

## Secularisation: a Catholic Response

### *Introduction*

In a recent article in the new journal of cultural affairs *Standpoint* I argued that while secularization is far more of a challenge to Christianity in England than is Islam, nonetheless by seemingly strengthening the case for secularism the issue of Islam has moved centre-stage.<sup>1</sup> In this lecture, as to some degree in that article, I want to add further, along the lines of the case presented in the opening chapters of a small book, *The Realm* (also from this year), that secularization presents an equally massive, and potentially even more disastrous, challenge to England - the cultural-political identity of that ancient nation which constitutes the southern half of the island of Britain, and which (I take it) for most of us present this evening counts as 'home'.<sup>2</sup> And finally, I want to pinpoint the crucial (as it seems to me) role of Catholicism in the construction of the historic English identity, and to make an appeal for the reinvigoration of the Catholic body which itself has suffered serious decline in the last decades.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Nichols, O. P., 'Christianity, Secularisation and Islam', *Standpoint* 2 (2008), pp. 44-47. I thank the editor, Daniel Johnson, for permission to re-use some material from this article.

<sup>2</sup> Idem., *The Realm. An Unfashionable Essay on the Conversion of England* (Oxford 2008).

*A cul-de-sac: communitarianism*

But before broaching the issue of secularization for its own sake, I wish to examine first, if briefly, what I regard as a cul-de-sac of criticism, namely, that response to the rise of the Islamic community in both numbers and confidence which applies to this issue the principles of the kind of social thought known as 'communitarianism'. The defining mark of communitarianism is its ascription to each faith community (or non-faith community for that matter) of that community's own version of public space. Communitarianism, it may be said, is the Ottoman Empire on a good day. It is the social-philosophical equivalent of the politics of 'multi-culturalism'. But the price to be paid for communitarianism, as for its favoured child, multi-culturalism, is - so the word 'multi-cultural' already indicates - the dis-integration of the cultural system of the nation as a whole.

As a supporter of 'birthright politics', also known as 'historical politics', I take the view that, in civil discourse, the phrase 'the community' should signify first and foremost the national community, which is the form humanity has taken historically under Providence on this particular piece of earth.

Whether by birth or adoption, I have a *patria*, a native place. If I am indigenous, it is the place of my ancestors. If I am exogenous, then, like Ruth the Moabitess addressing Naomi, I say to those who are indigenous, 'where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people... where you die I will die, and there will I be buried'.<sup>3</sup> So whether I am the one or the other, it is my hearth and home. Now the United Kingdom is itself a composite multi-national State, so the national community with which I am dealing is England. The proper response to communitarians should run: other communities within the greater whole that is England need to 'own' the overall public space of this national community, while simultaneously making their distinctive contribution.

So far as Islam is concerned, for an immigrant population with a peculiar (in the non-pejorative sense) religious and ethical system, that will take considerable energies of adaptation. While it is unwise to deflect its members from that primary task, a distinctive contribution by Muslims will mean the maintenance of whatever in their own customs and practices is noble and of good report, as others are able to acknowledge it with them.

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth 1: 16, 17.

One important criterion of those qualities - nobility, good report - has been hitherto congruence with the common law, whose name means: what is accepted in the king's (queen's) courts as legal norms all other juridical instances must respect. But the 1996 Arbitration Act renders binding the decision of an arbitration tribunal, however mounted, if both parties have agreed so to submit their dispute. *De facto* this has allowed, it now appears, the incorporation into the civil justice system of the sharia law. In terms of submission to sharia courts and acceptance of their decisions there seems reason to doubt - as with his intimate knowledge of the background Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali of Rochester has underlined - whether women (especially) are in all such cases genuinely free, fully in possession of English liberties.

I think it not impossible that some twentieth century developments have aroused in even moderate Muslims a distaste for English law in its changing ethical index which has fuelled this desire for recourse to sharia, a desire entirely predictable among the more militant. In recent times, the effect of Parliamentary statute (and European legislation) has been to elide certain norms that were based on the good custom and proper tradition of a

Christian society. The constitution of the family by the heterosexual, monogamous household, and the invulnerability of innocent human life from before birth until natural death are no longer secure at law. These are both points on which, at least in significant part, traditional Islam and Christianity concur.

### *Secular liberalism and its drawbacks*

Legal developments incongruous with the Christian ethos would have been unthinkable in the United Kingdom without the aggressive incursion of secular liberalism. Such liberalism can only base rights discourse on the parity of each and all as they choose the way of life they prefer to follow, whether their preferences be well-founded in the objective moral order or not. We have moved into what the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has described as a period of romantic expressiveness on a mass scale, where the existentialism of a few influential figures in earlier twentieth century European thought has now become, in a demotic version of itself, the maxim of so many men and women

in the street. Allow me to do my own thing: meaning, to choose my own values.<sup>4</sup>

It is not pleasant to attack values, but sometimes it has to be done.

Once we get the idea that there is a plurality of values and that we choose which ones will have a claim on us, we are ripe for the modern idea, first found in the works of Nietzsche, ... that we *posit* our values – that is, that valuing is something we do and value is the result of doing it. But once we see that we posit values, we also see that we can equally ‘unposit’ them. They thus lose all authority for us. So, far from giving meaning to our lives, thinking of what is important to us in terms of values shows that our lives have no intrinsic meaning. As long as we think in terms of value positing rather than being gripped by shared concerns, we will not find anything that

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<sup>4</sup> C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard, MA, and London 2007), p. 300.

elicits our commitment... 'No one dies for mere values'.<sup>5</sup>

Connected herewith, surely, is the difficulty many people in our society have in finding strong reasons for living - and connected in turn with *that* is the too easy descent of our young into the miasma of drink and drugs. 'Strong reasons' for living, however, even or especially when they are appropriated with our mother's milk, or through breathing the social air around us, customarily take what may compendiously if somewhat barbarously be termed a 'culturo-politico-metaphysico-religious' form: the form of a comprehensively persuasive way of life. It is this form which is undergoing corrosion today.

The manner in which secularization is occurring in modern England - and the superbly competent Christian Institute at Wilberforce House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, monitors the public aspect of this process on an almost weekly basis - is not, evidently, the coercive one of, for instance, the League of Militant Atheists in the Russia of the 1920s. Rather, we are dealing with a soft secularization which seeks to privatize religious aspiration, so that

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<sup>5</sup> H. L. Dreyfus, 'Nihilism, Art, Technology and Politics', in C. B. Guignon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge 2006, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 349.

the public square can be cleared of all religious claims from whatever quarter. As with communitarianism, this too comes with a hefty price-tag attached.

Secular liberalism decreases the moral capital of the culture, which derives, or so I would argue, from its historic (Judaeo-Christian) patrimony which itself incorporated what was best from the ancient world. It entails the shrinking in public life of the metaphysical imagination, which becomes ever more unable to advert to the spiritual dimension of human existence. Indeed, the legal establishment of secularism – even if introduced in the name of communitarianism rather than liberalism – would amount to a declaration that agnosticism is now the religion, or anti-religion, of the State.

The human poverty of secular liberalism can already be inferred from the results of contemporary secularization. In modern England moral discourse is in danger of becoming a parody of infantile egoism. The moral life becomes a matter of wishes, preferences, needs and desires. It is true that the moral life begins with desire. But such desire, as Plato argued and the English historian of ancient philosophy John Rist has emphasized



in his study *Real Ethics*,<sup>6</sup> is not the desire which leads us to pursue 'enlightened' self-interest, in the form of the hedonistic calculus which asks how I can maximize pleasure. The desire which impels the moral life is, rather, desire for the good because it is beautiful. To dignify with the term 'ethical' the expression of preference by reference to wants contravenes this principle. In terms of moral aesthetics it is ugly. That can be seen in the way typically secular liberal ethicists find it difficult to avoid the justification of moral pathologies: for example, the choices of those who freely contract to inflict physical pain on each other for the purposes of sadistic satisfaction. Outside the purview of abnormal emotionality, the combination of secularism with utilitarianism is capable of producing equally repellent effects, as when last month Baroness Warnock proposed that elderly people in mental decline are wasting other people's lives and should be encouraged to consider it their duty to opt for euthanasia. The awareness that the good is truly beautiful such that it is fine to serve it, regardless of inconvenience - what the Hellenes termed *kalokagathia* - sits as uncomfortably with Lady Warnock's asseverations as, by contrast,

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<sup>6</sup> J. Rist, *Real Ethics. Reconsidering the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge 2002).

it fits like a glove the moral beauty of the Church's saints, in whose lives the voices of creation in pagan antiquity entered into concert, so to say, with the biblical revelation. Pope Benedict XVI has called the saints the demonstration of Christian claims in an empirical age since between them the saints span all the main sectors of human living, from public service through education and health care to the arts and domesticity, and in those realms give evidence of a great range of virtues.

The exemplars we have in this island from the Christian past and present – and those who today, without personal faith, show in decency of life the *effects* of the Christian faith in an inherited ethos – constitute a spiritual commonwealth that is our most precious form of national wealth. In terms of real function that commonwealth is the most important part of the body politic since it shows us the *telos* or goal at which life lived in the light of a common good aims. Nothing can compare in culture-creating power with the example of people who embody the highest goods in their due order of significance. Doubtless you will all have your heroes. Mine, so it occurs to me, close as we are in this room to Westminster Hall, is Thomas More.

Some people will commend a secular State simply as a pragmatic response to cultural diversity, albeit an important piece of pragmatism since it holds out the hope of social peace. They fail to see how every such response carries its own ideological load which may include substantial negatives. Considered as a State ideology, secular liberalism, paradoxically enough, has one attribute in common with the Islamist militancy that is propelling it towards power and prospective hegemony. It will not address questions of the common good in a way that can build up a firm texture for the social fabric. While Islamist terrorism seeks the outright dissolution of that texture, such liberalism merely allows it to unravel, but the result may be much the same: an atomism that destroys effective solidarity.

Atomism can be a word for separating individuals who are contemporary with one another in space. But in this social application it can also denote the dissolution of inter-human bonds across time. Secular liberalism cannot help looking for a *politics without memory*, which is why it allies so readily with mass-media pundits bound to the instant contemporaneity captured in the sound-bite. It is a modernism insouciant of the past. But, as with

the *homo sovieticus* of the Bolshevik experience, its attempt to sever the past from the future produces an attitude to human living which devalues the real present, depriving it of richness of reference. The theorists of secular liberalism have their own (contractarian) 'tradition' – the late American political philosopher John Rawls is the final outworking of this, yet their tradition is not one of life, but of thought-experiments by ratiocination. It is a 'tradition' defined by enquiry into what any rational agent would do to acquire minimum security. Such theory is always inclined to deny history and particularity, including those of a religion. This does not sit well with our culture which, as the Labour Member of Parliament Denis McShane has written, 'from Shakespeare to Pope to Brontë to Orwell has been about a deeply felt sense of language and history'.<sup>7</sup>

More profoundly still, philosophical liberals rarely understand the foundational character of metaphysical and religious belief and thought, which turn on how human beings are made with a deep inclination to seek and worship almighty God. Philosophical liberalism marries readily with secularism.

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<sup>7</sup> D. McShane, 'For Labour, the Scottish Years are Over', *Daily Telegraph*, 27. 7. 2008.

Secularism wants to suppress the public relevance of the human orientation to transcendence, while philosophical liberalism has already lost the sense of it. By 'transcendence' here is meant a goal lying beyond humanism. Unfortunately, there is more than one way to transcend humanism. The divine way of salvation in the triune God - such is the message of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures - goes beyond humanism by gathering in all authentic human good beyond the deaths of persons, cultures, and even the cosmos itself. This is not a counter-humanism so much as an eschatological humanism that licenses sacrifice and renunciation now. Many twenty-first century secular liberals, still fighting High Victorian battles, do not sufficiently appreciate that the real enemies of humanism are situated a million intellectual miles from the Church, on the far boundaries of scientific technology and naturalistic ethics.

Thus, for example, scientists intrigued by 'transhumanism' are investigating, at any rate theoretically, the possibility that nano-technology and atomic re-arrangement may permit the spring-boarding of the development of a post-human species. For other transhumanists, since the world's only underlying feature is

information - which itself is fluid, reconfigurable in indefinitely many ways - it should be possible to 'upload' the brain patterns of individuals, transferring them to computers, whether with prosthetic bodies attached to replace our out-of-date hardware, or simply for the purposes of continued existence in cyberspace. Meanwhile, the more radical deep ecologists castigate the human race as a vermin species afflicting Gaia, and yearn for a global pandemic as a cure, while the bioethics movement grows increasingly utilitarian, denying human beings intrinsic worth in order to justify not only abortion but eugenic infanticide.

Where, we may ask, is the dignity of the *humanum* here? Without a theological basis in the doctrine of the imagehood of God in man, such dignity is insecurely placed. It is not surprising that rational humanists have been hard put to find a stable philosophical foundation for human rights claims. Yet they need to meet the objections to the well-foundedness of those claims, objections summed up in Jeremy Bentham's dismissive description: 'nonsense on stilts'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> N. Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ, 2007).

If rational humanists struggling to defend human dignity while denying man's creation in the divine image may be said to mistake the foundations of anthropology, secularists, through using the legislature to press human rights claims in new directions, may be said to misunderstand the nature of the State. Where its higher functions are concerned, over and above the defence of the national territory and the preservation of fundamental order (including, as we have seen recently, economic order), it is not the task of the State to invent new moralities, but to *guard the spiritual civilization of its own society*. For the legislature and judiciary that means being guided in the formulation and interpretation of laws by the moral ethos which forms a given society's spiritual patrimony. For the executive it means self-restraint, since the urge to intervene at as many points as possible in civil society, whether administratively or by proposing new laws, undermines the will of citizens to collaborate with each other in community-building projects at all levels of life. Where charities and other voluntary associations are so managed by State action that they become little more than expressions of a

government project, the result will eventually be for civil society to wither away.

Recent legislation obliging Catholic adoption agencies to place children with civilly partnered foster-parents of the same sex offended on both counts – respect for the historic moral ethos and the need to leave civil society its proper space. On this issue Catholic spokesmen were accused of seeking to gain for the Church a special exemption – which could all too easily be compared with the wish of some Muslims for the full recognition of sharia law. In a sense the critics were – after a Pickwickian fashion – right. Catholics were concerned for consistency of religious practice in their own Communion, as no doubt zealous Muslims are for the coherence of the *umma*. But because the reaction of the Church was to a signal transgression of a prime principle of a spiritual civilization formed by the historic Christianity of the English people, the Church was also protesting in the name of the historic moral ethos of this nation, which politicians should respect, if not indeed serve. In another sense the critics were altogether wrong, since in a complementary perspective the Church's opposition was entirely without self-



regard. Catholics objected to the inflation of State power vis-à-vis civil society, with its attendant threat to other groups – and, for that matter, individuals – seeking to pursue charitable ends which could only benefit the social whole. As Benedict XVI remarked in his first encyclical *Deus caritas est*

We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need.<sup>9</sup>

As English Christians we also want to live in a public order that will make it easy, not difficult, to transmit what I have called the culturo-politico-metaphysico-religious form of the good life to our children and grandchildren.

I have been describing some of the drawbacks to a secularizing State which, in one perspective, is chiefly a device to ease life for the non-religious. That reminds us how

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 28.

secularization, though it may in part be unintended, arrived at serendipitously - as suggested by analysts as different as Taylor, already mentioned, and John Milbank of the University of Nottingham - is not an inevitable process. As fully achieved in societies where religion has been successfully marginalised, secularization is the work of elites who want to free themselves and the world they inhabit from any appeal to an authority that invokes transcendence.<sup>10</sup> The so-called 'Whig Grand Narrative', for which the progressive emancipation of mankind, prepared by Renaissance and Reformation, comes about through the birth of modern science and the emergence of the secular State, is far from incontestable, even if we balk at the American historian who has called it 'not much more than paid political advertisements for English liberalism'.<sup>11</sup> That remark, by raising the question of the distinctive character of the English tradition, has at least the advantage of enabling me to pass more or less smoothly to the next stage of my exposition, which I entitle:

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<sup>10</sup> The theme of C. Smith, 'Introduction', in idem. (ed.), *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), pp. 1-96.

<sup>11</sup> G. Olsen, 'The Role of Religion in the Twenty-First Century: A Prolegomenon and Overview', *Communio* 31 (2004), p. 319.

*A privileged moment: the debate over English identity*

The debate over English identity, itself spurred by a combination of elements - internal devolution in the United Kingdom, reflection on the wider implications of membership of the European Union, the scale of recent immigration, and the breakdown of corporate memory facilitated by a range of factors, from media absorption in the contemporary to the deficiencies of history teaching in schools, constitutes, I believe, a privileged moment for English Christianity. It provides a forum in which one can put forward the case that the Judaeo-Christian tradition furnishes what is most foundationally form-giving in English society and culture, while simultaneously allowing that, on grounds of conscience, there are individuals and groups who cannot make that tradition fully their own. As always, freedom of conscience can and should be balanced against the interests of a particular historic society as a whole.

A nation, like a civilization, needs a shared vision of reality, at any rate in fair degree. It is unclear that a great civilization can be formed except on the ground of metaphysical or religious principle. The historian Christopher Dawson predicted in the

closing years of the Second World War the eventual death of any civilization that loses hold on its own religious basis.<sup>12</sup> There is no other obvious way in which to secure the foundations of ethics, or to inspire a high artistic culture, or to animate institutions which will be seedbeds of the virtues. In the case of England, whose emergence as a nation coincides with its conversion, this can only be Christianity, with its Judaic background, and more especially the 'New Israel' of the Catholic Church.

Every people needs a narrative. The ethicist Alisdair MacIntyre has registered his anxiety that, in a liberal society of ahistorical outlook, the individual will prove unable to form a firm identity, as member of some shared story, or to acquire clear criteria for the definition of a shared good.<sup>13</sup> In a national community, not to be able to situate oneself as a bearer of a shared narrative is bad for mental and moral health. Such a community should help me to answer the question, 'Who am I?' even if my eventual answer entails some criticism of that story and even a degree of detachment from it. Along with the formation of

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<sup>12</sup> C. Dawson, 'Religion and Mass Civilisation - the Problem of the Future', *Dublin Review* 213. 428 (1944), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN, 1984, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pp. 226-236.

identity goes, so MacIntyre has it, the acquiring of criteria for defining a shared good, for some range of non-arbitrary values I can cherish. We can commend Catholic Christianity to our fellow-countrymen not least on this basis.

The thousand years of Catholic Christianity which preceded the Reformation settlement are responsible for the origins of the English literary imagination, for the principles of the common law, for the concept of a covenanted people under God which permeates the induction of the sovereign, and for the range of virtues which have been commended, and sometimes practiced, in English society and culture. In the context of a more-than-national Church this entailed a measured trans-nationalism. When the mediaeval idea of Christendom weakened, the early modern nation-state tried more vigorously to instrumentalise the Church, politicising the divine rather than – by exposure to a transcendent Good – divinising the *polis*.<sup>14</sup> This was the Machiavellianism of the Cecils and the first Elizabeth, which has taken in so many English patriots of the *Westward Ho* school of thinking.

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<sup>14</sup> G. Olsen, 'The Role of Religion in the Twenty-First Century: A Prolegomenon and Overview', *op. cit.*, pp. 320-321.

Recent historiography, however, has pushed back the origins of English identity and State formation well behind the Reformation, with which Victorian apologists for Protestantism were too ready to identify them, and for that matter behind the Norman Conquest too. Englishness is a very ancient thing.<sup>15</sup> Such historians of the Anglo-Saxon period as James Campbell and the late Patrick Wormald have spoken of the ‘wide extent of “emotional and ideological commitment”’ to the later Anglo-Saxon State which achieved by dynastic means a political union for all England in 927. Within this dynastic context, the two most crucial factors in play were law and religion. For Wormald, there was already by that date ‘a remarkably precocious sense of common “Englishness”’ defined, for the literate by Bede.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the Reformation, especially but not exclusively in its Calvinist dimension, can be seen as an attempt to internationalise England in a cosmopolis of the Reformed – over against the doctrinal consciousness rendered native by hundreds of years of mental

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Englishness, though continually involving, was very ancient’: J. C. D. Clark, ‘Protestantism, Nationalism and National Identity, 1660-1832’, *The Historical Journal* 43. 1 (2000), p. 262. I am grateful to Professor Clark for the gift of this article, along with that cited in n. 17 below.

<sup>16</sup> P. Wormald, ‘Bede, the *Bretwaldas*, and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*’, in idem., D. Bulloch, and R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford 1983), pp. 99-129.

accustoming which found expression in traditional liturgies, devotions of varied lineage and date, iconography (including the new printed images), and a host of customs and practices too many to enumerate though wonderfully evoked in studies by Eamon Duffy. Writing of recent historians of the Tudor age, Jonathan Clark, probably the premier living historian of the transition between early modern and modern England, reports that

the few Anglicans who are historically aware now often depict the Church of England as essentially a radical Protestant denomination with a revolutionary foundation in the early sixteenth century...<sup>17</sup>

such that, in the absence of some more coherent narrative of the *longue durée* that might confer a greater moral authority, the Anglican Church has no real option at the present time other than to follow the direction of a free-floating public opinion, for example in the matter of feminism and the gay issue. Even though the memory of the pre-Reformation past sparks Catholicising

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<sup>17</sup> J. C. D. Clark, 'Telling a Story', *Church Times*, forthcoming.

movements in Anglicanism every half century or so, this judgment, itself offered by a practicing member of the Church of England, ought to be taken with full seriousness. It is at any rate a clear response to the questions about Anglican identity put so sharply by Cardinal Walter Kasper at this year's Lambeth Conference.

### *The role of English Catholicism*

In historical perspective the establishment of the Church of England at law is far from rendering superfluous, then, the public role of the English Catholic Church. But any plausible occupancy of that role has as its precondition the future institutional flourishing of the English Catholic Church. Yet this is not a future which from every angle looks too rosy at present.

Here the strategy I advocate is one which might be called 'in depth re-confessionalisation'. In this slogan, the adverbial phrase - 'in depth' - and the noun - 're-confessionalisation' - should be given equal weight. 'Re-confessionalisation' speaks of the renaissance of a kind of Catholicism that would be more secure in its own identity, both doctrinal and cultural, than has been the



case in recent decades, where milk has been spilt in the name of ecumenical adjustment and accommodation to the social life-ways of others. That more secure identity is needed, not least, in order the better to counter the force of secularism. With too dilute an ecclesial glue, hearts, minds, sensibilities do not bond.

By contrast, the adverbial phrase 'in depth' indicates that re-confessionalisation does not mean a sectarian Catholic tribalism which in any case would be incapable of taking responsibility for England's soul, nor does it involve an attempt to recreate the Church of the 1950s, which, though its unity and confidence were exemplary, showed its Achilles' heel by the manner in which its adherents subsequently fell away. A deep Catholicism, as portrayed in the book of that name by the French theologian Henri de Lubac, is not simply sure of its dogmatic basis and at home in its corporate memory, though these are essential. It is also profoundly rooted in the Scriptures, the Fathers, the great doctors and spiritual teachers, and receptive to whatever is lovely in the human world of any and every time and place, which the Word draws to himself by assuming human nature into union with his own divine person.

When I think of the internal renewal of the Catholic Church in England the kind of things that come to mind are the rediscovery of Catholic Christianity as an adventure in ideas through the claims of Christian philosophy and the diffusion of a rich dogmatic vision through much-improved catechesis; a re-enchanting of the Liturgy which is our primary induction into the nature of prayer and so the mystical; a re-focussing of Catholic institutions, from family, through school, to health-care agencies, on an approach to life that is informed by the intellectual and mystical facets of revelation, so that people are gripped, and discover what I earlier called not simply values but 'strong reasons for living' through their participation in these shared concerns.

The witness of the Church to the human good, over against the more crabbed and confined, or fragile and evanescent, version of that good found in secularism (and in this lecture I have mainly been concerned to point up that contrast), needs to be accompanied by her popular revival as a public force. The late Maurice Cowling, in the foreword to the third and last volume of his *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, asked whether, after the 'doubt and turmoil of the 60s and 70s', the Catholic

priesthood in England, any more than its Anglican or Nonconformist counterparts, has what he termed the 'requisite normality, serenity and self-confidence to address the Christianity which is latent in English life'.<sup>18</sup> That, I suppose, ladies and gentlemen, is my question too.

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<sup>18</sup> M. Cowling, *Religion and Modern Doctrine in England. III. Accommodations* (Cambridge 2001), p. xi.