

Columns

Bombing Gaza Won't Make Israel Safer | Deal W. Hudson.....2

My Non-Binding Resolutions for the New Year | John Zmirak.....4

Contraception and Conversion | David Mills.....8

Resolution | David Warren.....11

A Church of Memory | Anthony Esolen.....13

My New Year's Wish for the Church | Deal W. Hudson.....15

A Christmas Pilgrimage | Mary Jo Anderson.....17

Review

Ring Out the Old, Bring In the New | Robert R. Reilly.....19

Crisis Classic

The New Language | Christopher West.....22

Bombing Gaza Won't Make Israel Safer

Deal W. Hudson | Column

12/29/08

The situation in Gaza is a tragedy whose denouement is approaching. Over the past two days Israeli air strikes have killed nearly 300 Palestinians -- over 700 have been wounded. Israeli tanks are ready to attack and 6,500 reservists have been called up in case the conflict intensifies.

Israel is calling this retaliation for Hamas' rocket attacks against Israel over the past week, ending a six-month ceasefire (Hamas claimed Israel broke the ceasefire first). Mark Regev, a spokesman for Prime Minister Olmert, said the campaign would continue "until we have a new security environment in the south, when the population there will no longer live in terror and in fear of constant rocket barrages."

The question arises whether or not such barrages and death tolls really bolster Israel's security or U. S. interests in the Middle East. These allies are already vulnerable because of increased distrust and resentment, especially after the perception of a Hezbollah win against Israel in 2006.

No doubt Israel's actions will embolden hard-liners in Iran, just as they are losing their influence. As the *Washington Post* editors observed, Hamas may have been weakened by the attack, but "the real winner may be Iran."

President-elect Obama will have to deal with this situation, which may well escalate by late January. If Secretary Condoleezza Rice's call for a ceasefire is respected, Obama can immediately start the kind of dialogue that will bring security to Israel and stability to the region.

Gaza's 1.5 million civilians have been under a virtual lockdown for over two years, with extreme shortages of potable water, food, gas, and electricity. Israeli policy has produced the exact opposite result from its stated

objective of weakening Hamas. Unfortunately, the current Israeli campaign will have the same effect.

Israel, of course, has the right of self-defense and the duty to protect its citizens. This assault on Gaza, however, will only embolden extremist groups, like Hamas, who would otherwise lack popular support.

Former U.N. Special Rapporteur for Human Rights to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, John Dugard, declared of Israeli-besieged Gaza after Israel had evacuated its settlers but tightened its military control: "Gaza has become the world's largest prison, and Israel seems to have thrown away the key."

Israeli civilians have endured barrages of homemade Palestinian-rocket fire, killing several and terrorizing tens of thousands. But these rocket attacks will likely continue given the indefinite imprisonment of 1.5 million Palestinian civilians, the majority of whom are children. Further, this siege policy -- and latest assault -- only increases the likelihood of future attacks and escalated conflict.

This attack will only weaken Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and may spell an end to the long overdue and short-lived process agreed upon at the November 2007 Annapolis Conference. Abbas will probably be viewed as complicit with the assault if he does not react swiftly, especially with an imminent Palestinian constitutional crisis on January 9th undermining his continued presidency.

Despite the core ideology of its leadership, the majority of Hamas voters have consistently supported a two-state solution, as articulated at the Annapolis Conference. But Israeli policy toward Gaza only creates more unrest and will make the two-state solution less likely. Just last summer 200,000 Gazans broke down the border fence with Egypt just so they could get food.

Until Gaza is allowed some measure of freedom and access to external markets and basics such as food and water, we will continue to see a deteriorating security and humanitarian situation.

Within 10 years, there will be another million Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. They are not going anywhere. The Israeli leadership must realize that raising a million children on its border without food,

medicine, or access to education -- and often under bombardment -- will not make their country safer.

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

My Non-Binding Resolutions for the New Year

John Zmirak | Column

12/30/08

I'm not a libertarian, but I play one on the PC. As I've written before (blatant plugs for other rants I've written on this subject follow [here](#) and [here](#)), there's nothing wrong with the State using its power to foster the Common Good, when the dignity of individuals is respected and the Common Good is properly defined. And that Common Good, as popes have [written over](#) and [over](#) again, includes the salvation of souls. Now that doesn't entail coerced conversion, or (as Vatican II rightly clarified) restrictions on the practice of [other folks' religions](#) -- however [wrong-headed](#) those might be. So try to suppress those fantasies you've been having about corralling liberal Catholics (like the gals of [Women-Church](#)) into [walled ghettos](#), and forcing them to wear [distinctive costumes](#). Such measures are probably sinful, and the liberals are easily recognizable from their rust-colored stretchy stirrup pants.

So none of us should have a problem, in theory, with the State in a Catholic society funding religious education, censoring indecent material (like most of my favorite HBO shows; see below), hanging crucifixes in courthouses -- and generally acting in much the same way that our Abrahamic Muslim brethren act when they have the whip hand. Minus, you know, the [stonings](#). We needn't be *that* ecumenical.

But the U.S. government is different. Our system (including the First Amendment) was tailored to fit a multi-denominational country, to accommodate the squabbling Congregationalists, Anglicans, Quakers, and other assorted products of the English Reformation who'd populated this continent. Eloquent men like Thomas Jefferson crafted high-minded rhetoric that made its way into our national ideology, and helped convince even Catholics (like John Courtenay Murray) that somehow the U.S. founders had stumbled onto the perfect system of governance -- the best expression available of the Natural Law that is writ on the human

heart. Most American Catholics I've met have come to the [Americanist](#) conclusion that the U.S. system of secularized democracy is not just the best system for [U.S. Americans](#) (as I believe), but *the final answer to how men should govern themselves* -- while Catholic states that existed for 15 centuries were flawed, sinful experiments for whose very existence we must apologize. Now I'm tempted to answer that with the pastoral dictum, "Never apologize, never explain," but a confessor told me to stop saying that. Particularly to him.

Of *course* we should echo Pope John Paul II's [expressions of repentance](#) for the mistreatment of religious minorities, and all the other manifestations of pride and arrogance that accompanied the exercise of power by Catholics -- and reflect on the awful excesses that accompany religious wars. We should also keep things in perspective: Leaving aside the casualties in the Thirty Years' War (which had as many secular as religious causes -- the French fought for the Protestants), no incidence of religious persecution by any Christian government, of any denomination, in the history of the West, came anywhere near the atrocities of the 20th century, committed or permitted by the secular states of the West: the persecutions of Jews and other minorities by the neopagan Nazis, the butchery of Christians by various Communist states, or the mass murder of the unborn that our country recently voted to continue. A commissar once joked that he and his colleagues executed more people in a day than the Inquisition had in hundreds of years. Our own death toll since *Roe v. Wade* exceeds Josef Stalin's -- although we haven't yet matched Mao's. (We never could outcompete those dang Chinese.) The secular state must answer for its crimes, as we must for ours.

So pardon me if my image of a "good" secular leader has nothing to do with Jefferson, Lincoln, or even Reagan, but hovers somewhere between *Kaiser*

Franz Josef and *Taoiseach* Eamon de Valera. Imagine the government spending your tax money for something that's actually useful -- like building [baroque abbeys](#), or putting the [Angelus on TV](#). Think of all such outreach as the supernatural answer to anti-smoking ads.

But given the fact of American religious diversity, the First Amendment is the best protection we believers could ask for in this society, and we should thump the table and insist on its strict observance in the face of secularist demands that our hospitals do sex-change operations, our doctors perform abortions, or our seminaries admit the "differently gendered." In fact, in every society where secularism dominates the public square, as long as that suicidal ideology rules the roost, it's the duty of Christians to be libertarians for the duration. If the State is defined as godless, it will always be inclined to be our enemy -- and we should return the favor. The Natural Law, rightly interpreted, *could* lead men to pursue objective justice and respect each other's rights. (Get back to me when that happens.) Since all men are fallen and few are philosophers, they require the aid of revelation to make the right decision when the dictates of Natural Law interfere with fulfilling their appetites. Ironically, since David Hume convinced the West that "is" can't lead to "ought," it's pretty much only Catholics who even talk about Natural Law. Rhetorically, it's less useful as a tool for convincing unbelievers than a four-color holy card of Padre Pio. Especially [one that's 3-D](#).

I deduce from this that in every country that follows the heritage of 1776 or 1789, we should say with [Albert Jay Nock](#), "Our Enemy, the State." At its best, a secular government is a near-sighted, well-meaning umpire; at worst, it's a hungry idol, a Moloch that's out to eat the children. Best to starve the beast, keep it hemmed in like Gulliver with hundreds of tiny strings, checked and balanced as our wise Founders actually intended. Meanwhile, we should work energetically to convert our fellow citizens, until one fine day in the future we can hear the presidential address preceded by the Angelus. (Hey, a man's allowed to dream . . .)

[Given the dangerous proclivities of a throne](#) that doesn't acknowledge the altar, I regard most actions on the part of the U.S. Congress with preliminary trepidation. As Ronald Reagan once wisely said: "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'" Apart from defending the country's borders and protecting basic human rights, a state such as ours should do as little as possible -- refraining from micromanaging children's educations, exploring whether employers had racist or "heterosexist" motives for hiring decisions, or bailing out massive investment banks. The larger and more distant the government body involved, the more nervous I become. I'd much rather hear from the sheriff than the I.R.S.

One of Congress's few activities of which we can unambiguously approve is its passage of non-binding resolutions. Such resolutions don't take money from the pocket of Jane Taxpayer, or put coercive power in the hands of Alexander Bureaucrat. They express uplifting aspirations, wistful hopes on the part of our legislative branch -- like petitions humbly offered to the tsar by a handful of *muzhiks*, hats in hand. For instance, in 2001, the U.S. House voted to encourage public schools to set aside a moment of silence for prayer. Equally uselessly, the Congress voted in 2007 to decry President Bush's troop surge in Iraq. These votes came in handy back in the home district at next election. They were shiny and reassuring -- like "good sportsmanship" awards to members of a last place little league team. (To answer your questions: Yes. I got one. Yes, I was part of the reason we all got one.)

In the same spirit as the brave acts of our legislative branch, most Americans take this season to draw up a list of non-binding resolutions for themselves for the upcoming year. Unbacked by the power of the purse, perfect contrition, or the sincere purpose of amendment, these resolutions are the spiritual equivalent of a Senate vote declaring January 6 "International [Talk Like a Pirate Day](#)." Which is silly, of course. As [Dom Gueranger](#) notes, this feast falls on September 19.

In the spirit of office workers greeting each other with "Arrrrrrr, Matey!," here is my own list of non-binding New Year's Resolutions for 2009:

It is the sense of this House that in 2009, Dr. John Zmirak should endeavor as much as possible to undertake the following activities (within reason):

1. Say the Rosary. I know, I know. Hundreds of saints recommend it. It's scriptural. It's a meditation on the Gospels. It's a wholesome Christian version of the mantra, which quells the nattering of the conscious mind and encourages introspection -- insight into the moral issues and spiritual shortcomings that impede one's daily dying to self. That's precisely why I don't like it. I'd much rather read sermons by Cardinal Newman -- who is profound and spiritually searching, but also rhetorically complex enough that I can lose myself in the way he employs parallel phrases, his sometimes archaic language, and the nice little snarks he occasionally aims at the Anglicans or the [liberals](#). I can call this *lectio divina*, when often as not I treat it as highbrow airplane reading.

2. Only watch TV while exercising. Like everyone else out there, I need to lose 20 pounds or so for the sake of vanity. (Those "insurance charts" drawn up, it seems, for supermodels, say more like 50 pounds -- at which weight my girlfriend insists I'd "look like an AIDS patient. Gross!" God bless her and keep her!) So I've set up an elliptical exercise machine in front of the TV, and only let myself view reruns of *Law and Order* while pretending to cross-country ski. Of course, the street outside my window is covered in snow half the time (this being New Hampshire), but if you think I'm going out in *that*, without some sort of bribe like [Mariska Hargitay](#) cuffing felons . . . let's just say your understanding of the Fall is [semi-Pelagian](#). Applying to myself the lessons I learned [training my dogs](#), I'm trying to set up a Pavlovian feedback loop in my brain, whereby every time I crave an episode of that

Augustinian comedy *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, I automatically start to sweat, and reach for my sneakers.

3. Go to daily Mass more often. I find the experience of the liturgy emotionally wrenching -- and I don't mean just when the rock band enters the sanctuary and I go hide in the crying room. (This really happened to me once at a "last-chance" Mass in Nashua, and yes, I really was crying.) The starkness and simplicity of daily Mass, the absence of reassuring, familiar hymns, Gregorian chant I can butcher, or Melkite processions at which I can bow and repeatedly cross myself -- it all leaves me feeling too vulnerable and raw. I couldn't handle that on a daily basis; I'd be even more of a wreck. Unless, of course, I brought along an iPod with Haydn's Coronation Mass . . .

4. Stop procrastinating. This is every writer's curse, of course. It's a truism to say that the longer you put off finishing a column or chapter, the more painful the process will be. Like delaying a root canal, it only prolongs the throbbing in your head, while holding off the promised laughing gas. But procrastination afflicts one kind of person even more cruelly than it does the writer -- namely, the writing teacher. Any day of the week I'd rather write 2,000 words of my own than have to read a [paper](#) of that length from some of my students -- whose high schools or home schools have taught them helpful grammar rules like:

Wherever possible, use "his or her," as in: "Hemingway made his or her reputation with the novel *The Sun Also Rises*."

Or:

Use commas for variety, at any point in a sentence where you think it might be appropriate as for, instance, here.

Or:

The semicolon is a useful tool for demonstrating; that you are well-read and highly intelligent.

5. **Send fewer writs of excommunication** to toxic acquaintances I need to shed -- the kind of person I call a FWID (**Friend Whom I Dislike**). Old spiritual manuals used to talk of the need to avoid "keeping evil company," and they weren't talking about Wal-Mart. If you're an affable fellow like me, who is also a **sucker for a sob story**, chances are you've accumulated over the years your own share of narcissists, emotional/financial parasites, or outright sociopaths. Afraid it would be "uncharitable" to tell these folks at which stop to get off, you've probably wasted too much of your limited resources, empathy, toil, and time with people who couldn't take a hint if it were lying in a basket in the back of the church labeled "For the Poor." Even verbal tirades on your part get laughed off or forgotten, and the person shows up again in your Inbox or at your doorstep, relying on the power of Limitless Chutzpah to

blow past your defenses and land him or her back inside what Robert DeNiro called (in *Meet the Parents*) the Circle of Trust. But the last time they were there, they messed on the floor, and you've got to get them out. So if you're like me -- an extremely acerbic writer -- you pen the person a searchingly critical letter full of theological references, ugly anecdotes, and long-suppressed emotion, designed to remove every inch of skin, coat him in road salt like a pretzel, and spread him with mustard. This usually does get rid of him, but it can make a dangerous enemy.

I hope to write fewer such letters this year. I'm almost out of FWIDs.

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Contraception and Conversion

David Mills | Column

12/30/08

Sometimes a "progressive" Catholic asks me why my family and I became Catholics. As often rapidly becomes clear, the Episcopal Church we left is his ideal for the Catholic Church. We had married priests, women priests, homosexual priests, no doctrinal restrictions, evolving moral standards, and an official reason to be rude to the pope. What more could one want? How could we leave Paradise for the church of that oppressive Pole and then that oppressive German?

The regularly attending, basic-believing Catholic is usually pleased as punch to meet a convert. He rarely asks why -- and, when he does, wants only the most general of answers. Becoming a Catholic for him is just an obvious thing to do, and he is glad to have you around.

The sporadically attending, selectively believing Catholic is slightly bemused, because (if I understand him right) he seems to think of the Church as a heritage and a home and doesn't see why anyone else would be interested in it. He seems to feel as he would if you showed up to the Wisniewski family reunion or dropped into the Aquilina's for Sunday dinner or starting putting ornaments on the Rothfus's Christmas tree. Yet he is usually rather pleased that we did join, being a patriot.

The "progressive" is not so patriotic, if he isn't actually a traitor. So I will often say, in as cheery, boosterish, and cheerleading a voice as I can manage, "My wife and I discovered the truth of the Church's teaching on contraception, and after a while we just had to join the one body in the world that was telling the truth about it."

That usually shuts down the conversation. I am now familiar with the sequence of facial expressions that begins with incredulity and then, after a period ranging from half a second to four or five, moves to either annoyance, disgust, or fear. People have, when they

realized exactly what I'd just said, edged away while keeping their eyes on me as if I might hit them from behind. (I am not making that up.)

Perhaps I should not provoke the "progressive" so directly, but I speak to him that way to find out how serious he is in asking his question. In my experience, he rarely wants a real answer, and quite often just wants an excuse to berate the Church for all her alleged sins. I haven't time for that kind of disloyalty, partly because (having heard all this as an Episcopalian) I think the arguments fairly stupid.

The Church's teaching on contraception was not the only thing that drew us to the Church, of course, but it ranked high, not least because the teaching so thoroughly contradicted everything we had been taught that it had to be either the truth held with supernatural aid or a delusion held for any number of foolish or corrupt reasons.

Everyone I knew, well into my early thirties, assumed that sexual activity without the "risk" of children was perfectly natural and that the number and spacing of your children was something for you to decide. Even among Christians, no one would have blinked at a married couple who said that they were not going to have children, as long as they in some way (perfunctorily was okay) invoked God's will.

When my fiancé and I went to our Episcopal church for the required premarital counseling, one of the first questions we were asked is what method of birth control we would be using. We didn't know well anyone with more than two children, and I strain to remember anyone we knew at all with four. I remember meeting, when I was about 30, a minister with five children and feeling, even then, that I had met a mythical animal.

I first began to wonder about contraception as a pro-life activist, when I noted (after reading Joseph Sobran in the *Human Life Review*) its emotional association with abortion: Contraception sometimes fails, and some people find this failure to be unfair, denying them the child-free sex to which they feel entitled, and thus are inclined to abortion to correct the "injustice" of having a child they didn't intend. They assume that if children were to be chosen and scheduled, the untimely, unchosen child could be rejected. Aborting him might be "tragic," but it was "a tragic necessity."

At first I thought the claim absurd, but then I heard some Evangelical Episcopalian friends -- mainstream conservatives -- say this very thing. They assumed that, for a married couple at least, sexual intercourse whenever desired was mandatory, but that having the baby that resulted was not. This didn't change my mind, but it worried me. Contraception kept bad company.

A few years later, involved in the debate over homosexuality within the Episcopal Church, I was disturbed by the difference between the conservatives' approval of non-procreative sex for married people and their loud opposition to non-procreative sex for homosexual people. They never got beyond the Bible verses against homosexuality, which seemed arbitrary without some idea what sexuality is for -- and as a result, the homosexualists who *did* have some idea what sexuality is for seemed to have the better arguments (though they were wrong).

I began to wonder about the end for which sexuality is given us, and to see that sexual activity couldn't be reduced to an emotional connection unrelated to the physical purposes of the organs involved. God had a reason for forbidding people to use their sexual organs with members of their own sex, but this reason implied that he intended them to be used only in certain ways even with a member of the other sex to whom they are married.

My assumptions about sexuality were further disturbed by the unanimity of the Church's witness. Anglicans, having no Magisterium, look to the Christian tradition for guidance, and traditional Anglicans have

always weighted it very heavily. And here -- though "traditionalist" Anglicans were almost always in favor of contraception, and even used their opposition as an argument against Catholicism -- was a teaching about as universal as could be asked for.

These hints led me to read up on a subject to which I would have given no attention at all before. Gradually I, and my wife too (and on her own), began to understand and then to accept, and finally to appropriate for ourselves, the Church's teaching, which just a few years before had seemed to us utterly bizarre.

When we took it up as a practice, it changed our marriage as the articles had promised. Obedience led to the gift of our two youngest children, born after we accepted the teaching but before we became Catholics, and that addition radically changed our lives for the better. We couldn't imagine life without them, not just for themselves but for the kind of family their addition created.

We naturally noticed, as we grew closer to the Church, that only she proclaimed this truth that, to us, was increasingly self-evident and objectively life-changing. And she did so with a complex and extensive and subtle understanding of man, sexuality, and society, also found in its fullness nowhere else.

To us, the Church's insight and her courage in proclaiming it to a society that thought the whole idea daft was a sign -- one of many, but one of the very biggest -- that we were not yet where we ought to be. Gratitude for the life the Church had brought us, even when we remained outside her borders, drew us in.

David Mills is the former editor of [Touchstone](#) magazine and is now writing a book on Mary. He and his family were received into the Church in 2001. For a short popular explanation of the argument for the Church's teaching, he recommends Julie Loesch Wiley's [The Delightful Secrets of Sex](#); for a description of the

*relation of contraception and abortion, he recommends
Patrick Henry Reardon's [The Roots of Roe v. Wade](#).*

Resolution

David Warren | Column

12/31/08

Several years ago, I picked a fight with some Darwinist or other. This was in print, as part of my day job as a newspaper pundit, I hasten to add: No humans were injured in the making of this controversy. I must have had a lot of time on my hands, for the time I have since invested.

The "mainstream media" run articles daily in support, praise, or extenuation of "Darwinism" -- implicitly defined as "the scientific alternative to religious belief." The year 2009 will be a double anniversary for Charles Darwin, for both his birth (in 1809) and the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859). It follows that we will have more celebration of this "patron saint of modern atheism" and be subjected to more irritations than ever.

Now, Darwin is no more to be blamed for the behavior of his disciples than Karl Marx for the crimes of Stalin -- which is to say, yes, I blame Marx, but I blame Stalin more. That Darwin was himself an atheist I think becomes clear as one reads him; that he was also a remarkable observer of natural history should go without saying.

Darwin's contemporary, Alfred Russel Wallace, whose contribution to the hypothesis of "natural selection" tends to be understated when not overlooked (he had weird spiritual views of the sort that embarrass "rationalists"), had the more interesting, original, and engaging of the two minds. I was rereading recently his wonderful book, *The Malay Archipelago*, which I can recommend to anyone as a narrative of travel and adventure. There you will find a man remarkably open to experience and careless of where the truth may lead. In Darwin, by comparison, I find a very careful man -- a decent and honest one, but a spiritual miser, crouched over his single, plausible insight into nature.

"Plausible," and no more. Evolution was clear enough to the generation before Darwin's; the descent of diverse creatures from common ancestors cannot be an issue. But there is no conceivable way to extract, from recoverable fragments of the deep fossil record, a confirmation of Darwin's hypothesis, nor to predict anything with it.

Moreover, modern biology moved on through Gregor Mendel, through DNA, through advanced microscopy, into realms unimaginable to Darwin, where none of his assertions are required. We have, in evolutionary biology today, what is called "the modern synthesis" of neo-Darwinism and Mendelian genetics. But if Darwin had never lived, the science would be much the same. We would be missing only the lip-service to Darwin.

That all living nature can be explained ultimately by "natural selection," and by this alone, is plausible, easy to imagine -- but only for as long as one is able to ignore the presence of volition in all living things. By comparison, no form of "intelligent design" can possibly be plausible, until a Designer can be produced and dissected. This God has done only once in history.

Beyond this, the idea that the existence of God is "disproved," merely by suggesting an alternative hypothesis, is too absurd. A better question is: How have intelligent minds been reduced to this? Arguments over how one species came of another cannot possibly touch on the existence of God. Likewise, "proofs" of God are irrelevant. Faith in God is prior to intellectual knowledge; if nothing else, Descartes should have proved that no intellectual process can get "behind" it.

I was shown, over Christmas, an article by an American "philosopher" (in the *Boston Review*)

touching on recent "arguments from design" and comparing them dismissively with other "proofs" of the existence of God, chiefly St. Anselm's "ontological argument," with animadversions to St. Thomas. What a waste of precious electrons!

There are unintended comic moments when our contemporary Whiz Boys present themselves as interpreters of Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, but mostly it is grim to read. For they are smartasses: They lack seriousness. They do not want to know the answers to the questions upon which they are disporting themselves. It is pure display, performance art.

Anselm was not presenting a "proof" of the existence of God, in any glib sense of that word. Faith is prior to knowledge, from the first reaching of the newborn child, so long as there is life. It is volitional, not epistemic, in its nature.

This is not playing with words. Anselm is instead concerned with what faith itself can teach us about God, through the concentrated application of reason -- which involves a faith in reason, too. For Anselm is not trying to replace faith with reason, as trite interpreters

assume, he is trying to enlarge upon faith. His point of departure is to ask why the Fool in the Psalms -- "who has said in his heart, there is no God" -- is a fool. He is engaged in a high philosophical quest, not a game with such rewards as tenure. This is why he remains worth considering after a thousand years.

The smartass begins by rejecting all "faith claims." In doing so he places himself, as it were, outside his own being, in the void where abstract judgments are made. As Anselm was showing, he is a fool.

My New Year's resolution is to try, hard, to overcome my own foolish propensity to argue with fools on the fools' own premises. For it is a pointless distraction from the task of building, upon faith, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

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A Church of Memory

Anthony Esolen | Column

1/1/09

"**H**e has remembered His promise of mercy," sang Mary, in a rapture of praise as she greeted her cousin Elizabeth, "the promise He made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever" (Lk 1:54-55). "Remember me, Lord," said the thief to Jesus, "when you come into your kingdom" (Lk 23:42).

God sees all things in the still-present moment of his eternal being. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," says St. Peter, warning his fellow Christians not to expect Christ's return to be imminent, and not to suppose that God has forgotten them (2 Pt 3:8). An infinite stretch of years backward and forward are less than a wink of an eye to the Lord, indeed are as absolutely nothing, since it is He who made time, and all its moments.

Then why should Scripture so often refer to God's *remembering* His covenants? That is what the Baptist's father, the priest Zechariah, says He has done (Lk. 1:72), when his mouth is opened after the naming of John. Appropriately so, since the name Zechariah means "God remembers." So too the name of the prophet, who foretold the coming of the King who would fulfill all the covenants, riding into Jerusalem "upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech 9:9).

God remembers, but has never forgotten. Instead, this "memory" suggests a relationship God has never abandoned, even though man has abandoned himself to sin. God remembers us: He will not let us go. He will have justice from us, whether we like it or not. He will have mercy on us, whether we like it or not. We wish He would not be mindful of us -- a wish that is at the heart of every sin, that we should be treated as the witless beasts. We want God to forget us, or at least to overlook us while we are sinning, because we do not want to be reminded of Him.

We want no Savior to warn us that the blood of all the prophets will be upon our generation, "from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple" (Lk 11:51), murdered by the Jews, because he told them what they did not want to hear, or reminded them of what they wanted to forget. To remember what we owe to God, and to our forefathers in the faith, is to set ourselves within the vast sweep of the history of salvation. It is to acknowledge centuries of blessing, without which we would be quite lost. It is to confess our ingratitude and our poor return on that kindness. It is to look forward, with that same thief, to the moment when Jesus may grace us with His memory -- may say to us, "Come, blessed of my father!"

But what happens when all the currents of one's day converge to destroy not our memory of this or that benefit, but memory itself? "History is bunk," said Henry Ford, as he set about destroying a way of life that rewarded craftsmanship and thrift. "Education," said the great American flattener of our schools, John Dewey, "[must] undermine and destroy the accumulated and self-perpetuating prejudices of long ages," including, as far as he was concerned, the hoary old prejudices of religion. Neither Ford nor Dewey was much of a thinker. But we did not need them to tell us that we owed nothing to the past. We required no encouragement to forget. We have been doing that ever since Eve forgot the multitudinous blessings of God and ate of the single forbidden fruit.

We call it "cultural amnesia," but the odd phrase already suggests how much we have forgotten. It might as well be called a living death, since to the extent that we have forgotten our past, we have no culture at all, amnesiac or otherwise. It is, I suppose, no surprise that a consumer anti-culture, ever on the lookout for the next ephemeral fad, should so detach

itself from time and its claims and duties. But how on earth could the Catholic Church have done so?

Take Ford's quote, and replace "history" with "tradition," or "the faith expressed in the first creeds," or "the piety of past ages of Catholics," and you express the sentiment of any number of Catholics, lay and clergy. Do something similar with Dewey's challenge: Tack on the name of a chancery director of religious education, and see if the result raises an eyebrow. So thoroughly have we committed ourselves to amnesia that we now hug ourselves for our betrayal of our heritage, as if it were a virtue.

There is no culture without memory. If you do not pass along, from generation to generation, the skills you ply, the truths you revere, the laws you obey, and the feasts you celebrate, you have no culture, but what Romano Guardini called "mass man," thrall to the central marketers and manipulators.

So too, without memory, you have no Church. You may have thousands thronging the coffee shops at Willow Creek, in the market for the latest therapeutic Jesus promo. You may have 20 people in a little niche chapel in the country, where Pastor Joanne turns Christianity into chicken soup for old ladies. But you have no Church. That is because you have severed yourself from those who came before you, to whom you acknowledge no debt; from those among whom you live now, since you have substituted your personal predilections for the unity-making tenets of the faith; and from those who will come after you, who will follow

your own example and forget you, as you have forgotten your fathers.

I stand in the faith of Augustine and Aquinas, not simply because I have been persuaded that they are correct, but because I owe them my allegiance. They are my fathers. I stand in the faith of Lawrence the Deacon, not simply because I admire his brave martyrdom, but because his witness has played its part in God's design, making possible the conversion of all nations. He too is my father. I stand in the faith of Pope Benedict XVI, not simply because he is the wisest man alive, but because I accept the promise of Christ, that He would send His Church the Comforter, who would teach us all that it behooves us to know. I try, and God knows how often I fail, to remember, to be a loyal son of the Church, because my Savior Himself, knowing how inattentive and vain and forgetful we are, so commanded us all at that first Eucharist.

Said He, looking round upon those twelve who were, otherwise, but men of the passing day, "Do this in memory of me."

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My New Year's Wish for the Church

Deal W. Hudson | Column

1/1/09

In the twenty-five years since I became a Catholic, I have continuously wondered why there is so little evangelism. I speak of the Church in this country, of course, though the observation would apply to Europe as well. I think I have finally located one source of the problem.

My New Year's wish for the Church is that by becoming aware of two attitudes -- dutifulness and complacency -- we can start to renew our parishes with a spirit that greets those we know and welcomes those we do not.

Non-Catholic churches are filled with baptized Catholics who went elsewhere to find a spiritual home. Teenagers and young adults drift away after years of coming to Mass with their parents. These Catholics who no longer practice their faith, or have found other church homes, rarely speak ill of the Church; rather, they talk about a lack of "connection," of feeling "anonymous," and the experience of "not being fed."

Yes, there *are* adult converts to the Catholic faith, but their number represents a trickle of what it could be if our Church was genuinely evangelical.

What do I mean by "evangelism," "being evangelical," or having an "evangelical spirit"? Is this just another example of a convert haranguing the Church for not being what it never was? Not at all. What I am proposing is something that arises naturally from the very nature of our faith and the mission of our Church. Does not our faith contain a story that begs to be told? Is not our Church a place that should greet and welcome all who come to its door?

Evangelical Christians are motivated to share their faith because they are taught that every person's eternal salvation is at stake. Are Catholics taught any differently? No. Yet our behavior and prevalent attitudes would suggest otherwise. Evangelicals treat

everyone who comes to their church as a customer (for lack of a better word) -- strangers are welcomed at the door, recognized during the service, and often invited to lunch afterwards. Put simply, they make a concerted effort every Sunday to build their community by extending it to others.

So what is getting in the way of Catholics sharing the story of their faith and consciously seeking to build the parish community from week to week? The problem is not our teaching, but the unnecessary attitudes mistakenly fostered by that teaching. In my opinion, these attitudes can be expunged through a more joyful engagement in the liturgy.

The Church teaches that certain aspects of religious practice, from Sunday Mass attendance and Holy Days (Canon 1247) to confession (Canon 989) are obligations. The consequences of not keeping these obligations **can be** mortal sin (Catechism 1855) and the loss of sanctifying grace.

When all Catholics are required to be at Mass on Sunday the attitude can become: "Well, I have to be here and so does everyone else." Let's call that attitude *dutifulness*. That approach explains the lack of welcome on the part of congregants and priests alike. Why say, "I'm glad you are here," when everyone is *obliged* to be here?

I am well aware that the teaching on obligation is not intended to encourage such an attitude, and it is clear that there are other factors to consider (such as the need for liturgy that lifts the spirit of those in the pews). Nevertheless, there's no debating the fact that problems arise when Catholics approach Mass as a duty.

The second attitude stems from Catholic teaching about the sacraments as they are entrusted to the Church (Catechism 1131) and necessary for salvation

(Catechism 1125). Our priesthood is what "guarantees that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church" (Catechism 1120). This teaching was one of the Church's great attractions to me as a convert. But this often translates into an attitude of "You have nowhere else to go if you want true salvation." Let's call that attitude 'complacency,' which in the extreme becomes smugness.

Catholics are not a people who are deeply disposed to sharing their Faith, and are often put off by what they consider aggressive habits among their Protestant brethren. But our religion *should* motivate us to evangelize, though our styles and methods might be different. As Catholics we are [taught](#) that the "Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic

Church." And we are also taught the Church and its universality is "a gift from the Lord himself whereby the *Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity*" (Catechism 831).

So great a gift demands to be shared. And to those who come to our parish door in search of that gift, they should be met not only with a "welcome," but also with a celebration of the Mass that satisfies their hunger for God.

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

A Christmas Pilgrimage

Mary Jo Anderson | Column

1/2/09

Our Christmas tree still blinks in the window, though most of our neighbors have taken down all signs of Christmas. Our nativity remains on the front lawn, too, and will until after the Feast of the Epiphany.

Each year it seems we struggle harder to "keep Christmas" amid the marketeering that now characterizes what most Americans experience simply as "the holidays." Is it any wonder that this blessed season, overshadowed by commercial preparations, leaves some of us harried and spiritually vacant?

We are invited by the liturgical rhythm to make an interior Christmas pilgrimage, beginning with Advent and following the Holy Family all the way to the Adoration of the Magi. That first Christmas was not simply a Roman command to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem for Caesar's census; for the Holy Family, it was an interior journey of faith in God, in His promises and His providence.

We have listened to the story yearly; we know by heart each verse of the Gospel. And yet, do we identify with Mary and Joseph's struggle to trust in the cosmic promise that the Divine Word, the Son of God, would enter history to be born of a humble maid? And if it were truly God's will, why was there no room at the inn? Why was there no advance party to prepare a grand way for the Holy Child?

The human couple discovered God's plan in the doing of His of will. It is part of their journey of faith that -- somehow, despite appearances -- they learned that God was going before them. It is this interior journey of trust that one makes when going on pilgrimage.

Pilgrimages are an ancient form of devotion to some manifestation of God's providence. Among the more famous pilgrimage sites for Catholics are

Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Santiago de Compostela, Lourdes, Fatima. Each represents a unique place and moment in history when God revealed His work to those with the faith to "see." This seeing with the eyes of faith is part of the pilgrimage experience -- that is, one makes a physical journey in hopes of touching and experiencing the temporal place where heaven entered our world. But it is never the physical contact alone that true pilgrims seek. Rather, that physical reality reflects what the heart already knows: Only those who *believe* will see heaven at work.

In 1873, the Sisters of Loretto used their personal inheritances to build a chapel to complement their school for girls in Santa Fe ("Holy Faith"), New Mexico. Their new **gothic chapel** was patterned on Sainte Chapelle in Paris, but the architect for their project was shot to death before the chapel was completed. It's unclear whether the architect simply omitted a staircase to the choir loft or the builders made an error. Either way, the sisters labored over their problem: How can a staircase be built that will fit into the chapel where apparently no space was designed for it?

Over the years, legends grew as to how the lovely stairs were built, and who the mysterious builder might have been. The story has the familiar elements of a fairy tale. The most famous version of the legend is that the good sisters called in builders from near and far who hung their heads in despair: "No, Mother Superior, a stairwell such as the one you require cannot be built without injury to the chapel itself." Desperate to complete the chapel, the sisters resolved to make a novena to St. Joseph, the Master Carpenter.

On the ninth day, a poor man and his burro arrived in Santa Fe. The man offered to build the stairs to the choir. In the still of the night, the mysterious carpenter

finished what one popular history describes as a stairway that

confounds architects, engineers and master craftsmen. It makes over two complete 360-degree turns, stands 20 feet tall and has no center support. It rests solely on its base and against the choir loft. The risers of the 33 steps are all of the same height. Made of an apparently extinct wood species, it was constructed with only square wooden pegs without glue or nails.

Alternate versions of the legend recount how the sisters tried to pay the man who would not accept payment, or that one morning the stairs were completed, but the carpenter has disappeared. Pious believers are content to accept that the carpenter was St. Joseph himself, and that the stairs follow a heavenly design.

Since the CBS television movie *The Staircase* aired in 1998, there have been numerous attempts to discredit the "miraculous" staircase. It is made without nails, but this was not uncommon, say the skeptics. And while the wood used for its steps is not native to the area, the species is not extinct; meanwhile, the staircase itself was so unsafe that rails were added years later . . . And

so it goes, until many of the legend's claims are skewered.

Yet in the debunking fervor, the real providence of God is missed by those who have no faith to see what is clearly in front of them. How can one gaze on the astonishing stairwell and not know that it is a superabundant provision in response to fervent prayer? There was an actual, logistical problem; the problem was not simply solved, but solved with the incredible work of a carpenter's art. That art *is* the message.

For pilgrims willing to look for God, His providence is clearly seen in this chapel, and at other revered sites. One might as well say that Joseph and Mary experienced nothing unusual when the Magi arrived in Bethlehem with coffers of valuables that provided the means for the Holy Family to escape to Egypt in advance of Herod's murderous rage.

Mary Jo Anderson is the co-author of [Male and Female He Made Them: Some Questions and Answers on Marriage and Same-sex Unions](#), and is a frequent contributor to [InsideCatholic.com](#).

Ring Out the Old, Bring In the New

Robert R. Reilly | Review

12/29/08

As we prepare our farewell to Anno Domini 2008, I reflect back on some things that gave me great pleasure and on some new discoveries from this year. Although my appetite for obscure composers and compositions is insatiable, I want readers to know that I do revisit the classic repertory as often as I can, and with it we shall begin this month's meditation.

My friend, music critic Jens Laurson of Ionarts and WETA, put me on to the set of [Beethoven symphonies](#) by the Berlin Staatskapelle, under Daniel Barenboim, on the Warner label (2564 61890-2). I had no particular opinion of Barenboim as a conductor, but I am completely sold on these old-fashioned, sumptuous, yet powerful and passionate performances. I found it for \$30. If it comes your way, grab it. I was so impressed that I also bagged Barenboim's complete [Bruckner symphonies](#) -- this time with the Berlin Philharmonic -- also on Warner, at a bargain price of only \$36 on the Berkshire Record Outlet site. The playing is staggeringly beautiful, but Barenboim does not quite reach the spiritual level of sublimity that my favorite Gunter Wand performances achieve.

My Christmas present to myself was Sir Charles Mackerras's complete set of [Mozart symphonies](#), with the Prague Chamber Orchestra, in a budget Telarc box for only \$30. The adrenaline runs high even in the early works that Mozart penned as a pre-teen. The term energetic would be almost an understatement in describing these jolting performances. It is hard to sit still while listening to them. While I appreciate the verve, I will not discard my Josef Krips recordings, which are more leisurely and bring out the operatic quality of the late symphonies in an especially appealing way.

Reaching back somewhat earlier into the 18th century, we have an intriguing *Missa Brevis* from Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736). If you only know Pergolesi from his exquisite *Stabat Mater*, you

have a treat ahead of you with the *Missa Romana*, an inventive, highly charged setting of the Kyrie and the Gloria. Playing and singing of great character from the *Concerto Italiano*, under Rinaldo Alessandrini, bring completely to life a work accounted by Pergolesi's contemporaries as radiating "the utmost harmony, grandeur and piety." That a 24-year-old could have written something this original leaves one wondering what other glories Pergolesi might have achieved had he not died at age 26. The [Naïve CD](#) (OP 30461) includes a very lovely Christmas Mass, written by Alessandro Scarlatti in 1707.

Another vocal treat comes in the form of the secular cantatas of Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-1792), an exact contemporary of Mozart, who died at the young age of 36. We already know that Kraus was a genius from earlier Naxos recordings of his symphonies; that he deserved his appellation as the "Swedish Mozart" is made abundantly clear by his glorious coloratura writing in the four cantatas for soprano included in a new CD, *La Primavera*, issued by Phoenix Edition label (101), with the delicious singing of Simone Kermes and energetic playing of L'Arte del Mondo, under Werner Ehrhardt. Alas, the cantata texts are only in Italian and German.

Mozart's spirit also imbues the [piano concertos](#) of Joseph Wolf (1773-1812), which is hardly surprising since Leopold Mozart, Wolfgang's father, was his teacher, along with Michael Haydn. The CPO label has released Concertos 1, 5, and 6, played by Yorck Kronenberg, with the SWR Radio Symphony Orchestra Kaiserslautern, under Johannes Moesus. If you have any affection for this period and genre, you will be charmed and delighted.

[My love of Bach's sonatas and partitas for solo violin](#) developed in me a taste for other works for solo violin.

Therefore, I was intrigued by CPO's release of the *40 Etudes ou Caprices pour Violon* by Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831). Kreutzer's name is renowned chiefly because Beethoven dedicated to him his 9th Violin Sonata. Kreutzer's Etudes are teaching exercises. I do not advise listening to the two CDs (CPO 999 901-2) of etudes non-stop, because their pedagogical intent can overwhelm the musical interest and try your patience. However, some of them are musically engaging and can stand proudly on their own -- for instance, the lovely lament, with an almost keening Celtic sound, in the first etude. Elizabeth Wallfisch's playing makes this a delight for those with an interest in this period, or for fanatics like me.

Perhaps an even greater entertainment quotient can be found in the complete piano concertos of piano virtuoso and composer John Field (1782-1837). Chandos has released its complete survey of the *seven concertos*, along with a few other works, on four discs in mid-price box (CHAN 10468(4) X), with pianist Miceal O'Rourke and the London Mozart Players. These are display pieces of great charm and little profundity, and there is nothing wrong with enjoying them for what they are, especially in these fine performances in stellar sound.

In the ear-candy department, we have Ottorino Respighi's *La Primavera Cantata* (1922), performed by soloists, the Slovak Philharmonic Chorus, and the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, under Adriano. The budget Naxos disc (8.570741) includes *Quattro Liriche* and *La Pentola Magica* (The Magic Pot). At 45 minutes long, *La Primavera* is a luscious, sumptuous, extravagant celebration of spring, with six soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Though its text is cloaked in Christianity, its musical sensibility has an almost pagan feel to it. Just as *La Boutique Fantasque* was based upon themes by Rossini, Respighi's *Magic Pot* ballet uses Russian sources, the music of Alexander Grechaninov, Anton Arensky, Anton Rubinstein, and others for this charming 25-minute confection. This program used to be on the full-price Marco Polo label and has just gravitated to the budget Naxos imprint, making these rare Respighi treats even more accessible to his many fans.

I have been very curious about the attention given to British composer Richard Arnell (b. 1917) by the Dutton label. It has released four of his six symphonies, some ballet music, and a piano concerto. Is this, I wondered, another neglected talent on the artistic level of Edmund Rubbra or William Alwyn, whose well-deserved revivals have preceded Dutton's recent attention to Arnell? I began by exploring the mammoth, more-than-hour-long *Symphony No. 3* (Dutton CDLX 7161), written in 1944-45. My initial impression was of repeated runs at heaving a heavy object into the air, getting it partially aloft, wobbling a bit under its enormous weight, but never relaxing the muscles in the upward lift. The very scale of this work creates a sense of expectancy, as if a great proclamation is about to be made. I was confirmed in my opinion when I read the CD booklet, which quoted Alwyn's comment that "the composer rarely relaxes the earnestness of his thought or the strength of his muscles." Also, Rubbra weighed in: "Obviously a work that because of its sheer musical vitality should be performed."

What does it sound like? I hear little influence from Shostakovich (perhaps a smidgen in the Presto movement), a comparison made in the booklet and a review I read. It has an inimitably English sound, but definitely not from the pastoral school. And I do not think it is beholden to Vaughn Williams. It is most reminiscent of William Walton's great *Symphony No. 1*, especially in the Andante and Allegro movements. It is as highly charged and also as distinctly Sibelian in places. It is not as thematically tight as Walton, and has a more cinematic flavor. Regardless, it is a magnificent, even extravagant achievement. It does produce the promised major statement with an almost Elgarian nobility. As it is dedicated "to the political courage of the British people" during World War II, this is as it should be. The more I listen to this symphony, the higher my opinion climbs. How wonderful the composer is still alive to enjoy this belated recognition, delivered in such a stirring performance by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, under Martin Yates.

Bargain of the year: the complete works of [Stravinsky](#), mostly conducted by Stravinsky, on 22 CDs from Sony for under \$40!

Next year, 2009, begins the centenary commemoration of Franz Joseph Haydn's death in 1809. So, in January, I shall begin reviewing massive amounts of Haydn recordings released for the celebration of this

most human of all musical geniuses, including the new 150-CD box from Brilliant Classics and boxed sets of the symphonies, quartets, and piano sonatas from Naxos. This should make it a very happy New Year!

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The New Language

Christopher West | Classic

12/27/08

It's no exaggeration to say that the sad task of the 20th century was to rid itself of the Christian sexual ethic. If we're to build a culture of life, the task of the 21st century must be to reclaim it. But the often repressive approach of previous generations of Christians (usually silence or, at most, "Don't do it") is largely responsible for the cultural jettison of the Church's teaching on sex.

We need a "new language" to break the silence and reverse the negativity. We need a fresh theology that explains how the Christian sexual ethic -- far from the prudish list of prohibitions it's assumed to be -- corresponds perfectly with the deepest yearnings of our hearts.

As many people are only now discovering, Pope John Paul II devoted the first major teaching project of his pontificate to developing that theology; he calls it a "theology of the body." This collection of 129 short talks has already begun a sexual counterrevolution that is changing lives around the world. The fire is spreading, and in due time we can expect global repercussions.

George Weigel said it best in *Witness to Hope* when he described the theology of the body as "a kind of *theological time bomb* set to go off with dramatic consequences...perhaps in the twenty-first century."

A Reply to Our Universal Questions

By focusing on the beauty of God's plan for the union of the sexes, John Paul II shifts the discussion from legalism ("How far can I go before I break the law?") to liberty ("What's the truth that sets me free to love?"). That liberating truth is salvation in Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter what mistakes a person has made or what sins he has committed -- the pope's theology of the body wags a finger at no one. It is a message of sexual salvation offered to one and all.

Through an in-depth reflection on the Scriptures, the pope tries to answer two of the most important universal questions: (1) "What does it mean to be human?" and (2) "How do I live my life in a way that brings true happiness?" His teaching, therefore, isn't only for married people, or even for those who hope to be married. If you have a body, this theology applies to you. It is a reflection on the meaning of life and God's "nuptial plan" for the universe.

To answer the first question -- "What does it mean to be human?" -- the pope follows Christ's invitation to reflect on the three different "stages" of the human experience of sex and the body: in our *origin* before sin; in our *history* darkened by sin, yet redeemed in Christ; and in our *destiny* when God will raise our bodies in glory.

In response to the second question -- "How do I live my life?" -- John Paul applies his distinctive Christian humanism to the vocations of celibacy and marriage. He then concludes by demonstrating how this provides a new, winning explanation of Church teaching on sexual morality.

Why is the Body a Theology?

According to John Paul II, God created the body as a sign of His own divine mystery. This is why he speaks of the body as a "theology," a study of God.

We can't see God. As pure Spirit, God is invisible. Yet Christianity is the religion of God's self-disclosure. In and through Christ, God has revealed Himself as an eternal Communion of Persons, as a Trinity living an eternal exchange of love. Furthermore, in and through Christ, we are invited to participate in that eternal communion. Somehow the human body makes this eternal mystery visible.

How? Specifically through the beauty of sexual difference and our call to communion. The union of the sexes is a created version in some sense of God's uncreated exchange of love. And right from the beginning, the union of man and woman foreshadows our eternal destiny of union with Christ. As St. Paul says, the "one flesh" union is "a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32).

The Bible uses spousal love more than any other image to help us understand God's eternal plan for humanity. God wants to "marry" us (see Hosea 2:19) -- to live with us in an unbreakable bond of love that the Bible compares to marriage. And He wanted this great marital plan to be so plain to us, so obvious, that He impressed an image of it in our very being by creating us male and female and calling us to become one flesh.

Thus, in a dramatic development of Catholic thought, John Paul concludes that we image God not only as individuals but also through the communion of man and woman. The original vocation to be "fruitful and multiply," then, is nothing but a call to live in the image in which we're made -- to love as God loves.

Of course, this doesn't mean that God is Himself sexual. We use spousal love only as an analogy to help us understand something of the divine mystery. God's mystery remains infinitely beyond any human image. But at the same time, the pope gives pride of place to the spousal analogy. He believes there's no other human reality that corresponds more to God's mystery of communion.

The Original Experience of the Body

We tend to think the war between the sexes is normal. In His discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus points out that from the beginning it was not so. Before sin, man and woman experienced their union as a participation in God's eternal love. This is the model for us all, and although we have fallen from this, Christ gives us real power to reclaim it.

The biblical creation stories use symbolic language to help us understand deep truths about ourselves. For example, the pope observes that their original unity flows from the human being's experience of solitude. At first the man was alone. Among the animals there was no "helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:20). It's on the basis of this solitude -- an experience common to male and female -- that we experience our longing for union.

The point is that human sexual union differs radically from the mating of animals. If they were the same, Adam would have found plenty of helpers among the animals. But in naming the animals he realized he was different; he alone was a person called to love with his body in God's image. Upon sight of the woman the man immediately declares: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). That is to say, "Finally, a *person* I can love."

How did he know that she too was a person called to love? Her naked body revealed the mystery. For the pure of heart, nakedness reveals what John Paul calls the nuptial meaning of the body. This is the body's capacity of expressing love. The body enables men and women to become a sincere gift to each other. And through this gift, the pope says that spouses fulfill the very meaning of their existence.

Jesus reveals this meaning when he invites us to love one another as He loved us. How did Jesus love us? Through the gift of His body. God designed the union of the sexes to image this; He created sexual desire as the power to love as He loves. And this is how the first couple experienced it.

For this reason, the first man and woman felt no shame, no fear, no threat being naked before the other. Nakedness without shame is the very key for understanding God's original plan for human life. It unlocks the intimacy and ecstasy of love that God intended from the beginning.

The Historical Experience of the Body and Sex

Original sin caused the death of divine love in the human heart. The entrance of shame brought the dawn of lust, of erotic desire void of God's love. Men and women of history now tend to seek the sensation of sexuality apart from the true gift of themselves -- apart from authentic love.

And so we cover our bodies not because they're bad, but to protect their inherent goodness from the degradation of lust. Since we know we're made for love, we feel instinctively threatened not only by overt lustful behavior but even by a lustful look.

Christ's words are severe in this regard. He insists that if we look lustfully at others, we've already committed adultery in our hearts. John Paul asks whether we should fear the severity of these words or rather have confidence in their power to save us.

Christ didn't die and rise from the dead merely to give us coping mechanisms for our sins and lusts. Christ's redemption is *effective*. As we open ourselves to the work of redemption, Christ's death and resurrection effectively "liberate our liberty from the domination of lust," as John Paul describes it.

On this side of heaven, we'll always be able to recognize a battle in our hearts between love and lust. Even so, John Paul insists that the redemption of the body is already at work in men and women of history. This means as we allow our lusts to be crucified with Christ, we can progressively rediscover in what is erotic that original nuptial meaning of the body.

Living a redeemed sexuality is very different than repressing sexuality. Christ doesn't aim to annihilate sexual desire with His warnings about lust. He wants to infuse it with everything that is true, good, and beautiful. He wants to impregnate *eros* with *agape* so that men and women can once again love one another as He loves.

The Ultimate Experience of the Body and Sex

What about our experience of the body in the resurrection? Didn't Christ say we will no longer be given in marriage when we rise from the dead? Yes, but this doesn't mean our longing for union will be done away with. Rather, it will be *fulfilled*.

As a sacrament, marriage is only an earthly sign of the heavenly reality. We no longer need signs to point us *to* heaven when we're *in* heaven. The marriage of the Lamb -- the union of love we all desire -- will be finally and eternally consummated.

This eternal reality is what the "one flesh" union foreshadows from the beginning. Marriage does not reveal the definitive meaning of our creation as male and female -- it's only the preliminary manifestation of that meaning and call to communion. In the resurrection of the body we rediscover -- in an entirely new dimension -- the same nuptial meaning of the body. But this time it is lived in union with God Himself and in the communion of all the saints who have responded to the wedding invitation.

This will be a completely new experience -- beyond anything we can imagine. Yet it will not be alienated in any way from God's original plan for us as male and female. In the resurrection, all that is true, good, and beautiful about the union of the sexes, marriage, and family life will be taken up, transformed, glorified, and fulfilled beyond our wildest imaginings.

The Christian Vocations

By looking at who we are in our origin, history, and destiny, we can properly understand the Christian vocations of celibacy and marriage. Both are an authentic living out of the most profound truth of who we are as male and female.

When lived authentically, Christian celibacy isn't a rejection of sexuality and our call to union. It actually points to their ultimate fulfillment. Those who sacrifice marriage "for the sake of the kingdom" (Matthew

19:12) do so in order to devote all of their energies and desires to the marriage that alone can satisfy -- the marriage of Christ and the Church. In a way, they're skipping the sacrament (the earthly sign) in anticipation of the ultimate reality. By doing so, celibate men and women declare to the world that the kingdom of God is here.

In a different way, marriage also anticipates heaven. The joys of marital intimacy are meant to be a kind of foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb. However, in order for marriage to bring the happiness it is meant to, spouses must live it as God intended from the beginning. This means they must contend diligently with the effects of sin.

Marriage does not justify lust. As a sacrament, marriage is meant to symbolize the union of Christ and the Church. The body has a language that is meant to express God's free, total, faithful, and fruitful love. This is exactly what spouses commit to at the altar. "Have you come here freely," the priest asks, "to give yourselves to each other without reservation? Do you promise to be faithful until death? Do you promise to receive children lovingly from God?" Bride and groom say "yes."

In turn, spouses are meant to express this same "yes" with their bodies whenever they become one flesh. Sexual intercourse is meant to be a renewal of wedding vows -- where the words of marital consent are made flesh.

A New Way to Understand Sexual Morality

The Church's sexual ethic begins to make sense when viewed through this lens. It isn't a prudish list of prohibitions but a call to embrace our own greatness, our own God-like dignity. It is a call to live the love we're created for.

Since a prophet is one who proclaims God's love, John Paul II describes the body and sexual union as "prophetic." But, he adds, we must be careful to distinguish between true and false prophets. If we can

speaking the truth with our bodies, we can also lie. Ultimately all questions of sexual morality come down to one simple question: Does this truly image God's free, total, faithful, and fruitful love or does it not?

In practical terms, how healthy would a marriage be if spouses were regularly unfaithful to their wedding vows? On the other hand, how healthy would a marriage be if spouses regularly renewed their vows, expressing an ever-increasing commitment to them? This is what is at stake in the Church's teaching on sexual morality.

Masturbation, fornication, adultery, intentionally sterilized sex, homosexual acts, etc. -- none of these things images God's free, total, faithful, and fruitful love. None expresses and renews wedding vows. They aren't marital. Does this mean people who behave in such ways are inherently evil? No, they're just confused about how to satisfy their genuine desires for love.

If I offered you a million-dollar bill and a counterfeit million-dollar bill, which would you prefer? Dumb question, I know. But what if you were raised in a culture that incessantly bombarded you with propaganda convincing you that the counterfeit was the real thing and the real thing was a counterfeit? Wouldn't you be confused?

Real Sexual Liberation

Why all the propaganda? If there's an enemy who wants to keep us from heaven, and if the body and sex are meant to point us there, what do you think he's going to attack? The tactic behind sin is to twist and disorient our desire for the eternal embrace. That is all it can do. When we understand this, we realize that the sexual confusion so prevalent in our world and in our own hearts is nothing but the human desire for heaven gone berserk.

But the tide is changing. People can only put up with the counterfeits for so long. Not only do they fail to satisfy, they wound us terribly. Sadly, the truth of

the Church's teaching on sex is confirmed in the wounds of those who have not lived it. Our longings for love, intimacy, and freedom are God-given. But the sexual revolution sold us a "pill" of goods. We haven't been liberated. We have been duped, betrayed, and left wanting.

This is why the world is a mission field ready to soak up John Paul II's theology of the body. And this is why it's already changing so many lives around the world. The pope's teaching helps us distinguish between the real million-dollar bill and the counterfeit. It helps us untwist our disordered desires and orients us toward the love that truly satisfies.

As this happens, we experience the Church's teaching not as a burden imposed from without but as a message of salvation welling up from within. We discover the truth that sets us free. In other words, we experience what the sexual revolution promised but couldn't deliver -- *real* sexual liberation.

Christopher West lectures globally on the theology of the body and has authored several books on the subject. To learn more visit www.theologyofthebody.com. This article originally appeared in the January 2005 issue of Crisis Magazine.