

3 September 2014

Archbishop Leo Cushley

Archdiocese of St. Andrews and Edinburgh

Several weeks ago members of the Edinburgh Newman Circle sent me a copy of a letter from you to Arthur Skelton, dated 11 July 2014, in which you said it was not acceptable that I should have been invited by them to talk 'on Church property' on a subject that 'called in question the traditional doctrine of Original Sin.' It was this latter phrase in the advance publicity for my talk which appears to have prompted someone *whose identity we do not know* to complain to the CDF about the talk I was invited to give. Please allow me to make a number of comments related to your letter. I do so in the spirit of dialogue which Pope Francis has actively promoted as the best way in which to resolve conflicts and disputes.

You may not agree, but in common with a good number of modern theologians, I consider the doctrine of original sin, as traditionally understood and interpreted, to be suffer from problems that trouble modern men and women. Rather than set them out in detail here, I would encourage you to read my book, *The Fall and the Ascent of Man: How Genesis Supports Darwin* (University Press of America, 2012) where my argument is fully developed. Indeed, I would gladly send you a copy of my book if you were inclined to read it. My book is my attempt to help modern men and women by developing a new interpretation of the story told in Chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis, one that achieves complete compatibility of Genesis with the theory of evolution. If you were to find any inaccuracies in my argument or any lapse of logic or intellectual rigour, I would gladly amend and retract what I have said or written. You might also like to know that my other book publication is a work on the philosophy of the great Canadian Jesuit scholar, Bernard Lonergan, and that I have read papers at a number of international Lonergan conferences in various universities, including the Gregorian University in Rome.

This brings me to my next point. I do believe that it is time that the CDF ceased reporting people to local bishops etc. on the basis of complaints from individuals *whose identity is never disclosed to those complained about* when the nature of the complaint concerns such trivial matters as the 'blurb' put out with the aim of attracting people to attend a particular talk or event. No other organisation that wished to be taken seriously would dare operate in this way. The individual who complained to the CDF about my talk most likely did not attend the talk and almost certainly had never read my book on which my talk was based. What is more, I have given talks based on my book twice to the Newman Circle in Glasgow and twice in the Diocese of Leeds, and no one has complained. Indeed, one of my talks in the Leeds Diocese was held in our local Catholic church and attended by our parish priest who was extremely supportive and expressed admiration for the scholarship manifested in my presentation. Our parish priest is a considerable scripture scholar in his own right and is and has been for many years Vicar General (Moderator) of the Diocese. In short, I am in good standing with the Church and, what is more, my wife and I are regular attenders at Church as are our two adult children who, in their turn, are bringing up their children as practising Catholics. I also run the local RCIA programme. I believe that if you were to contact our parish priest,

Mgr Kieran Heskin (01943 607690), he would speak in my defence. If this practice of the CDF's is bad enough in my case, it is even more reprehensible and, frankly, ridiculous in the case of Tina Beattie, a highly respected theologian with an international reputation. But I think that Tina Beattie is best placed to provide her own robust self-defence.

You see, your Grace, I believe that we are entering the age of the laity, as the late Cardinal Winning said back in the 1990s, and that the educated laity in particular, such as those who take the trouble to attend evening meetings at the Newman, need to deepen their faith so that they can rebut the arguments and objections put to them by many of those they meet and often work with in today's highly secular society. It is no longer good enough to recite the answers of the old Penny Catechism; today's educated lay men and women want something more. Indeed, we have raised our own two children in such a way that they are capable of defending their religious practice to the surprise of many of their peers. There must be room for 'fides quaerens intellectum', of helping today's lay men and women to achieve a deeper and more mature understanding of their faith and this was the task I believed myself to be performing in giving my talk to the Newman Edinburgh Circle. Incidentally, my talk touched on many issues other than original sin, such as (affirming) the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the differences between Christianity and Islam as well as differences between Western Christianity and the Orthodox Church. Given the enthusiasm with which it was received by the Newman audience, I am confident that if you put to them the question as to whether they found my talk confirmed them or undermined them in their faith, they would respond that it confirmed them. I found their response most encouraging.

I do not believe that the late Cardinal Tom Winning, whom I knew quite well, would ever have acted so precipitately on the mere whim or say-so of the CDF. And what is the point of Cardinal Vincent Nichols encouraging the laity to acquire a deeper understanding of their faith in order to withstand the attacks of modern secularists, as he recently did, if, when they attempt to do so, they encounter the kind of negative attitude reflected in your letter to the Edinburgh Newman? The Newman Association in our country takes its name from the great nineteenth century cardinal who was a major influence at Vatican II. And it was Newman who wrote, in his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, that the early Christian dogmas were the result of 'the collision of Catholic intellects with Catholic intellects' and who complained that the centralisation of power in his time had led to individual thinkers 'being brought into an immediate collision' with the central Church authorities, a development he clearly deplored since it stunted the intellectual exploration of the Church's teachings and dogmas. Truth cannot be presumed; it has to be discovered and argued for on the basis of the best available evidence. The members of the Newman Association are thoughtful, reflective Catholic adults who would like to be treated as such.

I wish you well, your Grace, in the exercise of your ministry in the Archdiocese of Edinburgh. You and I have a good deal in common: Blairs, Scots College and the Gregorian University in Rome as well as being born within the Motherwell Diocese. I hope and pray that you will exercise your ministry in the spirit of John Henry Newman, aware of the need for the development of doctrine whenever traditional interpretations become a stumbling block in respect of the Christian beliefs of modern men and women. In common with many well regarded theologians today, I believe that an evolutionary perspective can positively assist theological thinking. As Pope John Paul II said to the participants of a conference held in Rome in 1988 to study the relationship between evolution and religion: 'Does an evolutionary perspective bring any light to bear upon theological anthropology,

the meaning of the human person as the *imago Dei*, the problem of Christology – and even upon the development of doctrine itself?

I sincerely hope that you will find time to reply to this letter and I would be more than happy to travel to Edinburgh to speak with you, if that were convenient.

With every good wish,

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