

Celibacy, Cosmology and Eschatology: the Perfection of Chastity and the Easter Mutation.

Christ's resurrection is something more, something different. If we may borrow the language of evolution, it is the greatest "mutation," absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development: a leap into a completely new order which does concern us and concerns the whole of history."

Pope Benedict, Easter Vigil Homily 2006

Don't tell your conflicted gay spiritual director but there are thousands of priests who have perfected the virtue of chastity and live the fatherhood of the priesthood with joy and a great souled magnanimity. Get away from the chronic complainers who have emptied the priesthood of its natural joy in fatherhood, the miracle of the resurrection and the mission of the Gospel. Instead of going miniature with the critics, let's go cosmic with the Pope. Consider the "new mutation" and the masculine friendship that has been initiated to receive the miracle. What is this Ecclesial brotherhood that still actuates the Living presence of Christ in the present world?

Pope Benedict was polite in "borrowing" the language of evolution to describe the resurrected Christ as a new mutation. At the same time it must seem rude to a good Darwinian that the Catholic clergy is celibate. Darwin teaches that the whole point of survival and natural selection is to produce an organism that can successfully pass on his genes to the next generation.

Celibacy as a communal strategy must seem to a good Darwinian as a kind of corporate suicide pact. This strikes a good Darwinian as a spectacularly unsuccessful reproductive strategy. So the Pope borrows a term from science but then returns to religious vocabulary. He boldly declares that there is a new center of gravity in the world of mind and matter and that center is the risen Christ.

The Pope explained on Easter that Christ's "existential communion with God was concretely an existential communion with God's love and this love is the real power against death, it is stronger than death. The resurrection was like an explosion of light, an explosion of love which dissolved the hitherto indissoluble co penetration of "dying and becoming". It ushered in a new dimension of being, a new way of life in which in a transformed way, matter too was integrated and through which a new world emerges."

This is mindful of Benedict's writings in 1969 in the *Introduction to Christianity*. The so called intellectual reactionary acknowledges the significant contribution of Teilhard de Chardin in integrating cosmology and personhood. This is Cardinal Ratzinger not Chardin:

"We said before that nature and mind form one single history, which advances in such a way that mind emerges more and more clearly as the all embracing element and thus that anthropology and cosmology actually in fact coalesce. This assertion of the increasing complexification of the world through mind necessarily implies its unification around a personal center,...it points back to person, mind's only real mode of existence."

The priest who has forgone the usual bonds of family to enter into the priestly communion with Christ is a personal witness to this new reality which has become the organizing principle for all of physical matter. The priest holds in his mind the historical narrative of Christ. He holds in his hands the work of making Christ present in the Eucharist. He holds in his heart the understanding that the Jesus who he is conformed to is now sitting at the right hand of the Father and is coming again to gather in his people through his apostolic church. The priest must clear his mind of earthly things and in prayer and liturgy keep this Christic reality before the Church and the world.

Pope Benedict in his chrism Mass homily described the new relationship that the priest has with all of creation.

“...The same thing happened to each of us (priests) as happened to Peter when, walking on the water he encountered the Lord, suddenly he remembered the water did not support him and that he was about to drown. And like Peter we cried out, “Lord, Save me!” Seeing all the raging of the elements, how could we go through the rumbling and the foaming waters of the last century and millenium? But then we looked at Him...and He took us by the hand and gave us a new specific weight : the lightness that comes from faith which attracts us to the on high. “

Apparently, Pope Benedict has been avoiding the spirituality school for the whining wounded. He does not reduce Christ to an instrument which fixes the world or reforms society. He thinks Christ is the physical, moral “complexified” personal center of all nature and history. He sees the priesthood as a particular share in this Christic reality. He sees Christ’s love as the explosive center of a new reality which introduces a new way of calculating time and organizing the cosmos.

Again as Cardinal Ratzinger said forty years ago, “whoever believes is in the conversation with God which is life and which outlasts death. At this point the dialogical strand in the biblical concept of immortality, the one directly related to God and the human fellowship strand directly meet.”

Immortality comes from entering into a relationship with the new mutation Christ and the human fellowship that draws us into that communion is the Church. The first ecclesial relationship is the fellowship of Christ and the apostles. That relationship is now sacramentally manifested in bishop-priest fraternities in particular dioceses all over the world. ***Who has time to whine?*** “The individualist Jesus is a fantasy” says the pope. We are called into communion with real people in a real historical church with a cosmic Christ. Participating in that adventure could make a man want to be a priest. There is something high and wonderful and mighty about this way of understanding the priesthood, celibacy and the Church. All of these realities are tied to the resurrected Christ --the beginning of the end for Death and the Devil. The radical rejection of the biological impulse to procreate is subsumed in the relationship that promises life eternal. ***Hold the celibacy protest letters and say thank you, Jesus.***

The men who are conformed to Christ in prayer and the acceptance of the call to holy orders develop a unique capacity as a group to consider the will of the Father. As Pope Benedict puts it: “Friendship means to share in thinking and willing. We must exercise ourselves in this communion of thought with Jesus. This communion of thought is not just something intellectual, but is a sharing of sentiments and will and therefore also of action.” The will of God is no tiny thing. To properly receive it takes either one woman-Mary or a brotherhood of men stretching across time and throughout the world—the Apostolic Church. The Will of the Father is best apprehended in a communion of persons and the celibate priestly bond shapes the ecclesial *communio*. Hardly a cause for displeasure, priests revel in their happiness. For it is exactly the celibate nature of the priesthood that allows them to form a certain kind of corporate beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in spirit for they shall see God.”