphysical bull by the 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 To my way of thinking, that is a valuable and insightful observation, but I suspect it will not fit too well with the traditionalist's approach, an approach all but incapable of making theological and philosophical adjustment. 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

On the subject of theological and philosophical adjustment, 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 which may or may not work out. Religion has after all 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.

Armstrong is aware of 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 tells us that 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 then began to notice that the Church's God was hardly ever talked about, and that the Jesus who had taken his place seemed a purely historical figure firmly embedded in his own time. There was of course a sense of God throughout all of this, but he was no more than a taskmaster interested only in her infringement of the rules, or blankly absent when she needed him most. It would take years for her to realise that this doctrinally fixed God did not in fact exist, that the real God too had no actual *objective existence*, and that that was the key to the whole affair. So she left the religious life, discarded her taskmaster God and began to "deliberately create a sense of him" for herself. God could not be discovered in the rational processes, but he could be found in the creative imagination. One generation's ideas about God seldom satisfied another; so each generation had to create its own image of God and put up with being called "atheists" by their contemporaries.

All of this is to be found in Armstrong's introduction, and it is a breath of fresh air to read her tight, learned prose, and find oneself smiling for a change. Yes, secular humanism does not seem to be delivering the goods, but neither is Christianity in its present state of doctrinal fixedness. The inner darkness is all but complete, and it is the doctrines of the Christian Church that have helped generated that darkness.

Back to the Siblings

The German historian Uta Ranke-Heinemann has blasted an enormous hole big in Catholic thinking. Systematically dismantling the doctrinal edifice of the Church in her bestselling book *Putting Away Childish Things*, she 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 has been declared ineligible to teach and forced over into the history department of the same University.

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 fairy tale doctrines masquerading as eternal truths. Her main point is that Catholic "truth" is a censored truth, and that "the God whom we meet at the end of a series of ecclesiastical middlemen is a censored God."¹⁴ Called on to believe, but not to think, we practice "mental gymnastics" and studiously avoid the kind of questions we would quite naturally ask under any other set of circumstances. Touching the quick of the situation, she tells us that 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. She 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 of course the present Pope's argument that Jesus' mother was a virgin before, and after Jesus' birth, and that he had neither brothers nor sisters in the real sense of those words. Made into 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, for 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. And so John Paul takes his stand, and the nonsense elements of the story are once again swept under the doctrinal carpet before the faithful have a chance to glimpse their sheer absurdity.

The absurdity starts with a girl of around twelve years of age being led by God into a situation of public disgrace and dishonour. That's how it all started; Mary was in all probability just over twelve when her engagement to Joseph took place. At this time engagement at twelve, or a little older, was common practice; engagements at an older age were considered odd. And if she were so engaged and was found to be pregnant? Well, the worst imaginable was possible. Found guilty of adultery at twelve she could have been stoned to death; if older, either strangled or burned. It all depended on the husband; if he was so angry that he took her to court, then the very worst might happen; if not, then only the girl's moral reputation suffered - a penalty by degree depending on the circumstances. It should be remembered that engagement counted as marriage - it was *de jure* marriage. So around the mother of Jesus' grew two stories, one miraculous, the other scandalous, The latter was more probable due to the fact that Joseph agreed to stay with his already pregnant wife. But Mary's child did at least belong to the correct father. and that pointed to "irregularity" rather than "adultery".

It was still a problem of some proportions for the gospel writers as Mary's factually oriented reply to the archangel Gabriel reveals, for she knew full well that sexual intercourse was required if children were to be conceived, and her reported reply to the angel reflected what she would have said - if she had in fact been visited by an angel, which was not the case. "How shall this be, since I know no man?" he asked (Luke 1:3-4), her question reflecting not her personal astonishment at the pronouncement of this angel, but the writer's awareness of the sexual irregularity he has to camouflage as he labours at the task of story reconstruction. And what a story of reconstruction the Gospels are; they literally hum with imagination and hyperbole. The proof that there is another text struggling to get out is detectable in the anomalies and contradictions each Gospel contains, indeed, in their *looseness*. How strange that Mary will later accuse her son of being mad, and with the help of his brothers and sisters attempt to rescue him from himself. How

strange that this self-same Mary will not understand her divinely appointed son when, at the age of twelve, he speaks of his “heavenly father”; and how strange that she will apparently forget all about her meeting with Gabriel and fall into the kind of mind-set one associates with an ordinary mother fearful for a son’s sanity.

Or is all of this not nearly as strange as it seems? Is it more the truth that this mother and son did not get on? That Jesus’ kith and kin did not share in his curiously extended spiritual vision? That the whole Nazarean party led by Jesus’ family was doctrinally separate from the Christian party set up by Paul? And that Peter, in spite of attempts to reverse his role, was really at loggerheads with Paul? Is it not historically obvious that the rest of Jesus’ disciples were under James’ control, and that it was only the outbreak of war with the Romans that eventually allowed Paul’s Christian party to win out over the Nazarean Mother Church? Are not these the historical facts that have been clouded by mythology and centuries of textual manipulation? And shouldn’t the Christian Churches take responsibility for the whole extraordinary mess and help initiate the second Christian Reformation called for by John Carroll?

Two Christianities

The problem of who is telling the truth about Jesus’ death on the cross, about God’s supposed plan of salvation for the world, or Mary’s perpetual virginity, comes into sharp focus in Douglas Geivett’s conservative philosophical study of John Hick’s progressive approach to theology and the existence of evil. In *Evil and the Love of God*, Hick’s propounds a universal theory of salvation which quite blatantly challenges the Church’s major doctrines of sin, redemption and eternal punishment for the wicked; whereas Geivett in his weighty response, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, seeks to prove that Hick’s universalism has no place in Christian doctrine, and that his eschatological overview isn’t even Christian at base. Yes, Hick does allow for a redemptive process of sorts, a “soul-making” process of distinctly evolutionary flavour reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin, but that’s about as far as it goes: he does not believe in a God who periodically breaches natural law and reaches down into his creation to augment some divine plan. 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 crisis. In other words, God sometimes rewards believers.

As Associate Professor of Philosophy at Biola University in La Miranda, California, Geivett's response to Hick's new and progressive vision of life and afterlife is worth looking at - he argues with flair, is seldom boring, and on many occasions quite 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 And to firmly cement this intellectually provocative point in place (angelic visitation and much else may be possible under such an arrangement), he adds: "For . . . regularities 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, and Geivett's second point is interesting because it suggests that God might be much nearer to us than we may previously have supposed. The scientific side of his argument stems from an acceptance of the anthropic principle - that the universe has been specifically designed for human life to erupt - and that the incredibly restrictive process of creation necessary to produce and sustain life such as ours following the Big Bang strongly suggests both intelligence and purpose behind the scenes.

Himself an eminent philosopher of religion, Professor Hick's also believes in God, but not quite in the same manner as Professor Geivett - Geivett is a stickler for approaching God in the right way. It is not enough to just believe in God; we have to carefully define our theism in relation to the set revelation of Christianity. Now whatever one might think of Geivett's mental perambulations, his God is definitely *there* somewhere; whereas Hick's God is altogether ambiguous in his thereness. Geivett's God is susceptible to "devotional experiment"; Hick's God seems more like a proposition one either accepts or rejects depending on how ambiguous God happens to be on the day. Geivett's

God is benevolent, wishing to make “meaningful contact” with human beings; Hick’s God is altogether hidden, a “possible” God within or behind the universe as brute fact.

Taking these pictures as they stand, Geivett’s God sounds the more attractive of the two. But there’s a catch, and it’s a big one as far as the modern temperament is concerned: Geivett’s God is not averse to condemning human beings to eternal punishment. Why? Because not only do we have to believe that God exists, we also have to desire to be in his presence, and when finally there willingly participate in acts of adoration and worship. So it stands to reason 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 "Hell".

Such reasoning is astonishing. Or as Hick’s puts it: “This traditional doctrine of hell is one of the aspects of conservative Christianity that repels”.¹⁹ By saying such a thing, Hick’s reveals himself to be a Modernist enamoured of what Malachi Martin calls the "winsome doctrine", for his rejection of hell and punishment sets him up to be viewed by Rigorists like Martin as an exponent of doctrines diabolically reversed. Now I have no idea how Professor Geivett would finally define such a stance on hell and punishment, but I think Hick’s accurately describes the gulf between conservative and progressive doctrinal formulas as tension-filled and capable of spawning two distinctly different Christianities. For what is the good of postulating that God has given us free will and intelligence if we are then forced, by dint of a foreordained and inflexible plan, to accept a series of logic-defying religious doctrines which make a nonsense of both our intelligence and our free will? What would be the point of such an exercise apart from proving that God can't be bucked?

Well, fine; if that's how God really wants it then there's absolutely nothing we can do about it - except rebel. And that of course is what we are not supposed to do, what we are free to do, but due to the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment thought unlikely to do because of fear. But only if we believe in the old Catholic formula. The Catch-22 is that we find it difficult to stop ourselves from rebelling because we have sufficient free will and intelligence to create other ways of defining God, his purpose, and the reality at large. Geivett may write "the reality of hell underwrites the Augustinian conviction that God has not stacked the

deck against human freedom", but from where Hick's (and many another) stands 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 comes to our rescue here when she says that Hell "serves the purpose of cradle-to-grave intimidation."²¹ That is actually the whole situation in a nutshell, an encapsulation of all the learned notions that have accrued around this subject down the centuries. At first a silent kingdom which accepted man and beast indiscriminately, and within which there was no punishment whatsoever, the Judaic underworld (*Sheol*) slowly evolved from Ecclesiastes' place of dust and darkness (250 BCE) into Daniel's more hopeful underworld (165 BCE) where resurrection was possible. 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" (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 moral division sprang the assumption that "virtue" and "morality" are warriors by right. Ranke-Heinemann sums up her introduction to hell and its eventual transformation into a place of torment by saying "war and religion have always been a harmonious pair."²³ The point is well made, I think.

But what of Satan and his angels? Where do they fit in? What does Hick, as a "progressive" Christian scholar, and "traditional" Christian scholarship of modern hue have to say about these dark figures, these denizens of the hell Hick must necessarily reject as a place of punishment? Arguing that Satan and his minions have "permanent value as a vivid symbol of gratuitous evil perpetrated in society", Hick's nevertheless remains doubtful that any appeal can be made "to the reality of demons to explain the existence of some evils."²⁴ This seems to suggest that demons do not actually exist, but can be talked about *as if* they do for religious purposes. Geivett tells us, on the other hand, 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 On the same page Geivett 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 *clearly* false? Not *necessarily* “true”, but “possible”? I wonder what such statements mean? Are such word arrangements just another way of saying what Hick’s has already said; or are they a subtle side-stepping of too difficult a set of questions allied to the notion of divine revelation. For that’s what it comes down to in the end, the belief that God has “personally” delivered a revelation to the world in Jesus, and that everything said to be attached to that revelation (the existence of Satan, the perpetual virginity of Mary, or the miracles of Jesus) should be accepted without question; or do such obfuscations indicate deep philosophical unease in the religious camp?

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. Which means that we are not, as Hicks suggests, creatures created imperfect so that we might be improved through a process of earthly soul-making, but rather *rebels who have to lay down our arms*. So thought Cardinal Newman, and so thinks Douglas Geivett, it seems. And right behind them is Malachi Martin with an identical overview. So what of Hick's universalist notion that everyone will be perfected in the end, that the process of earthly life is in itself the refining fire which will transform us, and that after death this process will complete itself in a series of other lives not related to the theory of reincarnation? This is Geivett's breakdown of Hick's spiritual system, and I must admit to being as surprised by it as I am by Geivett's willingness to accept the idea of eternal punishment for human beings.

But I am not at all surprised by Geivett's insistence that it is not enough to believe in God, but that what matters is "how one comes to the conclusion that God exists."²⁷ How we approach God is important. If one comes to a belief in God via Christianity's basic argument of rebels in need of salvation, then sin, evil and Satan are realities. But if one accepts Hick's notion of everyone making it in the end, then the appeal is not actually to God's saving power over and against sin, evil and Satan, but

to the character and quality of human existence with all of its attendant evils intact. Evil then becomes an integral factor in the salvation process (part of God's purpose), not the reason for its existence, and in doing so "cancels out the prima facie evidence for religious belief."²⁸ This is what divides Geivett from Hick, and it is on exactly this note that we must now dwell 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 Sarahs in the Cave of Machpelah, at Hebron, and that in adjacent twin tombs repose his son Isaac and his daughter-in-law Rebecca. 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 with God himself, for as Father to Jesus in Christian theology, God too was willing to sacrifice his son for a sacred purpose.

More to the point, however, are the suggestions of nineteenth century German scholars that many Old Testament stories should be interpreted as symbols, or metaphors, and not read as historical events. Awarding them the status of myth, these scholars 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 self same 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 Here then is Martin's "winsome doctrine" with a vengeance.

So what of Abraham and the story of his attempt to sacrifice Isaac? Nothing more than a beat-up for historical and religious purposes? Or do we have to look beyond what Johnson terms the *deformations professionnelles* of nineteenth 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. The question is: What kind of basis? And what

kind of reality? And why am I bothering with this particular story at this particular point? Well, it strikes me that the Abraham/Isaac story may carry within it the rudiments of an approach to the Geviert/Hicks problem, and that the findings of the German scholars during the nineteenth century, although overly dismissive, may still be valid for reason other than those presented at the time. I mean that the inner world of a human being can express itself in dream, reverie or vision, and that such expressions can carry symbolically deep comprehensions not yet grasped by the conscious mind. So to speak of symbol and metaphor in relation to these stories is actually valid, although not in the sense of their being nothing more than historico-religious concoctions. But rather because they express the inner world of human beings 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 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 the 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. Which 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, the 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 field somewhat and allows us to realise that such acts of ritualised murder were committed on behalf of “ideas”, 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 word allows us to look into the depths of Abraham’s mind and heart and feel the presence of an old pagan brutality not yet fully rooted out.

There is virtually no 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 word one, and it does not diminish until Abraham makes his leap of faith, his leap away from old literalisms 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. Why? Because Abraham wakes up to what is going on in his life and makes a choice, and the choice he makes revolutionises his conscious conception of God. But only because of a three day journey in silence during which he has had time to think, time to 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 spontaneously invents a new way of relating to the circumstances of his life - the way of covenant, or contract with God in place of human sacrifice. For the killing of the ram in place of Isaac is not an off-the-cuff decision; and neither is it something abruptly imposed on him from heaven. It is the transferring of a method of contractual binding from one situation to another. As Paul Johnson points out, “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 what is going on here, for it signals not only that the 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 can be radically changed through the *blow from within*. Abraham sees a way out of his mental dilemma (the ram caught in the thicket), seizes upon it, and a more human prerogative is asserted. Or, as H Weston so accurately puts it 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 surely is the whole point of this story, the image we should carry from it if we are seriously interested in human freedom.

Our problem is perhaps that we attempt to argue God, as we have argued Jesus, into a state of unblemished and unblemishable purity, an idea of 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 which mold and shape us, and these pressures are born out of a capacity to take risks seldom actualised due to conformity of mind and behaviour. We're 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 God to sacrifice *our* Isaac, we bring the knife down with relish and look around for applause. Which is to say that Hell is Isaac knifed to the bone, that Satan smirking in his own private kingdom is Isaac pierced through, and that a God without a dark side is the man Jesus struck through with nails for having had the audacity to cheek back at the orthodoxy of his day.

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