

RCIA: NATURE, HISTORICITY, GRACE

Alongside nature, there is nurture, so parents not just pass life to their children but a way of life. A country, a people develops institutions which give a sort of common ground to everyone, so from Magna Carta in 1215, our House of Commons has developed as a sort of common authority for English, Welsh, Scots and Northern Irish. 1215 is also the date of the Lateran Council, which urged everyone to go to Holy Communion at least once a year, at Easter or thereabouts.

In those days, religion had a strong monastic base so it seemed for many that the real religious people were monks and nuns, and most of the laity, though they were baptised, did not see themselves as worthy to go to communion. So there was a change in religious practice which has continued so that today most people at Mass go to Holy Communion. The faith has not changed but the way of practising it has developed.

Man finds that though his nature is the same generation on generation, he develops or maybe declines through an historical process, which shapes generations just as parents shape their children through their nurture. Parents are seen as the first teachers of their children and teachers are described as "in loco parentis", "in the place of parents". In an epoch of massive public education provided by the State and by a professional educational hierarchy, we find that the principle is not too much respected by the authorities, for example with regard to sexual morality. Parental responsibility is a principle worth bearing in mind.

The historical process is to do with development but also decline. The two can go together in different areas. So our modern world seems in wonderful scientific development, or even in sporting development with the Olympics in London in 2012, but maybe there is a sort of religious decline. Perhaps Henry VIII when he dissolved the monasteries in 1537, did not realise he was destroying, as it were, the spiritual capital of the nation. Part of sanctification is the way spiritual matters capture the imagination of man. So Walsingham had been an important pilgrimage centre before the Reformation. After the Reformation, with the Council of Trent, Mary Tudor did not try to restore Walsingham. Her concerns though spiritual, were more pragmatic. The fact that the soul of man, addicted to truth, is also shaped by a psyche full of feeling was not realised, and that the psyche can be collective as well as individual.

I am a great supporter of the Second Vatican Council (1961-1965) but I think we again face the same non-realisation of man's imaginative and emotional shaping. So the Liturgy became English and the sublime became banal. Nuns and religious in great numbers left the Church. I do not know how things could have been better managed - here it is not even easy to be wise after the event - but this was an immense loss. So if we are looking for progress in the Church we must look to the importance to man of imagination and feeling.

There is critical intelligence, which has the task of freeing man from myth and magic. It is no doubt a subtle process but this process must not free man from imagination and feeling or we are faced with another dimension of decline, man with much less he cares for and loves.

History is an inevitable source of change just as growing up is a source of change. There is a saying, "Times change and we change with them". So before 1980, I never wore a seat belt in the car, but now I have to or the car bleeps me. I preferred the freedom of old, but as a matter of fact I don't have it today. Historical change though can impact on our faith and here a considerable resilience may be needed. Even bishops are not always up to the task. So in the sixteenth century it was laymen who realised that if they were to keep their close relationship to Jesus and God in the Mass they would have to risk death and build hiding holes for priests. This they did and from their courage arose our modern Catholic parishes.

History is a bloc-buster. So modern society is set to regard homosexual union as of equal status to marriage and we find the Catholic Church has had to close down its Adoption Agencies. As a result, fewer children are being adopted. A society arrived at a completely secular ideology is a new sort of problem.

On December 8th 1965, at the Second Vatican Council, the Church produced a "Declaration on Religious Liberty". So there can be religious excesses which need to be controlled by the State, such as shoe bombing down airlines. But the State as such is not equipped to judge religious matters. It is actually not equipped to judge scientific matters. It is rather ludicrous to imagine the State deciding between a corpuscular or wave theory of light. I sense we find the modern State inclined to decide which theory will prove more financially beneficial! But just as religion rightly goes its own way, so does Science and its benefits can't be predicted for there is an unknown to be discovered, such as Penicillin or DNA.

One of the fruits of the historical process even with many martyrs pain and blood is that it does not belong to the State to determine religious belief. It has to govern a people, which has one or several religious beliefs. So the State today has to deal with Anglicans, Catholics, Hindus, Moslems, Jews and so forth, or it is not dealing with its people. Here it is failing in not recognising a widespread regard for heterosexuality when it comes to adoption.

When political judgements go wrong, people suffer but they may not have the vote. Children looking for adoption have less chance. But also, when political judgements go wrong, one finds one's own judgement is forced into a corner. Is one not recognising the "Spirit of the Age"?

The Church had the title "Mater et Magister", Mother and Teacher. Some of the things she teaches, reason could never reach. So we have the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Other things she teaches are accessible by reason, such as for example, you should not steal. So when it comes to sex and marriage, if we are not taking the one night stand as the norm, we are dealing with a life-long self bestowal, which reason may glimpse and explore and be confirmed by the Church's teaching. With such a custom predominant in the community, how could the State fail to recognise it? It would be helpful therefore if the different world religions, Hindu et al, could get together and express their minds on this historical matter.

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