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# Genealogy: My Fathers and Our Father

Eric Pavlat | Column

8/9/08

I'm genealogy crazy, to my wife's occasional dismay. As of a few years ago, I'd traced most of my ancestral lines back to about 1600, but one particular branch was giving me problems: the Kendalls, the source of my middle name. Two years ago, I discovered my grandmother's grandfather, Adelbert A. Kendall, but I couldn't make any further progress on my own. He had been born in 1851 -- 150 years short of my personal "goal."

Eighteen months ago, I found some brothers and sisters of Adelbert and managed to track down two living descendants, Bob and Pat -- newfound cousins! Together with two near-descendants, Carl and Gay, we managed to gradually, painstakingly, piece together a mother and father for the family, as well as a probable date of death for the father. Every step required great labor (which I'm tempted to detail, but let's just leave it at "meticulous"), but we'd found new cousins to join in the search with us.

Then, recently, an unusually distant cousin, Jim, made a riveting discovery: an old genealogy book on [books.google.com](http://books.google.com) had just the breakthrough we were looking for. Indistinct, lacking in details, yet seeming to fit what little data we had, the book set us off on new paths. That led cousin Ken to contact another relative, Georgie. In short, after a long and difficult process, we met with success. There was much rejoicing; though separated by time zones, we celebrated together.

Later that day, Georgie e-mailed us a scan of a typed list she had found that her grandmother had made. It made my heart stop.

Births, marriages, and deaths, dates and place names -- it was as complete a genealogical record as one could ask for, going back to Adelbert's grandparents. It had been sitting in an old file folder in her home for years.

The irony was bitter. The paper had been there the entire time. We could have known the Kendall line

*immediately* -- all that labor, made meaningless by the discovery of a piece of typewritten stationery.

I quickly realized how childish that thinking was. God could have revealed this list to us at any time, but would we really have rejoiced then? Would I have ever met and become close to Pat or Bob, Gay or Carl, Ken or Jim or Georgie, without that search for our roots?

No, the past would have stayed dead. I would have dutifully deposited the information into my database -- but I would never have known about the grasshopper plagues that Adelbert and his family lived through, when the voracious insects ate not only the crops, but even the wooden handles of household tools. Nor would I have known what he did to support his family, educating himself at night to be able to pass the bar and become a lawyer instead of a simple postmaster. And I never would have learned how my family's past intersects with America's history, such as when Adelbert hunted gold in the Black Hills the first spring it was opened up to prospectors, or when he witnessed the bloodbath at Massacre Canyon during the Sioux Wars.

All of this -- the joy, the understanding, the love -- came through the process of doing the work.

**It's the same with the spiritual life.** God could infuse us with spiritual fervor, give us the gifts of the Spirit at all times, and so on. But each moment is precious and needs to be valued for *itself*, not judged against the completion of a task.

My prayers and studies don't just *inform* my relationship with God; they *form* it. My chasing down blind alleys, staying faithful to proven methods of holiness, trying out new spiritual exercises (new to me, at least) -- the point isn't how holy I'm *going to be* at some future point, but how holy I'm *becoming* at those

very moments. It's not the relationship I *will have*, but the relationship I *have right now*.

God could solve all of our problems immediately. He could feed the poor, teach the world's children -- even (most miraculous of all) keep my desk clean at work. However, our going through these temporal issues -- feeding the poor, teaching the ignorant, and cleaning our desks -- has objective value. Or, rather, they have the *opportunity* for value, if we use our moments in time to touch that which is eternal.

God can do all of our do-ings for us. But only we can be our be-ing. Not even God can be us for us.

Pope John Paul the Great once remarked that when it comes to any academic discipline -- physics, history, biology, art -- the more we learn, the more we find we have to learn, for each new fact suggests new questions. This is certainly true of genealogy, as each generation back in time doubles the number of lines

being studied -- each father and mother presents new fathers and mothers of their own.

The same is true in spirituality: The closer we get to God, the more we see faults and imperfections in ourselves that we'd never noticed before -- new ways to cleave more closely to Him. The more we understand God's love for us, the more it becomes a mystery. And the more we accept God as our true Father and embrace that relationship, the deeper the wonder that *He* embraces it, too.

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*Eric Kendall Pavlat, son of Robert Kendall Pavlat, recently celebrated the first birthday of his sixth child, Luke Kendall Pavlat.*

# You've Gotta Have Heart? How Obama Chooses Judges

Deal W. Hudson | Column

8/11/08

**E**voking the power of the human heart is the daily bread of American pop culture. It rarely raises an eyebrow. But the use of "heart" by Barack Obama to describe his criteria for picking judges is troubling.

Speaking to Planned Parenthood just over a year ago, Obama said:

We need somebody who's got the heart, the empathy to recognize what it's like to be a young teenage mom; the empathy to understand what it's like to be poor, or African-American, or gay, or disabled, or old. And that's the criteria by which I'm going to be selecting my judges.

Certainly, that empathy is desirable for anyone, simply as a human being. But what makes it a desirable quality *for a judge or a Supreme Court justice*? The phrase "sober as a judge" is a colloquialism for a reason. The senator implies that there's something missing in the Constitution and our law that must be supplied by the heart -- in other words, the empathy or caring of the judge. For him, the judge without "heart" cannot justly rule on cases about those who are gay, African-American, disabled, or "old" (whatever that means).

It's particularly worrisome that Obama's insistence on empathetic judges was aimed at the Supreme Court for upholding the ban on partial-birth abortion. During this horrific procedure, a doctor inserts scissors into a baby's skull and suctions out the brain just before he or she fully emerges from the mother.

An empathetic judge, according to Obama, would have allowed doctors to continue this gruesome procedure. A judge with "heart," presumably, would find the Born Alive-Infant Defined bill unconstitutional, allowing babies to die in hospitals without medical attention -- surely the exact opposite of what most people mean when they use the word.

UCLA law professor Stephen Bainbridge describes Obama's comment as an example of "how far left-liberalism has strayed from the rule of law." Bainbridge reiterates the view that impartiality -- not empathetic solidarity -- is what makes a judge what he should be: a neutral arbiter.

For Obama, the "first postmodern candidate" for president, there is no such thing as neutrality before the law. All values, and all judgments based upon those values, are the product of a struggle between groups as defined by race, class, and gender. The decision of the Supreme Court to uphold the ban on partial-birth abortion was wrong, according to Obama, because the justices ignored the perspective of women.

It seems that Obama believes that the law is about taking sides *before* you decide. As Professor Bainbridge puts it, "Settling upon a preferred outcome, without resort to the law, because it favors one group or another ought to be foreign to the judicial role."

Obama's support of gay marriage provides a perfect example of the problem. In his letter to San Francisco's Alice B. Toklas Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Democratic Club, Obama said he supported repealing the Defense of Marriage Act, passing the hate crimes bill, and opposed "the divisive and discriminatory efforts to amend the California Constitution." He described LGBT rights a "core issue" about "who we are as Americans."

A President Obama will be nominating at least one Supreme Court justice, probably more. With a Congress very likely to be dominated by the Democratic Party, an Obama administration will be positioned to reshape laws and policies according to this postmodern vision.

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*Deal W. Hudson is the director of [InsideCatholic.com](http://InsideCatholic.com) and the author of [Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States](#) (Simon and Schuster, March 2008).*

# Justice and Eternal Life

Rev. James V. Schall, S.J. | Column

8/11/08

**H**abitually, I call justice the most terrible of the virtues. It *is* a virtue; we are to render to another what is due. But by itself, even though rendering justice is an honorable act, it is cold and impersonal. This is why Aristotle always held that friendship was more important than justice. Friendship went beyond but it did not deny justice. Christianity saw that sacrificial love -- charity -- was also necessary if justice were to be achieved in the actual order in which we live. Justice looks only to the relation between people, not to the person to whom we are being just. Justice is an *invitation* to love, perhaps, but it is not love. As it is often said, we do not have to like those to whom we have to be just. We are even to be just to our enemies. However, the presumption of justice makes possible our many exchanges and relations with myriad people whom we can never know or know well.

The vast network that we call the market is but a way to make justice in exchange freely possible. In our relations of justice we are potentially related to anyone in the world. We want others to be just to us; we want to be just to them. The baseball cap I wore this morning was made in China. This is possible because of the global market and the political decisions that allow it to happen. Once trust in its fairness or justice is undermined, exchange ceases. Since not everyone is in fact just, we need and have mechanisms to deal with violations. One hopes the violators of justice are relatively few and the observers many.

But here I want to talk about a remark of Pope Benedict XVI on justice in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*. This is a remarkably brilliant encyclical whose scope I do not think is well understood. It is literally a re-presentation of what we call the four last things -- death, heaven, hell, and purgatory -- over against the way that modern economic and political ideology has sought to replace them by a this-worldly view of man's purpose, a purpose that rejects God and any criterion of man's

good arising from outside his own definitions and powers, even if that criterion is superior to the human ones.

The passage is presented as a rather paradoxical opinion of the pope about the significance of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This is the sentence:

I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the essential argument, or in any case the strongest argument, in favor of faith in eternal life (43).

First of all, we must note that Benedict is speaking of precisely "argument." A case is to be made that "eternal life" -- that is, the life of each individual human being, body and soul, after death -- itself requires that injustices performed in this world be judged and punished.

Plato understood much of this, of course. He knew that unless violations of justice in this life are properly judged and punished, the world, in effect, is ill-made. At the very depth of things there would be no order or fairness. The immortality of the soul was a Socratic teaching that arose from politics -- its inability to resolve the matter of actual justice in actual cities. Great and little crimes and injustices go on in every time and place, in every nation under the sun. Likewise, many great acts of heroism and virtue go unrewarded. This observation is simply a fact of abiding human experience. The only possible way for this situation to be requited such that we could say that the gods were just would be to propose after death a judgment whereby the crimes that were unpunished or unacknowledged would be reckoned with.

**The pope knows his Plato.** He also knows Scripture, which implies the same thing -- namely, as the Creed says, that Christ "will judge the living and the dead." But lest we think that this reflection is just so much pious myth, we notice that Benedict, a man well aware of modern philosophy, sees that the present argument for eternal life is itself the result of the modern ideologies that tried to replace it with a this-worldly theory of progress or justice that would, somewhere down the this-worldly ages, produce something perfect, a people and an age in which no injustices would exist, something caused by purely human reason and artifice.

The trouble with this thesis is that it sacrifices one generation, one class, one person to another. Once anyone dies, it is impossible to punish him or reward him for what was not done in this life. This failure would mean that most of the evil done among actual men is gotten away with. The central human problem is thus not solved by the ideologies that have tried to replace Christianity as an explanation of human purpose and destiny.

The pope cites two famous Marxist philosophers who, each in his own way, see the logic that requires a resurrection of the body or a requiting of justice. The pope is not arguing here from Christian premises. He is citing logic, philosophy that has thought through the implications of justice in terms of the whole order of the universe. This order includes both the possibility that all disorders will be punished and that all rewards will be given. The driving force of modernity has been justice.

Almost all the inner-worldly solutions, however, have ended up producing something worse, since they deny a transcendent order in which judgment and justice occur and are upheld.

Thus, when Benedict states that the best argument for eternal life, for the resurrection of the body and a final judgment, comes from justice, he is not addressing modern man in primarily Christian terms: He is addressing him in his own terms. Basically, Benedict says that the resurrection of the body and a final judgment of our deeds and words that took place among men are required if justice to actual, individual persons, no matter in what time or place, is to be done. This has to take place in the flesh, as the deeds were done in the flesh.

The denial of this logic has its own consequences -- namely, that the world is ill made and that protests against violations of justice are in vain. Injustice rules. Do not pretend the world makes sense in terms of justice. The case for Christianity can thus also be made from justice, thanks to the direction of modern ideology. Justice will be done, hence final judgment and the resurrection of the body in which every person as such will be present.

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# Galileo, Science, and the Smirking Chimp

Thomas E. Woods Jr. | Column

8/12/08

**N**ot long ago, someone at a Web site called "The Smirking Chimp" saw an episode of my EWTN series "The Catholic Church: Builder of Civilization" (based on my book *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*) and took me to task for my comments about Galileo. According to the Chimpster, my argument was: "Galileo had only a theory, and not 'ironclad proof' of anything."

"With this kind of logic," he goes on to warn, "what voter can parse subtly the relative merits of difficult moral issues?" Um, come again?

His argument, best as I can make it out, is this: People like me offer sledgehammerish arguments about subtle questions, and thus my point about Galileo is likely to lead Catholics to make poor electoral decisions. (See if you can glean from it anything more coherent than that.)

I'll leave aside his strange point that if it weren't for abortion, Catholics would surely see that "everything in their worldview" should lead them to vote for an establishment hack like Barack Obama. For what it's worth, I support neither of the empty suits the major parties are offering us, since both are dangerous on the economy and hopeless on foreign policy (anyone who thinks Obama represents "change" hasn't really been listening to him or looking at his foreign-policy team).

The three points I was making on the EWTN episode Mr. Chimp watched are not all that controversial, yet he seems to have grasped none of them. The first was that it was still intellectually respectable to be a geocentrist in Galileo's day. It is not the case that 17th-century geocentrists were imbeciles who refused, or were unable, to follow a simple argument; Tycho Brahe was not exactly a moron, and he was unpersuaded by Galileo's case. The latter's attempt to use the tides as evidence of the earth's motion could hardly be taken seriously. And he could not answer the key geocentrist

objection involving stellar parallax, which I explained in great detail in the very episode my critic complains about. So describing Galileo's case as lacking "ironclad proof" is the least one could say about it.

(Of course, my critic mentions none of this -- all the better to caricature my position, and make *me* seem like the one oversimplifying things. Physician, heal thyself!)

My second point was that, although I do not defend what happened to Galileo -- the Galileo case being the "one stock argument," as John Henry Cardinal Newman put it, that is constantly trotted out against the Church -- I do not think it unreasonable for churchmen like Robert Bellarmine to have hesitated to reinterpret biblical verses along heliocentric lines until they saw more persuasive evidence. That seems like common sense.

My final point was that the Galileo case was an unusual exception, and that it is absurd to employ it in support of the predictable refrain that religious people are stupid, and skeptics and atheists are the great avatars of Western progress. A century ago, the consensus view was summarized in Andrew Dickson White's two-volume *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. That continues to be the position that the overwhelming majority of schoolchildren are taught, even though any competent historian of science today laughs contemptuously whenever he hears it.

Not long afterward, Pierre Duhem did pathbreaking work in the history of science that showed the doctrines of the Church to have been a clear ally of, rather than an obstacle to, the success of the scientific enterprise in the West. Duhem's scholarship was scandalously neglected until Stanley Jaki helped rescue it from obscurity later in the 20th century.

**Catholic and non-Catholic scholars alike** have spent the past six decades overturning White's indefensible thesis -- among them Edward Grant, David Lindberg, A. C. Crombie, Thomas Goldstein, J. L. Heilbron, and Stanley Jaki. Revealingly, the Teaching Company, whose lectures are as moderate and inoffensive as possible in order not to alienate its customers, categorically rejects the older view and vindicates the Church's contributions in its own course on the history of Western science to 1700. In other words, it (like everyone else who knows anything about the subject) sides with the modern consensus.

Ever since the 18th century, the West has labored under an insidious Enlightenment myth: The Church's influence on the world has been one of obscurantism and repression, and what progress our civilization has enjoyed has occurred at the hands of religious skeptics. This assumption has led to innumerable errors in Western scholarly work, as professors followed evidence where they thought it should lead rather than where it actually *did* lead. It took two centuries to break through this self-imposed wall of ignorance.

Thus it wasn't until the 1950s that we learned how instrumental the Late Scholastics had been in developing the discipline of economics, centuries before Adam Smith. It has been only within the past two decades that we have fully discovered the extent to which the natural-rights tradition flows from the canonists and popes of the High Middle Ages. The truth about the Church's influence on the sciences began to

emerge only in the mid-20th century. And so on -- and on and on. That's what my book and series are all about.

And that was the context of my discussion of Galileo -- not that you'd know it from reading my critic. It's as if the poor guy knows not a blessed thing about the findings of the past 60 years of historians of science. Not that he has anything to worry about: No one else knows about them, either. But although parroting the Church-as-obstacle theory out of ignorance of six decades of scholarship will still win you the applause of the half-educated -- and you can be sure no one at the Smirking Chimp will know any better -- that doesn't make it any less stupid or dishonest, and that's why I was spending my time refuting it.

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# A Buckingham Palace Garden Party

Joanna Bogle | Column

8/12/08

**T**hese are perhaps the most famous gates in the world -- certainly among the most photographed.

We gathered outside, a vast crowd of us, forming a neat line -- as British people still do when in traditional mode -- talking, taking photographs, fussing about.

This is a Buckingham Palace garden party, one of the great events of London's summer. We are going to tea with the queen. An engraved card had arrived some weeks before to summon us, and now today we are here with an enormous number of people from across Britain -- people from voluntary groups who need to be thanked and rewarded, people who sit on official committees, people who hold minor positions in public life at the local level, people who represent different lobby groups and religions, people who have retired from various public offices -- plus diplomats from every different sort of foreign embassy. And we are all in our best clothes, and we are all going to have tea.

What happens at such an event? Hundreds of people -- ladies in vast hats, people in Army, Royal Navy, or Royal Air Force uniform, mayors and mayoresses wearing their chains of office, people in Islamic dress, the occasional Scotsman in a kilt -- crunch across the gravel beyond those famous gates, pass through one of the large arches into an inner courtyard, and then through the palace itself to the magnificent garden beyond.

And it is magnificent. Lawns stretch down to a large lake; in one direction there is a great rose garden, with paths to wooded areas and further lawns dotted with shrubs and flower beds in another. Today, the main lawns are host to several substantial marquees where large tea urns are ready on tables spread with white damask and huge floral displays of heavily scented lilies. Military bands are taking turns playing. A detachment of Yeomen of the Guard marches across.

At a Buckingham Palace garden party, you see the Britain that others imagine when they talk about us. We are formally dressed -- in some cases looking superb, in others simply terrible as fat bulges out from spaghetti straps, or unsuitable hats are clamped precariously on messy hair. There are young men in uniform -- rarely seen on our streets, as they have been banned from wearing it in public since the IRA bombs of the 1970s. People are introduced to one another; the mood is friendly, but restrained. Everyone comments on the weather.

The band stops. People rise. An elderly couple walks with brisk pace and upright carriage out from the palace and stops at the front of the terrace with split-second timing. As they come to a halt, the band strikes up the National Anthem. Everything stands stock still. As the notes fade away, there is applause. This is why we are here. For a moment, childhood memories of Christmas broadcasts, pictures in the press, national events shared on TV, all coalesce. Here we are: I am at Buckingham Palace, and this is the queen in front of me.

**Can all this last?** London is not a city of garden parties and tea urns. Drunken young people totter about our shopping centers on Friday and Saturday nights, shrieking at one another, vomiting, fighting. The structures of family life are cracked and wobbling: Over half of all births are now out of wedlock, and divorce is on an epic scale. Over five million of our relations and friends are missing, aborted before birth. Same-sex unions are celebrated with "gay weddings."

Can we go on dressing up and pretending everything is still functioning normally? As we stood on the lawn, chatting to various friends, I suddenly had a

fleeting thought: "Is this like the summer of 1914? Is doom on the way?"

I don't mean war, nor even an extension of Islamic terrorism. I was thinking of a different sort of doom -- connected with the demise of our culture, and what will happen to Christians within it.

The morning of the tea, I'd been summoned from bed by the telephone: a call from the BBC wanting a debate on a news program. The Church of England Synod had voted to create women bishops. They wanted a Roman Catholic comment, and I was happy to oblige.

The disintegration of the Church of England is fairly far advanced: There is theological muddle and some extraordinarily clichéd ranting that poses for genuine debate. Numbers attending services have dropped dramatically in recent years and are still dropping. Even here at a Buckingham Palace garden party, the Church of England news was an undercurrent -- it had dominated the headlines for the past two days, even edging out reports of the government's plummeting popularity, the G8 summit, and London's latest street stabbings.

Of course, it isn't female bishops who are essentially the issue in the Church of England, and everyone knows it. Somehow, it is an icon of so much more: the debate over homosexuality, the whole question of authority, the nature of God, the nature of the Church He founded.

And the sad reality is that, in speaking up for the traditional Christian teachings on a whole range of things -- sex, marriage, male/female relationships, the sanctity of a child in the womb -- Catholics, and other Christians who still want to identify with traditional beliefs and messages, have to go against the general tide, the general mood of current Western culture, the attitude prevalent in the mainstream mass media and in universities.

**During the next years, as the social problems** of our country continue -- and they certainly will, because of the anti-life and anti-marriage structures, backed by unjust laws and propaganda pushed at the young -- Catholics and all those who support the old traditional Christian teachings will face a tough time. We may find ourselves in a situation where we aren't on the guest list for garden parties anymore. We may find ourselves sensing an affinity with the Catholic heroes of the past and praying fervently that we might have something of their courage and devotion.

If this happens, and we are excluded from future tea parties -- at which Anglican bishopettes exchange pleasantries in a sunlit garden while adherents of our ancient faith languish elsewhere -- it will somehow be important that one thing is noted and passed down into history. It's this: Just as the martyrs of long ago, Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More and Edmund Campion, were not the traitors they were announced to be, nor will the loyal Catholics of any future Britain be. The Faith we hold is the one that fostered Western culture, and called into existence the things we have all long cherished and known to be important, right down to the concept of a Christian monarchy, anointed in a Christian ceremony that emphasized a covenant of mutual duties under the reign of Christ Himself symbolized by the Cross on the Crown and on the orb in the monarch's hand.

For the sincere Catholic, patriotism is a duty of love and no mere formality. It is linked to the Fourth Commandment about honoring father and mother. For Catholics in Britain, patriotism is a joy when it means applauding, with genuine affection, a much-loved monarch at a garden party. It is no less real when it affirms those basic moral truths and principles that are the foundation of any thriving society, but which sometimes -- as now -- happen to be unfashionable.

And it remains unswerving, knowing that, in honoring God first -- as Thomas More reminded us -- we remain, whether recognized as such or not, the monarch's good servants, too.

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*Joanna Bogle is an author and broadcaster living in London.*

# Those Angry Traditionalists

Mark P. Shea | Column

8/13/08

**E**ver attended a clown Mass? Me neither. To be sure, I've seen lovingly photographed liturgical bizarrenesses from time to time chronicled on the Internet. And I've seen some enthusiasts for the Latin Mass often talk as though such stupid liturgical antics are happening everywhere all the time and that they alone stand between the Church and the complete and utter circus-ization of the Mass. But have I been to an actual clown Mass? Nope. Never saw one -- and I live in the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Now I agree completely that the Blessed Sacrament is the absolute center of the universe and of all history. If you want to know What It's All About, look at the Eucharist. And I agree that in the Mystery of God's Providence, the Eucharist has been entrusted into our fragile hands in the same way that Jesus was entrusted into the hands of the Holy Family. We have an obligation to do our best to celebrate the Mass reverently and worthily.

But there is also the danger that we can forget that the Mass is God's before it is ours. We can start to regard it as our property. Certainly liturgical abusers are doing this. But "saviors of the liturgy" can forget in their own way as well. They can come to *relish* liturgical abuses because, well, it's gratifying to one's pride to be the Savior of the Liturgy, isn't it?

When I entered the Church I heard of the dreaded Clown Mass. I got the impression that such things were endemic, and that I was entering a war zone where I would have to struggle every day with unspeakable outrages against the Eucharist.

It's been 20 years and the worst I've had to put up with is listening to "Anthem" now and then.

On the other hand, I *have* frequently encountered, both on the Web and in real life, people like the one

described by a correspondent of mine [who wrote me last January](#):

At the March for Life in DC last week, our group (mostly young teens) came across a marcher holding aloft a Crucifix with a big sign: "Latin Mass=Truth; New Mass= Abortion." As I respectfully disagreed with him, he brought up receiving the Eucharist by hand, as if that somehow that had to do with saving unborn children.

That note sums up why I have no interest in becoming a liturgical fussbudget. At the end of the day, my Bible -- and the teaching of the Church -- insists that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control, not bitterness about mediocre liturgy and still less blasphemy at *valid* liturgies approved by Holy Church. People who act and talk like this are going to have to figure out how to be fully Catholic or they are going to disappear. A true Catholic faith evangelizes; like it or not, this is not evangelizing, but shouting "Repel boarders" and then pouring boiling oil on your own archers. Such treatment of brother and sister Catholics is, well, *evil* and will serve to ensure that Traditionalism (or, at any rate, *this* kind of Traditionalism) dies out in a generation or so.

**When I pointed this out on my blog**, I was tartly rebuked by a Traditionalist who reproached me with these words:

Your interest in "correcting" traditionalists is... shall I say... oddly disproportionate to your interest in understanding the things we care about.

Here's the thing: In the early Church, Christians did not huddle up and demand that those around them understand the things they care about. That's because

the command they had been given was "Go therefore into every nation, teaching them to observe what I have commanded." They were a missionary Church conquering the world with love, not a Fortress desperately fighting to bring back the good old days. They didn't hunker down, griping about how converts were screwing everything up, or complaining that things were better way back when, or talking as though faith, hope and love were wimpy symptoms of Kumbaya Catholicism. They endured *real* persecution of the "roasting on hot griddles" sort and not of the "having to sing 'Anthem'" variety. And they left a distinct impression on the pagans around them: "See how they love one another." They did not approach life with the expectation that those who came at them from outside owed them something.

But that is often the impression I have gotten from many (though certainly not all) Traditionalists. Like it or not, discourse among a great many Traditionalists is filled with anger and contempt for Catholics who do not share their burning interest in traditional forms of piety.

So while I've never seen a Clown Mass, I have encountered *lots* of angry Trads who have compared the Paul VI rite to a Black Mass, made clear that "Novus Ordo types" are second class Catholics, spent a great deal of time obsessing over Jews, sneered at John Paul II and Benedict "Novus Ordo Popes" who have compromised the Tradition, threatened people in my parish physically, smeared good priests with nasty rumor campaigns and generally made their claims to be the Guardians of True Catholicism so repellent that I wouldn't touch the Faith with a barge pole if they were the True Apostles of it they claim to be. And that experience is not just mine. One reader out of many wrote in to concur with an all-too-common anecdote:

[A] friend of mine took a breather from his Latin Mass group one year after a post-Mass brunch turned into a boisterous discussion over whether it was morally licit to pray for God to strike down Hillary Clinton. He said he was well into the

discussion when he caught a glance at people sitting at other tables, their mouths agape, listening in shock and disgust to what the traditionalist Catholics were talking about. He realized that HEY, we're not really being a good witness to the faith.

Yeah. Like that.

In much the same way that I think Muslims need to stop whining about how people perceive Islam and focus instead on *why* so many people have such similar perceptions, so too I think not a few Traditionalist Catholics should focus more energy on changing whatever it is in their sub-sector of the Church that leaves so many of us with such a bad taste in our mouths.

When the outsider's principal experience of Traditionalism is of repeated and frequent encounters with mean people who are perpetually angry about remote arcana and loony conspiracy theories, he is not going to feel any obligation or interest whatsoever in "understanding the things we care about." Telling outsiders to Traditionalism that they need to overlook their experience and stop talking about what they have actually seen and heard will be about as successful as Muslim attempts to force people to not notice the less-than-lovely face that the Religion of Peace shows the world.

Is clinging to anger more important to Traditionalists than actually winning hearts and minds to their cause? If so, then their agenda is doomed and they have paradoxically abandoned the worship of God in the name of liturgical purity.

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# Interpreting the Constitution and Voting for President

Ronald J. Rychlak | Column

8/13/08

**I**n back-to-back days of June this year, the U.S. Supreme Court came down with opinions in two different cases that illustrate very different judicial philosophies. The cases themselves are unrelated, and they are generally seen as coming down on different sides of the political spectrum, but together they provide a good lesson about constitutional interpretations.

The first case, *Kennedy v. Louisiana*, involved a sentencing law from that state. Back in 1977, the Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to impose the death penalty on someone convicted of raping an adult woman, stating that such punishment was disproportional to the severity of the crime. States were at least arguably, however, still free to impose the death penalty in the case of a child rapist.

Patrick Kennedy was convicted and sentenced to death in 2003 for raping his 8-year-old stepdaughter. Her injuries were severe enough to require emergency surgery. The Louisiana Supreme Court upheld Kennedy's conviction and rejected his challenge to the constitutionality of his sentence. The Supreme Court overturned the sentence, holding that the death penalty was unconstitutional when imposed upon a child rapist.

In reaching this decision, the Court asked the question whether the death penalty was so disproportionate as to amount to cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment. The Court decided that issue based upon "the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society."

Justice Kennedy (no relation to the defendant) was the swing vote in this 5-4 decision. He said the majority reached its conclusion based on "our own independent judgment" about the implications of extending the death penalty to child rape as well as on the fact that

the great majority of states have declined to do so. Justice Kennedy said there was thus a national consensus against applying the death penalty in such cases (though the *New York Times* pointed out that the Court seems to have been unaware of a provision in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which Congress inserted in 2006).

That leads us to the other important case, *District of Columbia v. Heller*, which was released one day after *Kennedy v. Louisiana*. In *Heller*, the Supreme Court struck down Washington, D.C.'s gun ban. Washington had the nation's strictest gun laws, but the Bill of Rights provides:

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

For more than two centuries, the meaning of the first clause -- about the militia -- has been unclear. Did that condition the right? No other right in the Bill of Rights has such a condition. On the other hand, the structure of the Constitution suggests that this, like all the other rights, is a personal right.

In *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Supreme Court ruled that the right was personal: American citizens have the right to keep and bear arms and it does not depend upon state militias. To reach this decision, the Court looked to the meaning of the words that were used in the Second Amendment, not to modern attitudes and concerns about society as the justices had done in *Kennedy v. Louisiana*.

**So here we have two cases**, decided one day apart, with very different philosophical underpinnings. The death penalty decision was based on something akin to the idea of a "living Constitution." Such a philosophy takes modern attitudes into consideration because

provisions written in the late 1700s might not be fully applicable in the 21st century.

The gun control case is based on something closer to an "original intent" philosophy. (Justice Scalia, who wrote that opinion, prefers to say that he relies on the "text" rather than the "intent.") This theory says that the Constitution should be interpreted as it was understood when the provision in question was written and ratified -- the words don't change. This theory grounds the Supreme Court in a written text, keeping at least one branch of government from flowing with the current of popular culture.

These different constitutional theories can lead to very different results. In general, the "living Constitution" test gives judges great discretion to fashion results and set policies. Critics would say that this theory lets judges amend the Constitution without going through the amendment process. Supporters of the living Constitution will point out that it gave us *Brown v. Board of Education*, whereas "original intent" gave us "separate but equal."

On the other hand, the original intent theory keeps judges closer to the governmental structure set forth in our Constitution, preserving different roles for each branch of government. This lets representative

branches (like Congress) set policy and makes judges interpret the law rather than write it. This theory would never have resulted in the invented right to abortion, and there would be no argument about a constitutional right to euthanasia, suicide, gay marriage, etc.

This fall, we will vote for president. One can never be certain how judges will act once they are put on the bench (reliable "liberal" Supreme Court justices Stevens and Souter were nominated by Republican presidents), but Barack Obama is likely to nominate judges who believe in that living Constitution. John McCain will likely nominate judges with an original intent/textual theory. With a Supreme Court that is so evenly divided, that may well be the most important difference between the candidates.

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# Can Charity Prevail on the Internet?

Deal W. Hudson | Column

8/14/08

**G**o to any news Web Site and find an article on George Bush, Barack Obama, or John McCain. Start reading the comments section -- there may be several hundred if it's a major news site like MSNBC or Fox News. Before long, you'll begin to feel like you have been punched in the face or dunked in the mud.

Sometimes, this is true here on InsideCatholic.com, despite very clear admonitions from our editor for visitors to remain civil. Fortunately, most readers have done just that, in spite of marked differences over politics, liturgy, and Catholic doctrine. That's what we're looking for: Our staff is committed to creating a virtual space where people can disagree, but speak with charity (we all fall short of that standard on occasion, myself included).

This is important if we want to have any kind of real communication. One disruptive commenter can ruin an otherwise constructive conversation.

The *New York Times* published an account of its own move to the Internet, and their experience echoes our own. One of its Internet editors, Kate Phillips, is "enthralled" by the readers' comments, but gets discouraged by the invective -- "I almost wish we could go back to the days when we never heard their voices."

With media moving to the Internet, and thus becoming interactive, the commonsense demands of courtesy are being ignored. Internet communication will never truly thrive until it demands the same decency people observe in other forms of interaction. That a relationship is virtual is no excuse for incivility.

So why are people on the Internet so... rude? Studies and surveys have confirmed that Internet use does make people act uncharitably who normally would not. The impact of digital technology has created so

many new ways of communicating that it has fostered an atmosphere of freedom without responsibility.

In a humorous column titled, "On the Internet everyone knows you're a dog," Michael Kinsley writes:

There is something about the Web that brings out the ego monster in everybody. It's not just the well-established tendency to be nasty. When you write for the Web, you open yourself up to breathtakingly vicious vitriol. People wish things on your mother, simply for bearing you, that you wouldn't wish on Hitler.

Kinsley thinks anonymity is the main culprit, but then makes the telling point that the social networking sites -- where everyone abandons anonymity -- are actually the most successful. If the implications of this are true, the bad habits of Internet "road rage" appeal to far fewer people than those who are in search of friendship and community.

Rev. Michael P. Orsi has diagnosed the problem well, and has spelled out certain moral guidelines Catholics must follow on the Internet. He believes the problem boils down to calumny -- the deliberate harm done to a person's reputation (see CCC #2447) -- which is endemic in the virtual world.

His analysis of online ugliness is simply brilliant and should be read by anyone interested in the ethical use of blogs and comment spaces. (Father Orsi is particularly insightful on the considerable craft some bloggers apply to their defamations.)

The Internet began as a place of pure immediacy and anonymity. Readers, cruising along the virtual highway, assumed their behavior would never lead to an arrest, or to any consequences at all. And so with no fear of being caught, they write what they want

with no impulse control, nor any thought of the real people on the other side of the screen.

Good manners will eventually inform virtual relationships, though there's much ground to make up. As Kinsley points out, most Internet users are interested in creating communities of common interests rather than providing an audience for the insufferable.

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# Why Taxation Isn't (Necessarily) Theft

Eric Pavlat | Column

8/14/08

**still remember the pain** when my best friend and I stopped attending the same school after first grade. His parents decided he would be better off in a private school. I asked my mom how he could do that, and she explained that his parents were spending a little extra money to send him there.

So, was my mom spending money to send *me* to school? She told me that she already paid taxes, and that's how the school building was constructed and the teachers were paid. As full of questions as any first-grader, I asked if people without children also had to pay taxes for schools, and she told they do.

That didn't seem fair to me. I'll never forget her answer:

Even if I had no children, I'd be happy to pay taxes in order to live in a world where people are educated instead of one where only the rich can go to school.

Her statement has remained with me since; it was my introduction to taxes.

There's a lot of talk in certain circles about taxes being "theft," and about how the government uses "force" to "take" our property. But is this thought compatible with Catholicism?

When I want answers to questions like that, I consult St. Thomas Aquinas:

[T]he public power is entrusted to [princes] that they may be the guardians of justice.... [W]hatever is taken by violence of this kind is not the spoils of robbery, since it is not contrary to justice.

In other words, as long as taxes are used *justly*, there is no theft or robbery involved in taxation.

The Church's teaching runs counter to the West's current view of property rights, which dates from the

Enlightenment work of Hobbes, Paine, Smith, and Locke. These philosophers shaped America's -- and the developed world's -- view of the right to ownership at a subconscious level. According to this view, one simply has the right to own whatever one has earned or acquired.

Opposed to this Enlightenment belief is the teaching of Aquinas, who noted that "man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, so that, to wit, he is ready to communicate them to others in their need" (II-II, Q. 66, Art. 2). His position is reiterated in the Church's social doctrine under the name of the Universal Destination of Goods. According to this doctrine, as explained in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

Each person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development . . . . All other rights, whatever they are, including property rights and the right of free trade must be subordinated to this norm (172).

In other words, property rights must always take *second* place to the universal destination of goods.

**Some argue that only the individual**, through his or her free choice, should help the poor. But this isn't Catholic social teaching. Instead, "The ethical requirement inherent in these pre-eminent social principles concerns both the personal behavior of individuals . . . and at the same time institutions represented by laws" (163, emphasis added). The government, therefore, has an ethical requirement to help meet the basic needs of the poor. In fact, helping the poor is not charity but "a debt of justice" (184).

And much of this debt is paid through taxes. The Catechism states, "Submission to authority *and co-*

*responsibility for the common good* make it morally obligatory to pay taxes . . ." (2240, emphasis added).

The further complaint that the State may not "redistribute income" is also without merit in Catholic thought. In fact, according to the Compendium:

The economic well-being of a country is not measured exclusively by the quantity of goods it produces but also by taking into account the manner in which they are produced *and the level of equity in the distribution of income*, which should allow everyone access to what is necessary for their personal development and perfection. An equitable distribution of income is to be sought on the basis of criteria not merely of commutative justice but also of social justice that is, considering, beyond the objective value of the work rendered, the human dignity of the subjects who perform it. Authentic economic well-being is pursued also by means of suitable *social policies for the redistribution of income* which, taking general conditions into account, look at merit as well as at the need of each citizen (303).

In other words, the just redistribution of income is part and parcel of Catholic social teaching. Along with that, of course, we have "the common good," which gets into a range of prudential matters: Is it in the common good to send men into orbit in space shuttles? Does the common good require the government to spend money on cancer and AIDS research? Does the common good compel us to fund PBS, which broadcasts *Foyle's War* and the recent Jane Austen movies? And what about public roads, parks, libraries, and schools?

It is possible, of course, to take this idea too far. Marxist socialism holds that all property belongs to the State, and this is plainly wrong. Aquinas, in the passage already quoted above, even-handedly comments that

"to take other people's property violently *and against justice*, in the exercise of public authority, is to act unlawfully and to be guilty of robbery," leaving it up to prudence to determine what constitutes "justice."

Another serious error would be for a government to set up a "Social Assistance State" -- a system that "leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending" (187). This might accurately describe the condition of the United States from the late 1960s through Clinton's 1996 welfare reform.

And all of this is to say nothing about tax rates themselves. The interest on our national debt claims twenty percent of our tax revenue, something that should please no American. So over-taxation and unjust taxation are both possible, and ought to be avoided.

But that's as far as it goes. A person who makes the sweeping claim that all taxes constitute "theft" contradicts Aquinas, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. And that's not a good position to be in, for any Catholic.

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# Rats, Roaches, and Queens

Marjorie Campbell | Column

8/15/08

**I keep an orderly kitchen** -- spices fresh and organized; cereal safely resealed into sorted Tupperware containers; a fitted lid for every pot, pan and roaster. I have been heard to screech, "Who loaded the dishwasher without rinsing the dishes?" Scissors, tape, and push pins all have a right place, and the telephone book remains in its cradle unless in active use. My family complies with my order; breaches draw painfully long lectures they'd rather avoid. I reign over My Kitchen -- and this seems both right and proper to me.

Thus I noticed the box of chocolate fudge on Wednesday morning when I walked into my kingdom at 7:15 to begin the day. I had left the intended gift on the bench by the door -- a gentle reminder to send it with my son for his teacher's birthday. Now, I stared unbelieving at the torn, flowery paper, the ripped protective plastic, and an entire corner gnawed away. I stared outraged, mouth agape, at the sharp teeth prints in the gooey, bourbon goodness lovingly made by the Monks of Gethsemane.

"Ruined, ruined," I moaned in royal dismay, as the children and my husband tumbled into the kitchen. I eyed them each with hostile suspicion despite the dental mismatch, and then turned sharply on my son's caged hamster Little Willy.

Little Willy fit snugly in Will's palm when we bought him two years ago at Pet Smart. Being clearly labeled "Domestic Hamster" did not stop this rodent from expanding in short order to the exact size and proportion of a rat -- barely able to squeeze his girth through the massive maze of tubes my son calls his cage.

"How," I crisply demanded of my sleepy son, "did that rodent get out of his cage and eat the bourbon fudge?"

Cooperatively, we examined all sections of the complex as a worried Will pleaded, "Mom, look at him. He's sleeping -- he didn't do it."

I snarled, "He's drunk and hung-over" -- but finding no obvious escape portal, I spared now-Slick Willy's life for the morning.

Two nights later, the kitchen still smelling of bleach and Lysol, I heard a disturbance in My Kitchen. A sly crumpling of paper from the otherwise still sanctuary reached me. I dashed down the steps, threw on the overhead lights, and saw peanut M&Ms lazily rolling and tumbling from the counter. The bag that once held them laid gashed and torn open. Nothing more stirred in the room, now still as a morgue.

Slick Willy, I quickly noted, slept curled and undisturbed in the top vestibule of his living system. Where was the traitorous, picky thief so determined to mock my authority? Was he sitting curled in a corner, nibbling one last M&M, watching me suffer with delight?

I admit it -- I broke down and cried. I hated this unwanted creature, roaming My Kitchen, picking through my order, as if invited to an elite, gourmet tasting.

**As I wept, I recalled a similar antipathy** not long before, in Hawaii, when my daughter and I discovered vandals in our rented minivan. Together, we had returned one evening to the vehicle to retrieve personal items. Simultaneously, we had opened the doors and seen a rush of little black spots, like those that dance around your head before fainting.

"What the heck?" she gasped, while gaping at the retreating interlopers.

"Good grief," I sputtered, "we have roaches in the minivan."

The next morning, my family rose to my mission and removed all trash, food, and crumbs from the car. "They'll just abandon the vehicle," I urged, knowing that a full retreat into the engine would satisfy me. I calmed -- until I discovered my sons secretly leaving morsels for our rental roaches because "they might be getting hungry."

The game expanded. My roach rancor eased as the boys' humor reached me. "What would you guys like?" yelled one son as we drove through McDonald's. "Do the roaches need sunscreen, Mom?" bellowed another son as we piled out of the car for a day on the beach. I forgot how much I hated the vermin.

**But I refused to give up My Kitchen**, the earthly area of my only reign. Forlorn, drying tears of frustration, I reminded myself, "This is My Kitchen where I am Queen." I would have my regal rights.

I fought back. I set up guard into the wee hours of the morning, cutting sleep to a bare minimum. For three nights, I puttered and toiled alone in the kitchen, distracted only by Little Willy's slow, lumbering efforts to turn the exercise wheel in his cage.

On the fourth night, I detected a slight scraping along a cabinet above the computer where I sat. I launched a full search but found nothing. I waited, clutching my robe like a Roman Empress. The scraping resumed, and drew my attention to a quarter-inch gap between the cabinet and outside wall of the house, above the desk. "Impossible," I muttered, squinting into the tiny space from the chair in front of the computer. "Nothing with an appetite for nutty chocolate could fit up there," I reassured myself, turning back toward the computer screen.

Suddenly, the scraping became a long, sliding whoosh. I turned abruptly and watched in dismay as a furry pancake slid from the crack and down the wall.

Landing right next to my elbow, it popped into a long-tailed, fat, gray rat. He blinked.

My outrage unbridled, I screamed, "Rat! Rat! It's a rat!" and I slammed my husband's briefcase across the desk, pinning the invader into the corner. Now in need of troop support, I bellowed for my family.

My youngest son responded first -- puffy-eyed and alarmed. "Mom, it's 2:00 a.m. Why are you screaming?"

Leaning my full weight into the briefcase, I ordered, "Get your father. Tell him I have caught a rat in My Kitchen."

My husband appeared in underpants, carrying a broom stick -- not the ready, willing warrior I had hoped for. His contorted face warned that he had yet to decide how best to use the broom and he barked, "What the hell are you doing with my briefcase?"

Unbelieving, he assumed my pose, loosened the trap, and peered into the corner. As the captive made a quick lurch for freedom, my startled husband turned and whispered, "My dear, you have indeed caught a rat."

Later -- after Bill dangled the now-deceased villain by its tail for family viewing, after the family had retired to bed -- I sat dazed and puzzled at the kitchen table. The rat's death failed to warm and restore my queenliness. Where, I pondered, is the glow of victory?

My eyes fell upon a small, wooden nativity scene, nestled into the corner of an upper shelf. Mary hunched over her newborn son lying in a manger. I felt a red wave of embarrassment, like the sudden nausea of spoiled food. *And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.* I grimaced -- she birthed the Christ child in the company of rats and roaches.

I gave over my outrage to God and resolved to mention my rat adventures only with humor and gratitude. As I flicked off the kitchen light, I repositioned the Holy Family prominently, a ready

reminder that My Kitchen was my stable -- a place of wonder and love for my family, a place often beyond my control. I had much more to learn about being a queen, I knew, as I dragged off to bed.

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# A Pattern, Somewhere

Christopher Scalia | Review

8/15/08

**H**ere's some advice for anyone starting a job as literary editor for a Catholic online journal: For your first book review, avoid novels whose central character is an atheist lesbian who fights to adopt a child and who eventually commits suicide. Not that these elements make a novel bad, of course, but you may have to do some fancy dancing to warn readers who expect you to review a novel that presents Catholic ideas and beliefs.

If you choose to ignore that advice, at least get the necessary caveats out of the way early. And be sure that the novel is actually *good*, with interesting characters, vivid settings, evocative language, and a compelling plot, like Jonathan Coe's *The Rain before It Falls*.

Coe's novel begins when Gill, a middle-aged mother of two, learns that her aunt Rosamond has died, and travels to Shropshire to take care of her effects. There, Gill finds that her aunt has left behind a collection of taped recordings that she had dictated in her final days, along with a number of family photographs. Confirming the old saying that "the family that listens to mysterious recordings by dead relatives together stays together," Gill and her daughters gather one evening to listen to Rosamond's tapes. The bulk of the novel consists of Rosamond's recorded biography, and particularly her relationship with her extended family.

As I said, this is a good novel, which naturally means that its families are dysfunctional. The root of its conflict is, simply put, bad parenting. Consecutive generations of mothers neglect and abuse their daughters, with disastrous consequences. Rosamond's own aunt mistreats her daughter Beatrix, who then neglects her own daughter Thea, who -- you guessed it -- mistreats her own daughter Imogen. These tragic repetitions constitute the novel's emotional core.

Rosamond tries to help the family as much as she can. She has particular sympathy for Imogen, who

suffered a violent accident as a young girl, but whom Rosamond perceives as a fulfillment of the family's destiny. As she tells her, "Everything that led up to you was wrong . . . But everything about you is right: you had to be born."

As with most interesting first-person narrators, it's not quite clear how reliable Rosamond really is. For example, when her cousin suspects that Rosamond is having an inappropriate relationship with her daughter, Rosamond's protests make the reader believe there was some truth to her cousin's suspicions after all. Moreover, her attempts to help her cousin's family often come across as meddling, intrusive, or simply foolish. But Rosamond is smart enough to recognize many of her shortcomings, and her concern for her relatives makes her a generally likeable character. (As for her homosexuality, if you can handle *Brideshead Revisited*, you can handle this novel. Coe is clear but never graphic.)

**This novel shares a number of traits** with Coe's previous works, from its exploration of family secrets, its setting in the Midlands of England, its emphases on music and the discovery of lost recordings, and even its iambic title (Coe's other novels include *The Dwarves of Death*, *A Touch of Love*, *The House of Sleep*, and *The Rotter's Club*). Coe has also dealt with issues of faith and its foundations. In *The Rotter's Club*, one character based his belief in God on an occasion as a teenager when he prayed to avoid humiliation in front of his classmates; in that novel's sequel, *The Closed Circle*, he recognizes the flimsiness of this foundation.

Coe makes a similar move at the end of *The Rain before It Falls*. From listening to Rosamond's account of her life and learning more about Imogen, Gill discovers surprising parallels and connections between her own life and theirs. This remarkable number of

coincidences leads her to conclude that "Nothing was random, after all. There was a pattern: a pattern to be found somewhere . . . ." Gill's brief flirtation with something resembling order, though not explicitly a divine plan, corresponds to Rosamond's eventual faith in an afterlife "after so many years -- a whole lifetime -- of not believing."

But Gill's faith dies suddenly, a victim to a phone call that interrupts her train of thought: "the pattern she had been searching for had gone. Worse than that - it had never existed. How could it? What she had been hoping for was a fragment, a dream, an impossible thing."

With this abrupt conclusion, Coe deprives the reader of the deeper meaning that he had established only pages earlier. Rather than a statement about the

metaphysical bonds that unite a family, the novel becomes, in the words of [a great literary critic](#), "just a bunch of stuff that happened." Of course, a good novel doesn't need a moral, and authors often complicate a theme or meaning that they introduce; but convincing the reader of this higher meaning and annihilating it with a few brief lines seems disingenuous. It's as if Coe lost his own faith in the power of his art. And that's a shame, because his art is powerful, and this is an otherwise commendable novel.

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