

In Defence Of The Roman Catholic Church

Part One

Listening to *Messe De La Nativité: Gaudeamus Hodie; Puer Natus Est Nobis* performed by Ensemble Gilles Binchois - I am so reminded how the Roman Catholic Church inspired such numinosity, such beauty, century following century. For it is as if such music presenced the Divine to thus remind us, we fallible error-prone mortals, of another realm beyond the material and beyond our own mortal desires.

Such presencing of the Divine - such a numinous reminder of our fallibility, century following century, as for example in *Kyrie Orbis Factor* as performed by Ensemble Organum - seems to have become somewhat lost in all the recent Media propaganda about how some Catholic priests and monks have allowed their personal desires to overwhelm such a presencing of the numinous and which presencing of the divine is and was manifest in compassion, empathy, and a personal humility.

Lost, in all the Media propaganda, because I from personal experience know that such incidents are perpetrated by a minority of individuals and that the vast majority of Catholic priests and monks are good individuals who strive, who often struggle, each in their own way and according to their physis, to manifest the virtues of compassion, empathy, and humility. That so many writers and readers of such Media propaganda in this our modern world seem to commit the fallacy of *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter* no longer, unfortunately, surprises me.

In respect of personal experience I have to admit that I was somewhat dismayed by a recent report issued by a government sponsored Inquiry Panel. For I personally had known two of the individuals mentioned in that report, knowing from personal experience in a certain monastery that they, and the few others like them over the years, were the exception out of dozens and dozens of other monks and priests there. I was also somewhat dismayed by what I felt was the personal opinion of the authors of that report - stated in their "Conclusions" - that those involved in placing their personal desires before compassion, empathy, and humility, are "likely to be considerably greater than numbers cited in the convictions" since no evidence was presented to substantiate such an opinion. Another example of individuals committing the fallacy of *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*? Probably.

But why does someone who has developed a somewhat paganus weltanschauung - the mystical individualistic numinous way of pathei-mathos - now defend a supra-personal organization such as the Roman Catholic Church? Because I from personal experience appreciate that for all its many faults - recent and otherwise - and despite my disagreement regarding some of its teachings it still on balance does, at least in my fallible opinion, presence - as it

has for centuries presented – aspects of the numinous and which presenting has over centuries, again in my fallible opinion, had a beneficial affect on many human beings.

As I wrote some years ago in respect of visiting my father's grave in Africa:

"Once I happened to be travelling to an area which colonial and imperialist Europeans formerly described as part of 'darkest Africa'. Part of this travel involved a really long journey on unpaved roads by bus from an urban area. You know the type of thing – an unreliable weekly or sporadic service in some old vehicle used by villagers to take themselves (and often their produce and sometimes their livestock) to and from an urban market and urban-dwelling relatives. On this service, to a remote area, it [seemed to be] the custom – before the journey could begin – for someone to stand at the front and say a Christian prayer with every passenger willingly joining in.

It was quite touching. As was the fact that, at the village where I stayed (with a local family) near that grave, everyone went to Church on a Sunday, wearing the best clothes they could, and there was a real sense (at least to me) of how their faith helped them and gave them some guidance for the better, for it was as if they, poor as they were, were in some way living, or were perhaps partly an embodiment of, the ethos expressed by the Sermon of the Mount, and although I no longer shared their Christian faith, I admired them and respected their belief and understood what that faith seemed to have given them.

Who was – who am – I to try and preach to them, to judge them and that faith? I was – I am – just one fallible human being who believes he may have some personal and fallible answers to certain questions; just one person among billions aware of his past arrogance and his suffering-causing mistakes." [1]

Is to not judge others without a personal knowing of them, to not commit fallacies such as *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*, and to allow for personal expiation, perhaps to presence the numinous in at least one small and quite individual way? Personally, I am inclined to believe it is.

Pietatis fons immense, ἐλέησον
Noxas omnes nostras pelle, ἐλέησον [2]

David Myatt
2.x.18

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[1] <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/2012/10/30/just-my-fallible-views-again/>

[2] "Immeasurable origin of piety, have mercy. Banish all our faults, have mercy." Kyrie Orbis Factor.

Although the Greek phrase Κύριε ἐλέησον is considered to be a Christian doxology, deriving from the Old Testament, it is possible that it was a common phrase in Greco-Roman culture, with origins dating back to the classical period, for it occurs in the Discourses of Epictetus - Book II, vii, 13 - in relation to a discussion about divination,

καὶ τὸν θεὸν ἐπικαλούμενοι δεόμεθα αὐτοῦ κύριε ἐλέησον

and in our invocations to the theos our bidding is: Master, have mercy.

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Part Two

Expiation And Penance

Two of the guiding practical principles of living as a Roman Catholic seem to me, on the basis of personal experience and fallible understanding, to be expiation and penance, related as they are to what was termed the Sacrament of Confession - now re-named the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation - and thence related to one of the founding principles of the Roman Catholic Church: that an ordained Priest has the religious authority [1] to give absolution for the "sins" [2] a person has committed, and the authority to specify what penance is required for expiation, but which absolution is dependant on the person making a full and truthful confession and being repentant.

Such personal confession, penance, and expiation, are evidential of how a practising Catholic interacts with the Divine and is thus personally reminded of what is spiritual, eternal, numinous, and beyond the causal everyday world. As I wrote in my essay *Numinous Expiation*,

"One of the many problems regarding both The Numinous Way and my own past which troubles me - and has troubled me for a while - is how can a person make reparation for suffering caused, inflicted, and/or dishonourable deeds done [...]"

One of the many benefits of an organized theistic religion, such as Christianity or Islam or Judaism, is that mechanisms of personal expiation exist whereby such feelings can be placed in context and expiated by appeals to the supreme deity. In Judaism, there is Teshuvah culminating in Yom Kippur, the day of expiation/reconciliation. In Catholicism, there is the sacrament of confession and penance. In Islam, there is personal dua to, and reliance on, Allah Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem, As-Salaam.

Even pagan religions and ways had mechanisms of personal expiation

for wrong deeds done, often in the form of propitiation; the offering of a sacrifice, perhaps, or compensation by the giving or the leaving of a valuable gift or votive offering at some numinous - some sacred and venerated - place or site." [3]

This personal - and via the Confessional, this priestly - connexion to the Divine, with the attendant penitence, penance, personal expiation, seems to me to have been somewhat neglected when non-Catholics, and even some Catholics criticize the Roman Catholic Church for their past response to those accused of placing their personal (often sexual) desires before compassion, empathy, and humility.

That is, such criticism is secular; based on what is temporal, causal, such as some secular law or some personal emotive reaction, with the spiritual - the eternal - dimension to mortal life unconsidered. Which spiritual dimension is for Catholics based on allowing for personal expiation by spiritual means such as confession, penitence, and penance.

This allowance for such personal expiation by such spiritual means is what, according to my fallible understanding, informed the treatment by the Catholic hierarchy of many of those accused of placing their personal desires before obedience to their God.

For judgement according to such a spiritual dimension was, rightly or wrongly, often considered more important than secular recompense and secular punishment. Understood thus, there were no - to use a vernacular term - "cover-ups", just the application of certain spiritual considerations, considerations which are the foundations of the Catholic faith based as such considerations are on the belief in the Eternal Life - in Heaven or in Hell - which awaits all mortals, one portal to such an Eternal Life in Heaven being, according to Catholic faith, the sacrament of confession.

Another aspect of this Catholic priority of the spiritual over the secular is the sanctity (the seal) of the confessional and which sanctity is adjudged to be more important than secular laws relating, for example, to disclosure of or information regarding actions deemed to be criminal.

As for my personal opinions on the matter, I have none, for who am I - with my decades of hubris, my knowledge of my plenitude of mistakes - to judge others, to judge anyone? I have tried to rationally understand both the secular and the spiritual dimensions involved, having personal experience of both, and as so often these days remain somewhat perplexed by our human nature and by the need so many humans, myself included, still have for a belief in a spiritual dimension whereby we can connect ourselves to the numinous, to the Divine - however the Divine is presented to and in us - enabling us to perhaps find some peace, some happiness, some solace, some answers, among the turmoil, the suffering, the changement, of the secular world.

My portal to the spiritual remains 'the way of pathei-mathos', the way of striving to cultivate, striving to live by, the virtues of humility, empathy, compassion, honour, non-interference, and self-restraint. A very individual way devoid of mythoi and anthropomorphic deities.

Perhaps it would be easier to believe in God, to accept again the Catholic expiation of the sacraments of Confession and the Mass. It would perhaps be even easier to accept some tangible votive wordless means in the form of offering some paganus propitiation, some libation, some talismata left, at some numinous paganus site.

But as Aeschylus so well-expressed it,

ἔστι δ' ὄπη νῦν
ἔστι: τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον:
οὔθ' ὑποκαίων οὔθ' ὑπολείβων
οὔτε δακρύων ἀπύρων ἱερῶν
ὄργας ἀτενεῖς παραθέλξει [4]

What is now, came to be
As it came to be. And its ending has been ordained.
No concealed laments, no concealed libations,
No unburnt offering
Can charm away that firm resolve.

Which type of sentiment I feel philosophers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius also sought to express.

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4.x.18

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[1] Qv. John 20:22-23,

λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἃν τινων ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφέωνται αὐτοῖς
ἃν τινων κρατῆτε κεκράτηνται

Receive Halig Spiritus: if you release anyone from their errors, they are released; if you hold onto them, they are held onto.

In regard to the term Spiritus, in my commentary on John 1:31 I wrote:

τὸ πνεῦμα. Almost without exception, since Wycliffe's Bible the Greek here has been translated as "the spirit", although the ASV [the Anglo-Saxon Version] has gast (gast of heofenum), whence the later English word 'ghost'. However, given what the terms 'spirit' and 'ghost' - both in common usage, and as a result of over a thousand

years of Christian exegesis - now impute, it is apposite to offer an alternative and one which is germane to the milieu of the Gospels or which at least suggests something of the numinosity presented, in this instance, via the Gospel of John. Given that the transliteration *pneuma* - with its modern association with terms such as *pneumatic* - does not unequivocally suggest the numinous, I have chosen *spiritus*, as referenced in respect of *gast* in Wright's *Anglo-Saxon And Old English Vocabularies*.

In regard to the translation *Halig Spiritus*, in my commentary on John 5:33 I wrote:

I have here used the Old English word *Halig* - as for example found in the version of John 17.11 in the Lindisfarne Gospel, 'Du halig fæder' - to translate ἅγιος rather than the later word 'holy' derived as that is from *halig* and used as it was by Wycliffe in his 1389 translation of this phrase, "in the Hooley Gost", which itself echoes the ASV, "on Halgum Gaste."

The unique phrase *in Halig Spiritus* - in place of the conventional 'with the Holy Spirit' - may thus express something of the numinosity, and the newness, of the original Gospel, especially as the word 'holy' has been much overused, imputes particular meanings from over a thousand years of exegesis, and, latterly in common parlance, has become somewhat trivialized.

[2] As I have noted in several essays, and in my translation of the Gospel of John, I prefer to translate the Greek term ἁμαρτία not by the conventional 'sin' but rather by 'error' or 'mistake'. As I wrote in the essay *Exegesis and Translation*,

One of the prevalent English words used in translations of the New Testament, and one of the words now commonly associated with revealed religions such as Christianity and Islam, is *sin*. A word which now imputes and for centuries has imputed a particular and at times somewhat strident if not harsh moral attitude, with sinners starkly contrasted with the righteous, the saved, and with *sin*, what is evil, what is perverse, to be shunned and shudderingly avoided.

One of the oldest usages of the word *sin* - so far discovered - is in the c. 880 CE translation of the c. 525 CE text *Consolatio Philosophiae*, a translation attributed to King Ælfred. Here, the Old English spelling of *syn* is used:

Ʒæt is swiðe dyslic & swiðe micel syn Ʒæt mon Ʒæs wenan
scyle be Gode

The context of the original Latin of Boethius is *cogitare*, in relation to

a dialogue about goodness and God, so that the sense of the Latin is that it is incorrect – an error, wrong – to postulate/claim/believe certain things about God. There is thus here, in Boethius, as in early English texts such as Beowulf, the sense of doing what was wrong, of committing an error, of making a mistake, of being at fault; at most of overstepping the bounds, of transgressing limits imposed by others, and thus being 'guilty' of such an infraction, a sense which the suggested etymology of the word syn implies: from the Latin sons, sontis.

Thus, this early usage of the English word syn seems to impart a sense somewhat different from what we now associate with the word sin, which is why in my translation of John, 8.7 I eschewed that much overused and pejorative word in order to try and convey something of the numinous original:

So, as they continued to ask [for an answer] he straightened himself, saying to them: "Let he who has never made a mistake [Αναμαρτητος] throw the first stone at her."

ὥς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες αὐτόν, ἀνέκυψεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν πρῶτος ἐπ' αὐτὴν βαλέτω λίθον.

Jesus here is not, in my view, sermonizing about sin, as a puritan preacher might, and as if he is morally superior to and has judged the sinners. Instead, he is rather gently and as a human pointing out an obvious truth about our human nature; explaining, in v.11, that he has not judged her conduct:

ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· οὐδεὶς, κύριε. εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐδὲ ἐγὼ σε κατακρίνω· πορεύου, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε

[And] she answered, No one, my Lord. Whereupon Jesus replied "Neither do I judge [κατακρίνω] you, therefore go, and avoid errors such as those."

The essay is available at <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/2013/04/26/exegesis-and-translation/> and was included as an Appendix to my *Mercvrii Trismegisti Pymander* (ISBN 978-1495470684)

[3] The essay is available at <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/numinous-expiation/>

[4] Agamemnon, 67-71
