

body it is people like Buffon and Lamarck, people in his field. Jesus was in a field all His own, *sui generis* as a scientific taxonomy might put it. But the meaning of the Darwin-fish is clear. On that vast mobile bulletin board composed of the rear ends of America's cars, a message has been posted: Darwin can replace Jesus. This is not just irreligion. This is a competing religion, called scientism.

If scientism continues to spread, and if its publicists remain as uninventive as the Darwin-fish shows them to be, will we see more co-opting of venerable Christian symbols and practices? Will the scientific faithful put on their dashboards little

plastic statues of Richard Dawkins? Will believers in materialism hang from their rear-view mirrors a medal of Stephen Jay Gould? Will they finger the beads on a plastic strand of DNA and murmur: Hail Francis Crick, full of doubt, the truth is with thee...?

If the pond of Darwinian inventiveness is all fished out, that's a shame. But the Darwinists would be well advised to leave the *ichthus* alone: It may look as harmless as a minnow, but it represents Someone of unimaginable power. As God warned when describing the great fish Leviathan: "Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears? Lay hands on him; think of the battle; you will not do it again!" ■

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**"WE USE MORE SULFURIC ACID THAN YOU"**

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**THOMAS STORCK**

## **AMERICAN CATHOLICS AS CULTURAL PROTESTANTS**

**A**rchbishop Francis George of Chicago made a startling statement during the Synod of Bishops for the Americas in November 1997. Archbishop (now Cardinal) George said that U.S. citizens "are culturally Calvinist, even those who profess the Catholic faith." American society, he continued, "is the civil counterpart of a faith based on private interpretation of Scripture and private experience of God." He contrasted this kind of society with one based on the Catholic Church's teaching of community and a vision of life greater than the individual.

Cardinal George's remarks deserve thorough consideration, and need some unpacking. We are no longer accustomed to thinking in such terms as "Catholic culture" or "Calvinist culture." There

aren't many honest-to-goodness Calvinists (or Puritans) left in America, but the Calvinism of early America went a long way toward putting an individualistic stamp on America as we know it today. In this sense we all are part of a Calvinist culture, however secularized. As for the notion of community, it has been so misused since the Second Vatican Council that the very term is now suspect in the eyes of solid Catholics. But in fact both the idea of culture and the idea of community are valuable means for understanding the ways in which society and religion interact, and thus for understanding how our faith affects, or fails to affect, our own life and the life of our society.

A society or culture tends to reflect in a larger pattern the dominant religious beliefs of its members. For example, two of the most basic articles of the Catholic faith are the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, and both involve the concept of community. The Trinity is itself a community of Persons and the doctrine of the Incarnation leads to the doctrine of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, the extension of the Incarnation. St. Paul

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describes the Church as one body made up of many interrelated members with different functions — in fact, a community of persons linked in the most intimate way possible, since we are all members of Christ Himself. From the doctrine of the Incarnation comes that wonderful union of the Divine and the human which is one of the hallmarks of Catholicism. Thus, just as the Divine Word brought the Infinite and Timeless Majesty of God into human form at a certain time and place, so Catholics are ready to incarnate their faith in objects and places, everything from blessed medals to shrines — sacred but still material — just as God the Son did not think it incompatible with His Divinity to actually experience our material condition.

It is certainly the case that some Catholics have promoted a false notion of community, as if we could have community without God or as if a community inside a church building were the primary locus of the Divine. But the best way to create a community is to look toward God. Christ formed the Church as His Mystical Body, and no amount of standing around and holding hands could ever have done so. But on the other hand, since Jesus Christ *has* constituted us as His Mystical Body, we naturally exhibit that unity in outward forms, as Catholic cultures have always done in their processions, pilgrimages, and festivals, just as these same cultures have exhibited the concreteness of the Incarnation by consecrating shrines and holy places to show that God and the life of mankind are not separate from each other.

But this is not the case with Protestant cultures. Though Protestants do not deny either the Incarnation or the concept of the Mystical Body, their theology has focused on different matters. Protestant theology emphasizes certain truths, but sometimes emphasizes them out of proportion or out of context; in other cases what it promotes is not true at all. But in any case the final product results in a different belief and thus in a different society expressing that different belief. An example of this is what Cardinal George says about the U.S. being “a civil counterpart of a faith based on private interpretation of Scripture.” Our economic system in particular encourages each of us to think only in terms of his own private good and rarely or never in terms of the common good. Similarly, our obsession with *rights*, which are usually conceived

of as being rights over against someone else, is another indication that our society is not based on Catholic principles.

If this is a fair assessment of American society, then we can ask, along with Cardinal George, whether American Catholics also hold these basically Protestant values. In 1899 Pope Leo XIII warned Catholics in the United States of the heresy of subjecting Catholicism to certain traits which were part of the spirit of American civilization. Pope Leo called this heresy nothing other than Americanism! Thus the tendency on the part of Catholics in the U.S. to accept the same cultural attitudes as their Protestant neighbors is not a new phenomenon.

Cardinal George made his remarks while considering the recent immigration of many Latin American Catholics to the U.S. He noted that it is difficult for these immigrants from Catholic cultures to adapt to living in this country. He said, for example, “The government schools, which are the U.S. equivalent of a state church, teach the children of immigrants a history of human progress from which religious influence has been expunged.”

As a child (not then a Catholic) I went to these government schools, and Cardinal George’s statement would have been accurate even back then. One of the dominant impressions public school gave me was that industrial and scientific progress is the highest (and unquestionable) good. My high-school chemistry textbook stated unforgettably that the level of civilization in a country could be measured by the amount of sulfuric acid it consumed. Sulfuric acid was very important at the time (late 1960s) in manufacturing processes, and industrialization was the mark of civilization, ergo, sulfur equaled culture. Even then I knew that religion, morality, literature, art, and music were much better indices of civilization than technology. But I suspect that many North American Catholics could read that statement about civilization and sulfuric acid without batting an eye. Such Catholics, whatever the quality of their faith, are sadly deficient in a sense of Catholic culture, for they implicitly accept a materialistic understanding of society. The Germany in which Hitler ranted certainly used more sulfuric acid than the Paris in which St. Thomas Aquinas taught or the Italy in which St. Francis

preached. Did Nazi Germany therefore have a higher level of civilization?

North Americans, including North American Catholics, are apt to consider Latin America backward, disorderly, and dirty. Without doubt, Latin America is not perfect. But I am afraid that our attitudes toward that region confirm that Cardinal George is on the mark: U.S. Catholics are Calvinist in their cultural assumptions. Yet if we care about living lives that are entirely Catholic, about showing our faith in what we do, then we ought to try to rethink things from the standpoint of the true Faith. Reading sound Catholic books is one way in which we can work against the individualistic atmosphere in which we are forced to exist. The books of the English Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc, especially *Essays of a Catholic* and *Survivals and New Arriv-*

*als* (available from TAN Books, 800-437-5876), are excellent antidotes to Calvinist thinking, as are the works of Christopher Dawson, the historian, and G.K. Chesterton, the journalist, novelist, apologist, poet, and wit.

The Archbishop of Chicago has definitely identified a weakness of Catholics in the U.S. In the midst of our battles to preserve orthodoxy in the Church, it might not seem like a very big weakness. But if we really want to preserve and hand on the Faith, then it should go without saying that we want to be Catholic in every part of our being. We want to believe as Catholics, to think as Catholics, to live as Catholics. And if Belloc were alive, he might add: "Yes, and to sing, to walk, to sail, even to drink as Catholics!" To which I would say, Amen. ■

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## **EVANGELIZE OR DOWNSIZE**

**STEVE DUNDAS**

# **Why Catholics Must Get Off Their Duffs**

**A** sidewalk preacher is bound to encounter a hostile response now and then. It comes with the territory. The shock is when the hostility comes from a fellow believer. Catholic Bishop William Houck recalls the day when he was doing street evangelism as a seminarian, and a woman accosted him to tell him how offended she was. Informing him that she was a Catholic, she exclaimed, "I don't believe it. We Catholics don't do this kind of thing! Street preaching is for Protestants."

Is she right? A Catholic priest I know seems to agree with her. He told me, "Catholics don't need

to evangelize, since we already have the truth." He meant, I take it, that people seeking truth can come to the Church; the Church need not go to them. The shocked laywoman and the complacent priest express in different ways an attitude that seems to be shared by many American Catholics. In my experience this attitude is particularly strong among liberal Catholics, for whom evangelism has no appeal because they no longer believe in absolute truth, especially the truths conveyed by the Creeds and the Magisterium. But it seems to be common, too, among the ordinary "good Catholics" in the pews of the average parish.

It's important to realize that there would be no parishes and no pews if the original followers of Jesus had shared this reluctance to evangelize. A New Testament unearthed by archaeologists containing *The Inaction of the Apostles* and *The Unsent Letters of Paul* would be but a historical curiosity. If the disciples had been loath to evangelize, they

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