



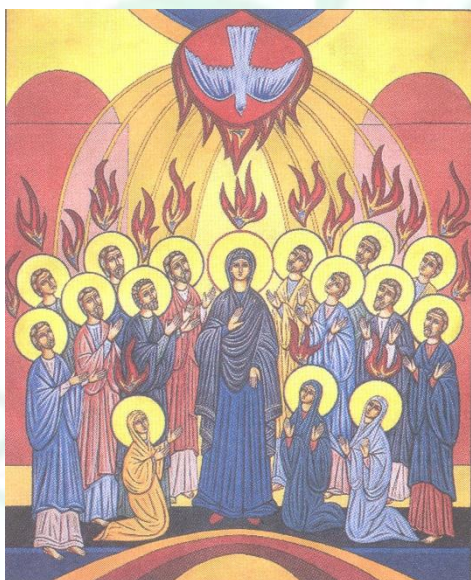
Roots & Wings

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The Periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second issue of *Roots & Wings* for 2023. This publication, sent electronically free of charge to members of the Professional Society, appears quarterly. It contains regular features as indicated in the Contents table alongside.



Members are encouraged to send material for future editions. What might you send?

- Lesson ideas or plans
- Reviews of useful materials such as books, magazines, videos or websites
- News from your school's RE Department
- Short articles of interest to religious educators
- Adverts for RE posts in your school

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REFLECTION

Our Over-Burdened Planet

(Ron Rolheiser)



Creating the human race may be the single biggest mistake that evolution made.

Douglas Abrams writes this in *The Book of Hope*, a book he co-authored with Jane Goodall. While that is a rather despairing view, in the end, this book is a

book of hope, though not without it issuing a dire warning: There are now over eight billion people on this planet and already we are using up nature's limited resources faster than nature can replace them. In less than thirty years from now, there will probably be ten billion of us and if we carry on with business as usual, that could spell the end of the earth as we know it.

What do we need to do to turn this around? Goodall and Abrams suggest four things:

First, we must alleviate poverty. When people are hungry and desperate, their thoughts are not on the big picture, namely, the long-range future and the overall good of all humans and the planet. Understandably, their thoughts will be focused on survival and there will be no hesitation in cutting down the last tree to grow food or catching that last fish still alive. Desperation and concern for the big picture generally don't go together.

Second, we must reduce the unsustainable lifestyles of the affluent. Mother earth is not a limitless resource and cannot continue indefinitely to sustain our present lifestyles. Moreover, this is

true not just for the lavish lifestyles of the rich, but for all of us in most countries. We haven't faced the fact that everything is limited and hence, we continue to buy in excess, consume in excess, use electrical energy in excess, waste food in excess, use gasoline in excess, and create garbage in excess. This cannot continue much longer. Already millions of desperate refugees on borders everywhere and dramatic shifts in climate most everywhere are telling us that we must make changes, and soon. Our planet is big, but it is finite, and it cannot sustain the limitless demands of unexamined consumption.

Third, we must eliminate corruption and economic self-interest. Without good government and honest leadership that focuses on the big picture rather than on its own self-interests, it is impossible to solve our enormous social, economic, and environmental problems. As a Barbara Kingsolver character quips in her recent novel, *Unsheltered*, the free-market has the same morality as a cancer cell. The entrepreneurial spirit that drives our economies serves us well in many ways and affords us comforts, freedoms, and opportunities that few in history have ever had. However, generally it is to the big picture what a cancer cell is to the body, a single cell growing on its own without connection to the overall health of the body. Like a cancer cell, the free-market (with some exceptions) does not take the big picture and the long-range health of the whole body into account.

Fourth, we must face up to the problems caused by an ever-growing population. For most of history, religious

and moral voices have literally commanded people to have children. *Increase and multiply*. This was a sacred duty, owed to God and the human race. However, for a large part, this was predicated on fears that the human race, like any species, was perennially in danger of becoming extinct. Indeed, there was the constant threat that his might happen. Diseases, famines, war, high infant mortality, a short life span, and disasters of all kinds constantly threatened the human species. Humans, like every species, needed to ensure that the species went on. That made sense, in every way, until this present century. Now, with the looming prospect of ten billion people on this planet, the threat of extinction arises more from our sheer number than from some external threat. The planet can only accommodate a given number of us at one time. Granted there are soul issues, moral issues, and religious issues involved with any talk of limiting human growth. Nonetheless, however complex these issues, unexamined growth must now be examined.

Abrams is wrong. *Creating the human race was not a tragic mistake that evolution made!* Creating the human person was not an accidental and undesired product of blind evolution. God is the author of the process of evolution and God doesn't make mistakes. God intended from the very beginning for us, human persons, to emerge from the process. Even more, God intended us to have a very special role in the process, namely, to be that place in the process where nature finally becomes conscious of itself and can then proactively help God shape the process towards a final peace and unity (*the Kingdom of God*) that will include all of us and the planet itself.

Humans weren't a mistake, though admittedly much of our stewarding has been because we tend to think of the world as something we can strip mine in any way that benefits us rather than as a garden, with limited resources, which we have been asked to care for with love.

San Antonio, Texas,

February 5th, 2023.

Website: www.ronrolheiser.com



REFLECTION

Digital Books wear out faster than Physical Books

(Brewster Kahle)

Ever try to read a physical book passed down in your family from 100 years ago? Probably worked well. Ever try reading an e-book you paid for 10 years ago? Probably a different experience. From the leasing business model of mega publishers to physical device evolution to format obsolescence, digital books are fragile and threatened.

For those of us tending libraries of digitized and born-digital books, we know that they need constant maintenance—reprocessing, reformatting, re-invigorating or they will not be readable or read. Fortunately this is what libraries do (if they are not sued to stop it).

Publishers try to introduce new ideas into the public sphere. Libraries acquire these and keep them alive for generations to come.

And, to serve users with print disabilities, we have to keep up with the ever-improving tools they use.

Mega-publishers are saying electronic books do not wear out, but this is not true at all. The Internet Archive processes and reprocesses the books it has digitized as new optical character recognition technologies come around, as new text understanding technologies open new analysis, as formats change from djvu to daisy to epub1 to epub2 to epub3 to pdf-a and on and on. This takes thousands of computer-months and programmer-years to do this work. This is what libraries have signed up for—our long-term custodial roles.

Also, the digital media they reside on changes, too—from Digital Linear Tape to PATA hard drives to SATA hard drives to SSDs. If we do not actively tend our digital books they become unreadable very quickly.

Then there is cataloguing and metadata. If we do not keep up with the ever-changing expectations of digital learners, then our books will not be found. This is ongoing and expensive.

Our paper books have lasted hundreds of years on our shelves and are still readable. Without active maintenance, we will be lucky if our digital books last a decade.

Also, how we use books and periodicals, in the decades after they are published, change from how they were originally intended. We are seeing researchers use books and periodicals in machine learning investigations to find trends that were never easy in a one-by-one world, or in the silos of the publisher databases. Preparing these books for this type of analysis is time consuming and now threatened by publisher's lawsuits.

If we want future access to our digital heritage we need to make some structural changes: changes to institution and publisher behaviours as well as supportive funding, laws, and enforcement.

The first step is to recognize preservation and access to our digital heritage is a big job and one worth doing. Then, find ways that institutions— educational, government, non-profit, and philanthropic— could make preservation a part of our daily responsibility.

Long live books.

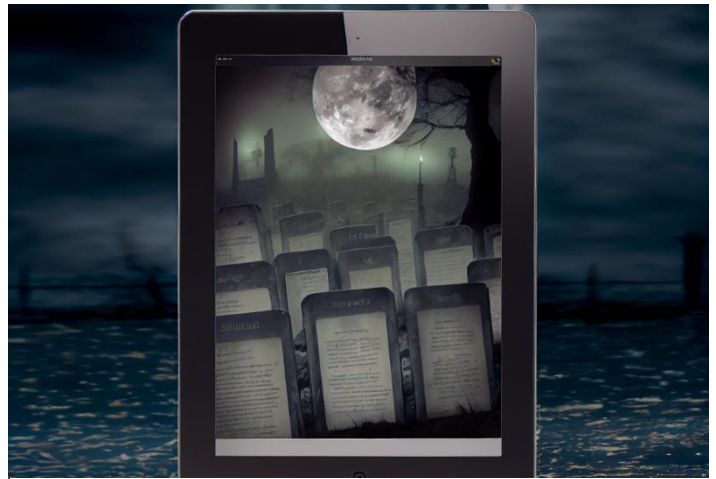


Illustration: midjourney AI generated

[Digital Books wear out faster than Physical Books - Internet Archive Blogs](#)



TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CPTD) ¹

The infantilization of our young people in religious ed and catechesis?

(Sean Hall)

Times past

Controversy over catechetical and religious education programs has raged for as long as I can remember. Having been born in the mid-1950s my primary years of schooling were dominated by learning the "Penny Catechism".

Each day after registration we would spend some time learning answers to questions put in the catechism, with the aim of repeating the answer, parrot-fashion, the following day... and whenever the headteacher or the religious inspector might darken the doors of the classroom. An added feature came on a Monday morning when the first thing we did was to fill in our own Mass Register.

The Mass Register recorded whether or not we had attended Mass the day before, along with boxes to be ticked if we had been to the "Children's Mass" at 9:15, received Holy Communion, been to Confession, and had attended "Sunday School and Benediction" in the afternoon.

Given that I came from a family that was 'addicted' to going to church, my score was almost always perfect, whereas any child whose parents rarely attended church had great blank spaces in their register.

The "Mass Register" died out in the early 1960s, thank God, and gradually newer forms of religious education began to appear. These were often held in great suspicion, especially by parish priests and other senior clergy.

Times present

Recently I came across an interesting comment in *The Spirit of Catholicism* (Bloomsbury, London, 2021), a book by the Dominican theologian Vivian Boland.

In a chapter dedicated to learning about faith matters he writes the following:

In a recent analysis of the collapse of Irish Catholicism, one of the reasons given for that collapse is the infantilizing textbooks through which the generation that is now adult were taught the faith when they were children. Children themselves do not want to be infantilized, never mind adults.

Perhaps some catechetical programs were so effectively adapted for younger children that their content and purpose seemed only to belong to the same stage of development as Thomas the Tank-Engine and Postman Pat – to be appreciated when we are children but left behind when we move on to serious study and face the demands of adult living. (p. 151)

Boland does not cite which study he is referring to, and he is certainly not impugning the intentions of the authors of any of those programs, but the criticism is a fairly damning one, nonetheless.

Boland demurs at the suggestion that in his book he is trying to emulate the classic work of Karl Adam of the same title (first published in 1924), and in his Introduction he refers

¹ Read this article for CPTD points. See Page 26.

also to works by De Lubac, Newman, and von Hugel, of a similar vein. Having admired these earlier works he continues:

I believe... that the social and cultural situation of our time, as well as the challenges the Church is facing, require that the same distinctive characteristics and teaching of Catholicism should be highlighted. (p. 17)

Whatever the modesty of his claims the book is nonetheless a very worthy modern take on the issues raised in earlier times by those authors and is a welcome new take on ecclesiology for our times, even if I do not always agree with some of his comments and conclusions.

I should point out that I am neither a catechist nor a religious education teacher, but I was involved for a number of years in training catechists and RE teachers; as well as checking over, from a theological perspective, programs that were then introduced in my own diocese and across England and Wales.

(I have no knowledge of similar programs introduced into Ireland during this time.) I suspect that there are a number of people critical of those programs for the same reasons that Boland offers in regard to Ireland.

Is it a fair criticism?

Failures of the past

Recalling my own religious education and sacramental preparation in the early 1960s the methodology used was almost entirely deductive: learning catechism answers by rote in much the same way that we learned our times-tables.

The questions were neither ours in our own language, nor were the answers, which often used rather unfamiliar and fairly inaccessible terminology.

The standard response to an awkward question, if one dared voice it in class, was, "It's a mystery." In those days this was meant as a put down simply telling the pupil to shut up and accept what was being said on faith.

It was a very unsatisfactory way of teaching and learning that did not so much "infantilize" us – except from the point of not inviting any questions of our own – but it did bore the pants off us and resulted in people, as they grew up, ditching something that seemed utterly irrelevant to life.

I can honestly say – while not in any way denigrating the good intentions of my religious education teachers – that, with one or two exceptions, we were effectively meant to leave our inquiring minds at the classroom door for RE lessons.

This was in complete contrast to other subjects we were taught.

For sure, one or two attempts were made later in my secondary school teaching (by now we are at the beginning of the 1970s) to engage with questions we did have, and there was always a strong encouragement to engage in apostolic activities – working with special needs children and adults or at a soup kitchen.

For many of my contemporaries, however, the change came far too late. They were lost forever to the Catholic Church, though not necessarily to other iterations of Christianity.

My own theological awakening was thanks to a very enlightened parish priest who came to my home parish in 1970, and thanks to my studies in the seminary and at university. It was here that a fascination with scripture, theology and Church history were truly born.

Thanks for this is due to those who taught me at Ushaw College, and the universities of Durham and Louvain (K.U. Leuven). Taught by men and women (though mainly men at that

time) of deep faith and commitment, my life-long engagement with the "things of God" was nurtured.

It is because of my own experience that I am leery [cautious] of taking Boland's criticisms as a reason to return to deductive methods of teaching and catechetics which is a cry heard frequently these days.

So where do we go from here?

Evangelization and learning from the past

Pope Francis has served notice that the entire Church is on a missionary footing.

Throughout his many apostolic documents and his homilies, he has talked extensively about the need for people to be "missionary disciples". He has even reorganized the entire Roman Curia to serve notice that mission/evangelization is a priority.

There can be no doubt that in these islands, and across the developed world, we are indeed missionary territory. Amongst other things our catechetical and religious education programs need to reflect this situation.

I feel sure that many of them already do so in many respects, but we need to be absolutely certain of this.

One way to check on the missionary nature of our work is to return to some basic ideas set out by Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Ad gentes, AG).

In the opening chapter, setting out principles for mission, the Fathers at the Council make clear that we can never pick and choose which bits of the Gospel we pass on, rather it is the whole gospel message that needs to be shared:

The mission of the Church is carried out by means of that activity through which, in obedience to Christ's commands and moved by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, the Church makes itself fully present to all men and peoples in order to lead them to faith, freedom and peace of Christ by the example of its life and teaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace. Its aim is to open for all people a free and sure path to full participation in mystery of Christ. (AG, §5)

At the same time the Fathers were also aware that the context in which the Gospel was preached varies: a factor which needs to be taken into account in any effective missionary activity:

The task (of preaching the Gospel)... is the same everywhere and in all situations, although because of circumstances, it may not always be exercised in the same way. The differences which must be recognized in this activity of the Church, do not flow from the inner nature of the mission itself, but from the circumstances in which it is exercised. (AG, §6)

Bearing this in mind we have to try to engage in this complex endeavour.

For help and inspiration, a good starting-point are the examples of evangelization that we find in the Acts of the Apostles.

Here we notice that when Peter is addressing the crowd in Jerusalem or the Sanhedrin, or when Paul is addressing the congregation in the synagogues at Philippi and Antioch of Pisidia, they both draw extensively on the Hebrew Scriptures as they present the gospel message to their Jewish audience, who were well-versed in the Law and the Prophets.

We notice different techniques used by Peter with the Roman Centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), and especially by Paul, when addressing the men of Athens in the Areopagus (Acts 17).

In this latter case, where the supposed sophisticates of Athens despised the Jewish religion, Paul makes no mention of the Hebrew Scriptures but argues from the experience and thinking of the audience in front of him.

He still preaches the message of Christ, of course. As soon as he mentions the idea of resurrection from the dead the crowd laugh at him, but he persists with the message and does gain some converts.

He begins with what they know and tries to lead them to the Gospel, in the same way, but taking a different tack than he does with a Jewish audience.

The message of the Gospel is always the same but the way in which it is initially presented takes into account the experience and thinking of any particular audience.

Discovering a Way Forward

In my own studies two books, in particular, helped formulate my thinking about how and what to teach in theology classes.

I first came across the writings of Jurgen Moltmann as an undergraduate. His book on the central Lutheran Doctrine of the Cross – The Crucified God (SCM Press, London, 1974) – poses the dilemma facing all Christian enterprises focused on mission and theology in this way:

The Christian life of theologians, churches and human beings is faced more than ever today with a double crisis: the crisis of relevance and the crisis of identity. These two crises are complementary.

The more theology and church try to become relevant to the problems of today, the more deeply they are drawn the crisis of their own Christian identity.

The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rights, and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become. (p. 7)

For a Lutheran like Moltmann it is, of course, precisely in the unfolding theology of the cross that he works through a solution to his dilemma.

The dilemma, as outlined by Moltmann, made a great deal of sense to me when reflecting on my own experience (of strong, but irrelevant, identity) and hearing of some fairly whacky attempts at relevance in the early 1970s.

Thinking of just how to present theology to a class of seminary students once I began teaching was foremost in my mind when pursuing post-graduate studies. It was during this time that I came across the work of another Lutheran, the American sociologist of religion, Peter L. Berger, in a book published in 1980: The Heretical Imperative (Collins, London, 1980).

I had already come across some of Berger's other work including A Rumour of Angels and Pyramids of Sacrifice, but it was this work focusing on theological method that captivated me.

To cut a very long story short – and hopefully in doing so not to over-simplify this wide-ranging book – for Berger an inductive approach to theology is one that makes most sense today.

He homes in on the example of the Father of Liberal Protestant Theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, as his paradigm for this approach.

Schleiermacher used human experience as the starting point of his theological method: specifically religious experience. From this he moved to reflecting on the various doctrines of the Christian Church (best exemplified in his seminal work of 1830, The Christian Faith).

Because human experience develops over time, and place, one of the consequences of this approach is to introduce the central necessity of an historical understanding to the theological endeavour.

Over the course of time liberal theology would degenerate into something that the "Father" would not have endorsed.

For the "Father" of its great counter-point, Neoorthodoxy, Karl Barth, the final nail in the coffin of this school of thought came when liberal theologians in Germany gave unreserved and unswerving support to the German War Machine in 1914, offering no criticism whatsoever of the warfare and the way it was being waged.

This act of complete surrender to the State, thus subordinating the revealed Word of God in the Scriptures, was the final straw for Barth and many others.

In short, the original inductive approach of Schleiermacher had been compromised in "reductionism": reducing the Christian Faith to the needs of the contemporary state and so setting to one side the demands of the Gospel.

This is always a potential temptation for those espousing an inductive approach, and it must be carefully guarded against. The fundamental idea, however, remains. Berger expresses it thus:

Properly understood, faith and inductive reasoning stand in dialectic relation to each other: I believe – and then I reflect about the implications of this fact; I gather evidence about that which is the object of my faith – and this evidence provides further motive to go on believing (The Heretical Imperative, p. 141).

There is clearly much more to Berger's work than I have outlined here but the idea of an inductive approach to theology was cemented in my mind and my approach to teaching. The caveat always remains, however, being very wary of reductionism.

It is the same inductive approach used by St Paul when speaking to the Athenians in the Areopagus.

He did not fail to move on to promote the hard core of the Gospel (and thereby descend into reductionism), once he had the attention of his audience, even at the expense of ridicule and rejection.

A few concluding thoughts

So, where does this leave us in regard to catechesis and religious education? I remain convinced that an inductive approach, starting for the actual lived experience of the students is the only effective method by which we can engage with people of any age.

It must, however, always move on from experience to the presentation of the Gospel (as St Paul did in Athens).

These thoughts lead to two conclusion.

Firstly, we need to check that any programs used do, in fact, lead to proper knowledge of faith at an appropriate level for the age and stage of the students.

And, secondly, we need to make sure that those charged with the responsibility of delivering these programs are themselves well-versed both in the method and have a proper understanding of the content of what is being taught.

Both require resources, especially the latter since, as Bolan correctly observed in The Spirit of Catholicism (p. 151), we have many adults who do not know their own faith, never mind what to pass on to coming generations.

When working in religious education in the diocese, one of my colleagues from another diocese used to have a motto attached to all his correspondence to teachers and catechists: "An enthusiasm for the things of God".

If we could inculcate such an attitude in sufficient people, we would be a long way along the road to making sure both that the Christian faith was being taught and, at the same time, reassured that those participating in the various programs are being offered material for adulthood, taking them beyond Thomas The Tank-Engine and Postman Pat.

[Sean Hall is a presbyter in the Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle (England). Currently pastor of St Mary of the Rosary (Forest Hall), he previously taught theology at Ushaw College and has served as advisor for religious education in the diocese.]

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/education/the-infantilization-of-our-young-people-in-religious-ed-and-catechesis/16209>



CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Authentic Learning

(Sydney CEO Leadership Team, October 9, 2014)



Authentic learning is learning which is relevant, purposeful and engaging. It is rigorous and empowering. It is learning that enables students to live lives of promise and meaning in a rapidly changing world.

By connecting to the real world of students' lives, authentic learning experiences enable them to become lifelong learners who contribute to society and the wider world as active and discerning citizens. Authentic learning is at the very heart of the work of the Catholic school, reflecting Jesus' own driving imperative that humanity "would have life, and have it to the full." (John, 10:10)

In the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Sydney, we value authentic learning because it respects the dignity of learners and builds on their prior experience, personal interests and innate potential. It fosters critical thinking and the application of skills and knowledge in a variety of settings. It is central to our work as Catholic educators because it promotes the continual growth and wellbeing of the whole person; spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically.

Given this understanding, as a system we are committed to the following principles:

Students learn authentically when they:

- engage in work that is rigorous and challenging;
- engage critically with the material being learned both as individuals and in collaboration;

- make connections between the material being learned, and their own lives and experiences;
- share what they have learned with others;
- exercise choice as they pursue their own passions and interests;
- believe that they are capable learners and have high expectations of themselves;
- apply knowledge and skills creatively in a range of situations.

Teachers enable authentic learning when they:

- create relevant and significant learning experiences, tailored to individual student differences;
- demonstrate a belief that all students can learn, by providing challenge in an environment of high expectation and explicit teaching;
- foster creativity and imagination through open ended tasks that stimulate curiosity;
- provide challenges that require higher order thinking and the application of learning in a variety of settings;
- encourage student ownership and responsibility for their own learning;
- provide appropriate and timely feedback as part of a sophisticated approach to assessment for, as and of learning;
- model respect and trust in relationships, and foster student wellbeing;
- demonstrate a commitment to both excellence and equity in learning;
- create an environment which encourages reflection, sharing and considered risk taking;
- have high expectations of their own performance;
- participate actively in ongoing professional learning that builds individual and collective capacity;
- base their teaching approach on quality research and relevant data analysis.

School leaders enable authentic learning when they:

- cultivate a shared vision, focus and practice to promote authentic learning by modelling and engaging with the principles and practices enunciated in this document;
- promote a school culture that balances trust and respect with appropriate accountability;
- foster reflective professional learning and capacity building to increase teacher efficacy, using practical experience as well as quality educational research;
- promote evidence-based experimentation in the development of authentic learning practices in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;
- strategically support learning-focussed collaborative practice through the management of priorities and the provision of time, space and appropriate resources;
- engage with parents and the wider school community in developing an appreciation of authentic learning that is rich and lifegiving.

System leaders enable authentic learning when they:

- nurture a shared and lived understanding of authentic learning that is evident in the system's understanding of success, its policies and practices placing a priority on a comprehensive range of indicators;
- strategically plan and resource the system's commitment to authentic learning;
- create forums and networks for sharing resources and ideas across the system;
- promote a systematic, evidence-based approach to teaching and learning;
- work closely with individual schools, respecting their unique agendas;
- monitor and respond to the level and type of demand on schools from imposed agendas so as to keep the focus on learning .



PORTRAIT

Sister Orianne, a Pauline nun on Instagram: Encountering Christ online

Religious sisters can bring Christ to social media and foster an encounter with God who loves us deeply, according to Sr. Orianne, a Canadian-born Pauline nun now serving in the US city of Boston and around the world.

(By Roberto Cetera)

Is it possible to evangelise with a smile? The answer to that question seems to be a definite yes when swiping through the Instagram posts published by Sr Orianne Pietra René, a young Daughter of Saint Paul, a Canadian now stationed at the Pauline sisters' North American Publishing House in Boston, USA.



Scrolling through Instagram profiles, it's impossible not to stop to take a closer look at Sr Orianne's account. This young sister, beyond her great competence on social media and her witty humour, boasts an extraordinary talent for mimicry.

But her irony is never an end to itself; rather, it always proposes an invitation to the spiritual and calls her 33,000 followers back to the Gospel.

"I entered religious life when I was 27 years old", says Sr Orianne, "and I made my first vows as a Daughter of Saint Paul in July 2021."

Q: And what was your life like before then?

I had no intention of becoming a nun. As a convert to Catholicism, my teens and early 20s were spent studying, working, traveling and growing in my faith. I went to university to study Anthropology and International Development, and then pursued

studies in Education. I worked as a teacher in the UK for one year, and then returned to Canada where I taught French to kids in kindergarten through grade 7. I was also active in youth ministry at our local parish.

I loved working with kids and teens. I began to realise that there was a real spiritual starvation in my kids. That realization opened me up to a desire for something more. Then when a priest asked me in confession if I'd ever considered my vocation I began to wonder (with a lot of panic at the time!) whether the Lord was calling me to religious life.

Since I was in a very rural area, there were not many communities nearby I could talk to, so I began to search online. That's where I found the Daughters of Saint Paul for the first time.

Q: Sr Orianne, you seem to think there is continuity between pastoral activity on social media and the fact that your vocation was born through it. How did you first become involved in this digital pastoral activity? Did your superiors request it of you or was it a personal decision?

As Daughters of Saint Paul, we are called to use the most modern and effective means of communication to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I certainly used social media before I entered the Daughters, but my accounts were all private. I just used it to share with my family and friends.

When I became a sister, I felt the Lord invite me to bring all of myself to this call, including my social media. After discerning this invitation with my sisters, I changed my social media accounts to public, and began to share from my heart with the people of God.

Q: Your videos are very original and ironic. Was that planned or is it part of your personality?

I actually never post anything unless I feel the Spirit prompting me to share. I love to find the humour in life. I think God has an amazing sense of humour and it comes out even in Scripture!

At the same time, I feel the needs and sufferings of people very deeply. I hope my videos can bring a smile to people's faces, and that the written messages beneath them can bring healing to people's hearts.

Q: Is it difficult to transmit a spiritual message in such a short video?

If we realized how much God loves us, and how much he loves us in the simple realities of life, our lives would be so different. I long for people to know that love — a love that is living, that heals, and that invites us to newness. This is the Gospel's message. This is what I hope to share.

Q: Who are your followers?

Each one of my followers is a precious child of God. I am grateful to have a little social media family that actually prays together — I pray for them, they pray for me, and they pray for one another. It's so humbling to see this amazing community forming in the comments of a video.

My following is pretty evenly split between guys and girls, and they range in age from teenagers to 60-year-olds. They are from all over the world — I've had amazing conversations with people across the US and Canada, Brazil and Italy, Lebanon and Kenya, Korea and Australia. It's amazing to see the Lord working in all of their lives! And they teach me a lot too!

I can say from personal experience how important our Christian presence is on social media. I have had the incredible privilege of accompanying people through seasons of doubt, returning to prayer, and of conversions to Catholicism.

I still cry every time I hear about someone beginning RCIA because of interacting with our sisters on the social media, whether it was me or someone else. I rejoice that the Lord has used both the fun and the serious posts of my account, and the accounts of my other sisters, to create an environment that is safe for people to come, ask, question, debate, learn, adventure, and be transformed by Christ's love.

Q: What risks can arise from digital religious communication?

On social media, messages have the potential to reach people you might never think of. We must always be open to the Spirit's guidance in both what and how we share: am I sharing love in truth? Am I creating division in how I express myself or am I inviting people into respectful dialogue?

One of the biggest risks in religious digital communication is accidentally counter-witnessing to the Gospel by posting or reacting hastily and thoughtlessly. When we make this mistake in real life, our words may impact one or two people, and it is easier for us to apologize and make things right. Online, it may impact hundreds or thousands of people.

This challenge comes with a great responsibility which calls us to accountability for our words and actions. In fact, it can help to refine our hearts in how we consider and respond to others.

Q: Yours is a complex vocation then?

As Christians we have been baptized into Christ. When we are on social media, we are called to live fully out of our baptism in how we scroll, interact with posts, and converse with people.

If we can live radically out of our baptism, and truly understand that we bring Christ to even this virtual space, then we can create a real ground of encounter for people with the one who loves them most.

[Sister Orianne, a Pauline nun on Instagram: Encountering Christ online - Vatican News](#)



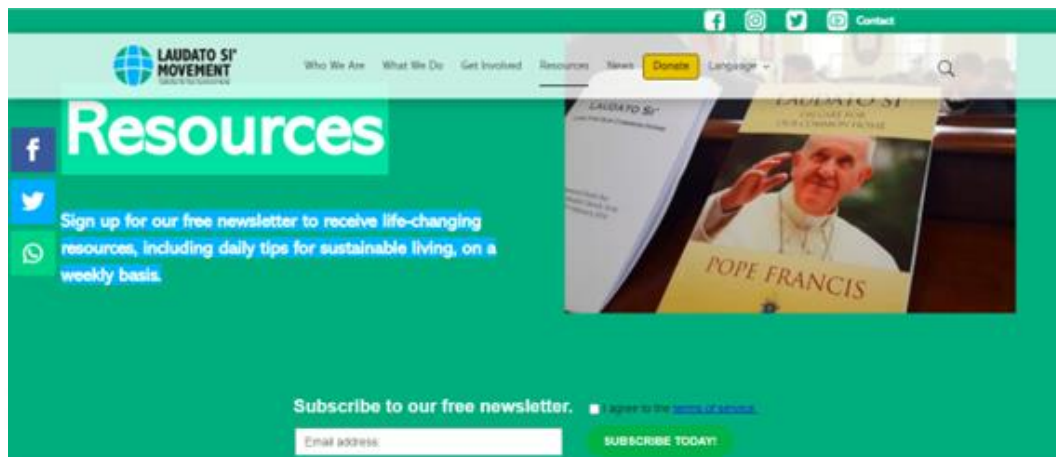
WEBSITE

Laudato Si' Movement



**LAUDATO SI'
MOVEMENT**
Catholics for Our Common Home

[Laudato Si' Movement \(laudatosimovement.org\)](http://laudatosimovement.org)



Our Mission

To inspire and mobilize the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice, in collaboration with all people of good will.

Our Name

Laudato Si' has been and continues to be the cornerstone of our movement, even as the Magisterium of the Church has continued to evolve with texts such as *Querida Amazonia* and *Fratelli Tutti*. Laudato Si' is just one milestone in the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, a tradition we embrace wholeheartedly; but Laudato Si's distinctive theme, "care for our common home," makes it a milestone that has touched our hearts profoundly and brought us together to advance our mission to care for our imperilled planetary home. In fact, in the spirit of an integral ecology, many of our key initiatives are named after the encyclical: LS Animators, LS Week, LS Circles, LS Generation, LS Retreats, and more. We also humbly acknowledge that there is a lot of Laudato Si' action taking place outside of our movement, starting with the Vatican's own Laudato Si' Action Platform which we actively support together with many others. We are delighted with so much life inspired by the encyclical and *Querida Amazonia*.



Roots / Wings

BOOK REVIEW

Is Christianity a Cult of the Dead?

Review of Kyle Smith's "A Brief history of Christianity"

(Luke Timothy Johnson)



Fra Angelico, 'The Beheading of Saints Cosmas and Damian,' 1430–40s

(Photo: Louvre Museum/Wikimedia Commons)

The preface to Kyle Smith's book about the commemoration, celebration, and imitation of those who testified to Christ even at the cost of their lives—the martyrs—provides unusual insight into the book's character. He tells us there that his interest in the topic was triggered by the discovery of Antonio Gallonio's sixteenth-century Treatise on the Instruments of Martyrdom in a Toronto used bookstore. Reading this treatise stimulated Smith to undertake a research project that convinced him "how Christianity became (and how it still remains) a cult of the dead." The reader is thus prepared for an investigation that combines an antiquarian's interest in the oddities of historiography with a passion for the ways in which ritual, literature, and art intersect. (In addition to many scattered illustrations, the volume contains sixteen handsome plates.) Whether "cult of

the dead" fairly characterizes Christian history is another matter, to which I will return.

Smith's preferred approach to his subject is indirect, and each of his chapters has a circumambulatory character. He begins his opening chapter, "The First of the Dead," with a reminiscence of walking his children through St. Alban's Square in Toronto, then moves to the Venerable Bede's account concerning that martyr, then makes his way to the second-century Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, who passionately longed for martyrdom, and finally reaches the New Testament for a consideration of Jesus and his followers (above all, Stephen) as martyrs. Smith accepts the conventional contemporary view that the evangelist Luke created the image of the martyr in his portrayal of Jesus' death

based on the Greco-Roman model of "Noble Death," and then, in his depiction of Stephen's death by stoning, set in motion a tradition (a "genre") that persisted for centuries. Smith quotes approvingly Candida Moss's "inescapable but repugnant conclusion" that "dying for Christ may be a central, rather than peripheral, part of the Christian experience."

The centuries-long trade in the relics of martyrs

Subsequent chapters offer similar scholarly peregrinations. In "The Names of the Dead," the chief fascination is the literary labours of the ancient ecclesiastical historians Eusebius and Sozomen, who preserved accounts of early martyrs, and Cureton's nineteenth-century identification of a fifth-century Syriac manuscript that contained, among other things, the lost original of Eusebius's *Martyrs of Palestine*. In the lengthy chapter titled "The Remains of the Dead," Smith leads his reader from the contemplation of Louis IX's Sainte-Chapelle in Paris to a bemused consideration of every peculiar moment and odd turn in the centuries-long trade in the relics of martyrs. That trade certainly had seamy aspects, but it was based on the conviction that through such relics God performed miracles. Smith includes in his survey the persistent though contentious claims made for Veronica's Veil and the Shroud of Turin.

Smith's chapter on "The Feasts of the Dead" provides him with the opportunity to move from the fairly obvious construction of the sanctoral liturgical cycle (in which martyrs occupy a significant if by no means exclusive place) to a detailed general examination of the marking of time through lunar or solar calendars, and from there to an appreciation of the way the sixth-century Rule of Benedict structures the moments of the day as times for prayer.

Another dimension of martyrdom is a life dedicated to solitude and asceticism, which from the time of the desert monks in the fourth century was regarded as a sort of "living martyrdom" available to those living after the age of persecution. In "The Living Dead," Smith examines the rituals

and practices attached to the medieval recluses known as anchorites (the most famous of whom was Julian of Norwich). He pays particular attention to a hortatory work called *Ancrene Wisse*, written by a male confessor for female solitaires.

The author's fascination with the literary and antiquarian is again evident in "The Miracles of the Dead." Here we find no sober reflection on the reality or non-reality of the miraculous, but instead a literary journey organized by the phenomenon of pilgrimage to the sites of martyrs' remains for the sake of healing (physical or spiritual). Smith begins with the Pardoner's tale in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, segues to Thomas Becket and the miracles associated with him at Canterbury, then takes up literary guidebooks for pilgrims, such as the twelfth-century *Peregrinatio Compostellana*, then quickly surveys miracle stories in the gospels, Augustine's *City of God*, Theodoret's *Religious History*, and Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*, before returning, finally, to Thomas Becket and the collection of wonders associated with him. The chapter is itself a sort of pilgrimage that, without revealing the real point of the journey, offers many and various delights along the way.

The Protestant counterattack

In "The War for the Dead," Smith takes up the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, with the Protestant side dismissing relics and the miracles associated with them as Romish superstitions, and the Catholic side intensifying its commitment to the martyrological tradition. Thus, the Catholic Philip Neri recovered new relics from digs in the catacombs, and Cesare Baronio published a twelve-volume *Ecclesiastical Annals*, which celebrated the role of martyrdom through the Church's history. (The earlier-mentioned Antonio Gallonio was one of his assistants.) Far more influential was the Protestant counterattack, especially John Foxe's 1563 *Actes and Monuments*—popularly known as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*—which recounted the deaths of those killed as heretics during the reign of Mary I (1553–1558). As Smith notes, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*—together with the

King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer—was critically important as a shaper of reform, and above all as spur to negative attitudes toward Catholics.

The final full chapter, "The Legends of the Dead," moves, somewhat uneasily, from the legends attached to the saints' intervention during the time of plagues and the Black Death to the development of critical historiography concerning these legends, which had, through books like *The Golden Legend*—the most widely disseminated book of the medieval period—wildly proliferated. Smith traces the development of the Bollandists (named after Jean Bolland), who sought to distinguish within all these accounts the historical from the fanciful. The project began in the seventeenth century and still continues, with sixty-eight folio volumes published to date.

As my summary suggests, there is a considerable amount of sheer erudition in Smith's leisurely circumnavigations around his selected topics, and this book will undoubtedly delight those satisfied by a display of arcane historiographical information.

A cult of the dead?

The thoughtful student of Christianity may, however, have a number of serious questions concerning Smith's treatment of martyrdom. He seems to join an extraordinarily strong thesis to an almost complete lack of genuine argument. In what sense, for example, has he provided—as the subtitle announces—a "brief history of Christianity"? The descriptor "brief" may be accurate in the sense that Smith's treatment stops in the seventeenth century. He states in the preface, however, that Christianity "still remains" a cult of the dead, even though he pays no attention to the continuing tradition of Christian martyrdom, above all in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Perhaps this is because the contemporary persecution and killing of believers is still only an "event" and has not yet become a "genre." Or perhaps the term "brief" accurately communicates the very partial character of his study; the topic of martyrdom, while certainly important, scarcely captures the totality of Christian life (and

death) through the ages. To take a small but telling example: the calendar of saints celebrated in the liturgy and in litanies gives martyrs a special place but includes with them all the confessors, and virgins, and odd and spare holy ones who witnessed to God through the ages.

Smith's use of the New Testament in particular is less than adequate. His acceptance of the contemporary scholarly conceit that the evangelist Luke "invented" the image of the noble death for Jesus along the lines of Greco-Roman models fails to take into account such Jewish precedents of witness in the face of persecution as are found in the prophets or the Second Book of Maccabees. More important, the language of "witness/witnessing" (martyrs/martyrein) in Luke-Acts is pervasively connected to all forms of witnessing, but is used only once—and then in passing—in connection to Stephen's (not Jesus') death (Acts 22:20). In contrast, the same language is prominently used in connection with Jesus' own testimony in Johannine literature (the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation) and even once in Paul (1 Timothy 6:13). There is very little evidence, moreover, that either the Gospel of Luke or the Acts of the Apostles were much read or had much influence before Irenaeus. Not everything in history is a literary trope.

As for Candida Moss's conclusion, mentioned earlier, that martyrdom was central to Christian experience, why is this "repugnant"? That word suggests that martyrdom was something distasteful, even reprehensible. Smith never seems to consider that martyrdom could have been something noble and courageous, that ancient believers took their commitment to Christ so seriously that they offered their lives as a witness to that commitment, that despite all the bizarre practices associated with their relics, for example, the devotion to relics was not itself silly, but based on the conviction that, as Smith puts it, "martyrs' bones were not dead: saints were still present in their relics.... [H]ow else could relics work their miracles if the saints and their divinely granted power were not still there?"

But Smith's statement does not go far enough. The fundamental error in this book lies in its calling Christianity—or for that matter, the veneration of the martyrs—a "cult of the dead." It is anything but that. Christ was not worshiped for the manner of his death but because he was raised from the dead as "Life-giving Spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45); Stephen was the prototypical martyr because in his witness

he saw the risen Christ; the martyrs gave their mortal lives as witness precisely to the truth of the Resurrection; the honour shown martyrs and the prayers addressed to them is based on the same belief: that, with all the other saints, they are alive in the presence of God; and that, as members of the Church triumphant, they can come to the assistance of the afflicted among the church militant. Christianity is not, in fact, a cult of the dead. It is, rather, the celebration of God's life.

Kyle Smith, *Cult of the Dead: A Brief History of Christianity* (University of California Press)

Luke Timothy Johnson is emeritus Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and a frequent contributor to *Commonweal* where this review first appeared.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/culture/is-christianity-a-cult-of-the-dead/17506>



FESTIVALS

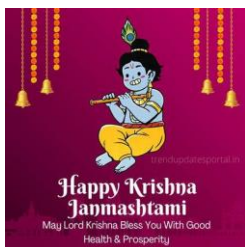
Eid-al-Adha (28/29 June 2023)



The feast of Eid-al-Adha is not only the climax of the Hajj pilgrimage, but also the main festival of the Islamic year. It takes place in the month of Hajj, two months after the end of Ramadan. It commemorates the triumph of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) faith over the temptation of the devil and illustrates his complete submission to God. Ibrahim had a vivid dream in which he was instructed by God to sacrifice his only son Ishmael. On awaking he told Ishmael of his dream, who encouraged him to do as God had

commanded. Both set off for Mina, the place of sacrifice. On the way the devil tempted Ibrahim in different ways: he suggested that God would never command such an act; that Hagar, Ibrahim's maid-servant and Ishmael's mother, could never bear such a tragedy; and that Ibrahim was losing his mind and should not trust the revelation from God. With fortitude Ibrahim resisted the devil, and at the place of sacrifice, just as he was about to offer up Ishmael, God intervened and provided a sacrifice of his own.

Gita Week (30 August - 6 September 2023)



During the build-up to Krishna Ashtami, the celebration of Krishna's birth, devotees engage in spiritual activities. The singing of bhajans and kirtans (devotional songs in praise of God), reading and discussing Sri-mad Bhagavatam and Bhagavad Gita are some spiritual activities that devotees engage in to prepare for the auspicious moment of Lord Krishna's appearance. In many temples in South Africa, the reading and the studying of the Bhagavad Gita takes place.



LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Church to "compete" in the 2024 Olympics in Paris

Catholic officials unveil plans to offer spiritual help and encouragement at the upcoming Summer Games in France, especially for the young and most vulnerable

(Matthieu Lasserre) April 19, 2023



The Catholic Church is taking on the Olympics and is entering the arena for the 2024 Summer Games in Paris. The team from the French Bishops' Conference (CEF) that is in charge of organizing the Church's presence and activities at this much loved sports festival unveiled its plans this past Monday at the apostolic nunciature in the nation's capital.

Representing the hierarchy were Archbishop Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, the CEF president, Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline, the ranking member on the CEF permanent council, and Bishop Emmanuel Gobilliard of Digne who is the Holy See's delegate for the Olympics.

Many lay persons also participated in Monday's meeting, such as Valérie Fourneyron, France's former minister of sports, Isabelle de Chatellus, director of a project called "the Catholic Church and Olympic and Paralympic Games 2024", and François Morinière, one of the project's founders.

La Madeleine, the nerve center of the project

The objective for the Church is to put athletes at the heart of this project, which will be promoted by the campaign "Holy Games, the Gospel is sport!" However, "there is no desire to take over the event", rather just to "contribute to its success, which offers a chance to make France a country of sports", said Morinière. The idea is to take advantage of the some 15 million visitors the Paris tourist office expects will be coming for the 2024 Summer Games.

The Church's steering committee plans to make La Madeleine – the iconic church in central Paris that Napoleon had redesigned in the Neoclassical style – a place dedicated to the athletes. The church, which is popular with musicians and artists, will be used to "bless the teams, give thanks and console".

Morinière said organizers hope it will be "a simple but clearly visible and meaningful sign".

The project will be articulated around four orientations: "proclamation", "solidarity", "educational dimension" and "spiritual dimension", with prayers and a blessing each evening, for example. A chaplaincy will also be set up in the Olympic Village in Saint-Denis.

"Chaplains will be available 24 hours a day for the duration of the Olympics and in accordance with the specifications requested of us," said Bishop Gobilliard.

A committee will also be set up to encourage athletes who are Christians to speak about their faith. The French international soccer player, Olivier Giroud, has already agreed to participate.

Solidarity and proximity

Isabelle de Chatellus said it would be particularly important to involve young people in the Church's activities at the Summer Games.

"The idea is to mobilize 2,500 young people in particular to animate the parishes," she said, specifically those that are located within a half hour's walk from the sites where competitions will take place. "The Frat 2024 will be coloured by the Olympics, and above all a link will be created between the participants of the World Youth Day in Lisbon this summer and the Olympics," de Chatellus said.

The Church of France is also working on including the most precarious, without whom "the Olympics will not be successful", she added. A "Summer of Solidarity"

will be developed during the event, on the model of the Winter of Solidarity, an operation that each year welcomes homeless people into parishes for the night. There are plans to "obtain places from the Olympics steering committee for the most vulnerable (to attend the competitions, editor's note)", said Philippe Marsset, auxiliary bishop of Paris.

Sports and faith

The organizers are convinced that the Olympics offer the opportunity to question the complementarity of sport and spirituality and to demonstrate that Catholics are justified in intervening in these areas.

"The Church has a real role to play in the societal and educational heritage of the Olympics, by bringing an additional dimension," said Valérie Fourneyron, France's former sports minister.

"Involvement in the Olympics can allow the Church to work on its relationship to the body, at the heart of the abuse crisis," added de Chatellus.

Neglected for several years by the Church, sports returned in the reflections of the bishops two years ago, thanks to the Olympic Games being awarded to the French capital.

"At first, some were not convinced," said de Chatellus. "But now everyone sees an opportunity to come together around a common project." She said there seems have been "a change in the bishops' interest" since the topic was discussed last month at the CEF plenary assembly in Lourdes.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/culture/church-to-compete-in-the-2024-olympics-in-paris/17670>



GPT-4 is here: what scientists think

(Katharine Sanderson)



Artificial intelligence company OpenAI this week unveiled GPT-4, the latest incarnation of the large language model that powers its popular chat bot ChatGPT. The company says GPT-4 contains big improvements — it has already stunned people with its ability to create human-like text and generate images and computer code from almost any a prompt. Researchers say these abilities have the potential to transform science — but some are frustrated that they cannot yet access the technology, its underlying code or information on how it was trained. That raises concern about the technology's safety and makes it less useful for research, say scientists.

One upgrade to GPT-4, released on 14 March, is that it can now handle images as well as text. And as a demonstration of its language prowess, Open AI, which is based in San Francisco, California, says that it passed the US bar legal exam with results in the ninetieth centile, compared with the tenth centile for the previous version of ChatGPT. But the tech is not yet widely accessible — only to paid subscribers to ChatGPT so far have access.

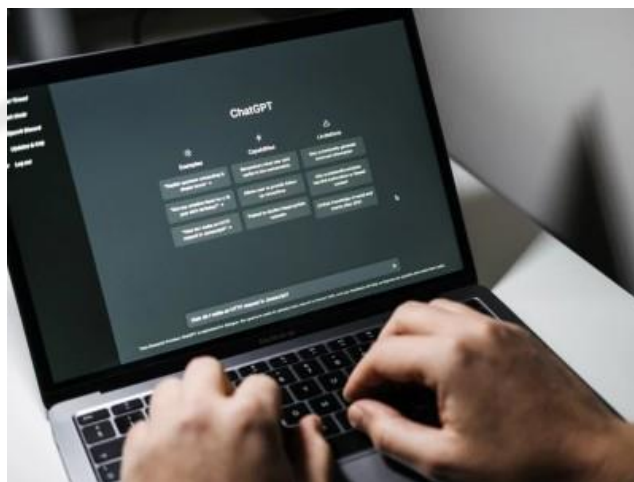
"There's a waiting list at the moment so you cannot use it right now," Says Evi-Anne van Dis, a psychologist at the University of Amsterdam. But she has seen demos of GPT-4. "We watched some videos in which they demonstrated capacities and it's mind blowing," she says. One instance, she recounts, was a hand-drawn doodle of a website, which GPT-4 used to produce the computer code needed to build that

website, as a demonstration of the ability to handle images as inputs.

But there is frustration in the science community over OpenAI's secrecy around how and what data the model was trained, and how it actually works. "All of these closed-source models, they are essentially dead-ends in science," says Sasha Luccioni, a research scientist specializing in climate at HuggingFace, an open-source-AI community. "They [OpenAI] can keep building upon their research, but for the community at large, it's a dead end."

'Red team' testing

Andrew White, a chemical engineer at University of Rochester, has had privileged access to GPT-4 as a 'red-teamer': a person paid by OpenAI to test the platform to try and make it do something bad. He has had access to GPT-4 for the past six months, he says. "Early on in the process, it didn't seem that different," compared with previous iterations.



He put to the bot queries about what chemical reactions steps were needed to make a compound, predict the reaction yield, and choose a catalyst. "At first, I was actually not that impressed," White says. "It was really surprising because it would look so realistic, but it would hallucinate an atom here. It would skip a step there," he adds. But when as part of his red-team work he gave GPT-4 access to scientific papers, things changed dramatically. "It made us

realize that these models maybe aren't so great just alone. But when you start connecting them to the Internet to tools like a retrosynthesis planner, or a calculator, all of a sudden, new kinds of abilities emerge."

And with those abilities come concerns. For instance, could GPT-4 allow dangerous chemicals to be made? With input from people such as White, OpenAI engineers fed back into their model to discourage GPT-4 from creating dangerous, illegal or damaging content, White says.

Fake facts

Outputting false information is another problem. Luccioni says that models like GPT-4, which exist to predict the next word in a sentence, can't be cured of coming up with fake facts — known as hallucinating. "You can't rely on these kinds of models because there's so much hallucination," she says. And this remains a concern in the latest version, she says, although OpenAI says that it has improved safety in GPT-4.

Without access to the data used for training, OpenAI's assurances about safety fall short for Luccioni. "You don't know what the data is. So you can't improve it. I mean, it's just completely impossible to do science with a model like this," she says.



The mystery about how GPT-4 was trained is also a concern for van Dis's colleague at Amsterdam, psychologist Claudi Bockting. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-00816-5>

"It's very hard as a human being to be accountable for something that you cannot oversee," she says. "One of the concerns is they could be far more biased than for instance, the bias that human beings have by themselves." Without being able to access the code behind GPT-4 it is impossible to see where the bias might have originated, or to remedy it, Luccioni explains.

Ethics discussions

Bockting and van Dis are also concerned that increasingly these AI systems are owned by big tech companies. They want to make sure the technology is properly tested and verified by scientists. "This is also an opportunity because collaboration with big tech can of course, speed up processes," she adds.

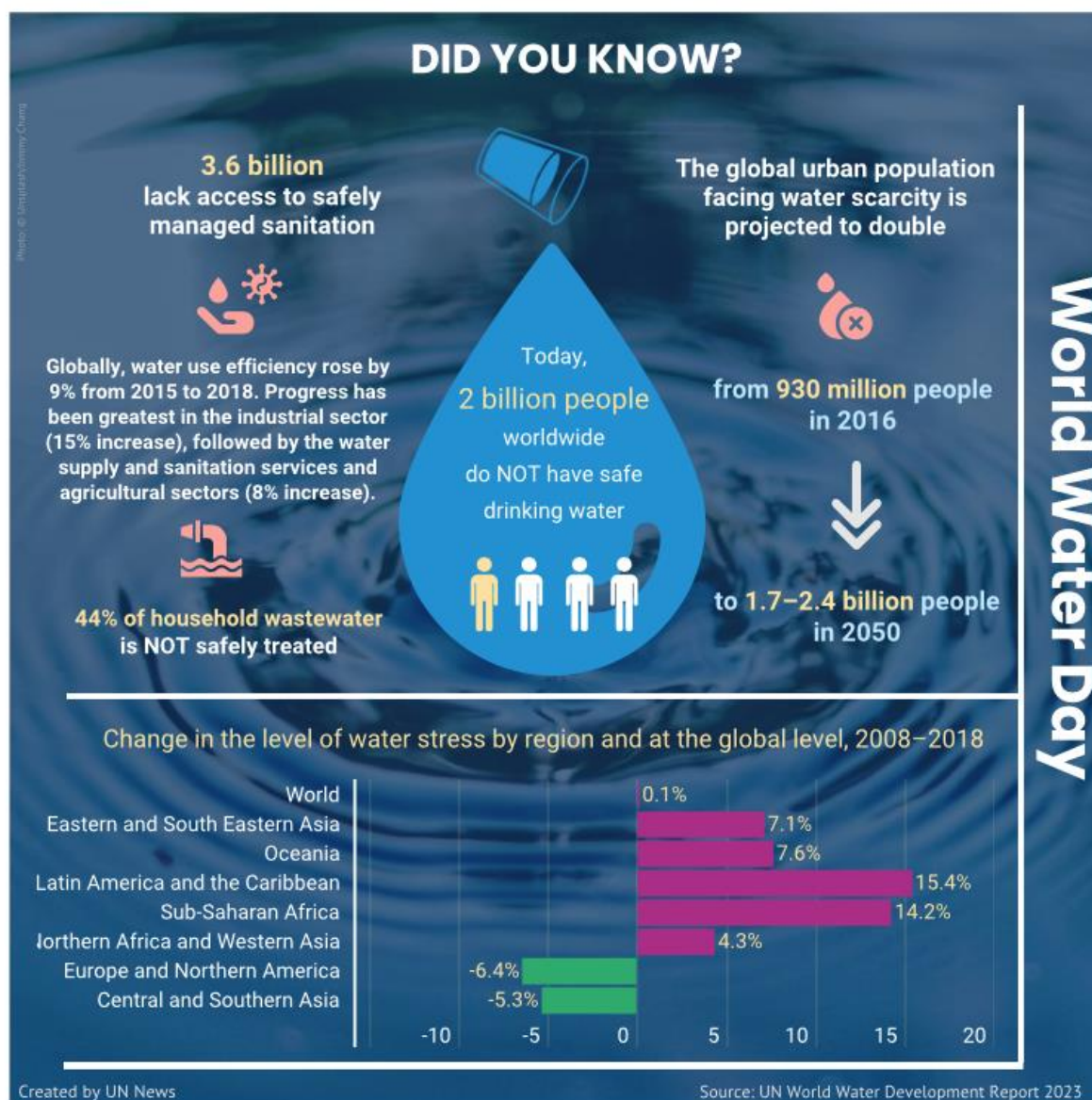
Van Dis, Bockting and colleagues argued earlier this year for an urgent need to develop a set of 'living' guidelines to govern how AI and tools such as GPT-4 are used and developed. They are concerned that any legislation around AI technologies will struggle to keep up with the pace of development. Bockting and van Dis have convened an invitational summit at the University of Amsterdam on 11 April to discuss these concerns, with representatives from organizations including UNESCO's science-ethics committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Economic Forum.

Despite the concern, GPT-4 and its future iterations will shake up science, says White. "I think it's actually going to be a huge infrastructure change in science, almost like the internet was a big change," he says. It won't replace scientists, he adds, but could help with some tasks. "I think we're going to start realizing we can connect papers, data programmes, libraries that we use and computational work or even robotic experiments."



Pope Francis, UN raise awareness of global water crisis

While Francis says water must never be wasted, abused or serve as grounds for war, the United Nations is working to alleviate hunger, conflicts and forced migration due to water scarcity.



Pope Francis has joined in with the United Nations to raise awareness about the water crisis and the need to accelerate initiatives in favour of those suffering from the scarcity of water.

"The words of Saint Francis of Assisi come to mind: "Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste". In these simple words we feel the beauty of creation and the awareness of the challenges involved in caring for it. During these days, the second United Nations Water Conference is taking place in New York. I pray for a successful outcome and hope that this important event will accelerate initiatives in support of those who suffer from the scarcity of water, this primary good. Water cannot be wasted and abused or a cause for war, but must be preserved for our

benefit and that of future generations," the pope said during his weekly Wednesday General Audience in St Peter's Square, March 22. The day marks World Water Day to make people aware of the importance of freshwater.

The United Nations is also hosting the 2023 Water Conference March 22-24 to create "a global momentum for accelerated implementation and improved impact to advance the broad challenges surrounding water." The conference comes just days after the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report for 2023 warns of a looming global water crisis and an imminent risk of shortages due to climate change and "vampiric overconsumption and overdevelopment."

Half of humanity lives without proper sanitation

United Nations data show that 3.6 billion of people or about half of humanity live "without safely managed sanitation," while one in three people or 2.3 billion, "lack basic handwashing facilities at home."

A World Health Organization and UNICEF joint monitoring program for "water supply, sanitation, and hygiene" reports that "eight out of ten people who lack even basic drinking water service live in rural areas, and about half of them live in least developed countries." The global urban population facing water scarcity is projected to potentially double from 930 million in 2016 to between 1.7 and 2.4 billion people, in 2050.

Like Pope Francis, a group of 18 UN independent experts and special rapporteurs appointed by the UN Human Rights Council and who are not UN staff, said in a joint statement on Tuesday that water should be "managed as a common good, not a commodity". "It is time to stop a technocratic approach to water and consider the ideas, knowledge and solutions of indigenous peoples and local communities who understand local aquatic ecosystems to ensure sustainability of the water agenda," they said.

Pope Francis has often invited us all to think of those who today lack such a substantial good as water, as well as of the generations that will succeed us and has called on everyone to work to put an end to the pollution of the seas and rivers, of subway streams and springs.

"Water, Source of Life"

In 2020, the Vatican-based Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in its document titled, *Aqua fons vitae* (Water, Source of Life) cautioned against the increasing "tendency to privatize" access to water and its usage, saying water is a common good intended for the entire human family.

The document draws heavily on teachings of successive popes. It also makes reference to texts issued by international institutions such as the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), something that is not common in Vatican documents. "Water, Source of Life" is primarily based on the vision of "integral ecology" -- which Pope Francis spells out in his encyclical *Laudato si'*-- by emphasizing the inextricable link between the spiritual, ecological, economic, political and social fields.

It looks at human rights and the environmental consequences of human activities in relation to water and addresses exploitation of the oceans, the phenomenon of migrants at sea and the status of maritime workers. *Aqua fons vitae* also calls on governments and leaders in the economic sphere to exercise a greater sense of responsibility when making decisions or implementing projects that have an impact on water.



Vatican sets new criteria for ethical investments

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences has published the Vatican's first document setting out the criteria for faith-based measures in the world of finance.

For the first time, the Vatican explicitly proposes a set of criteria that investors in financial markets should consider.

(Loup Besmond de Senneville)



In a document that has been in the works for several years, the Holy See has issued a new text that establishes and ethical criteria for financial investments. *Mensuram Bonam*, a 50-page document that was issued on November 25 by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, is intended to set out "faith-based measures for Catholic investors". It marks the first time that a Vatican body has explicitly proposed a set of criteria that investors in financial markets should take into consideration. While it is not a matter of drawing up a list of stocks or securities that are permitted or allowed, *Mensuram Bonam* believes that "24 categories" should constitute "concern" or even "prohibition" for Catholic investors.

Criteria for investing

Among them are some classic issues condemned by Catholic Social Teaching (CST), such as the promotion of abortion, weapons — nuclear or not —, as well as capital punishment, contraception and pornography. But others are less common, such as "genetic engineering" (including the GMO sector), "dehumanizing computer games and toys", or the "rights violations of In-

digenous Peoples". "Animal abuse/experimentation" are also part of the "exclusionary criteria" published by the Vatican.

Beyond this list, the Holy See sets out more general values that encourage investors to consider their choices. The human person, the common good, social justice and solidarity are some of them, as well as integral ecology and the inclusion of the weakest.

The document says there are many questions that investors should ask when assessing the ethical value of a stock portfolio. These include the following: "Does governance empower community-level decisions?", "Have those most impacted had their say?", "Will this investment grow or fray social trust?", "Do investment policies include lessons from the marginalized?"...

"Faith commitments"

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences also pushes for the need to integrate the principles of CST into the entire process of a company's investments in increasingly complex contexts. "Markets are forever frenetic and so can be all-consuming of attention," one reads in *Mensuram Bonam*. "Each investor will have their own aims, and will bring to bear in their own way their faith-commitments to their decisions and practices," the authors of the document point out.

The preparation of *Mensuram Bonam* began back in 2016 when the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development formed a working group of about a dozen economists. More than 60 other experts in various fields related to finance, investment and ethics were also consulted. The text was on verge of being published in 2020, but some in the Vatican thought it

took a liberal line. So the project underwent a revision.

Two-trillion euros of "Christian money"

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development had hoped to publish it this past January, but that plan was scrapped at the last moment with the unexpected departure of its prefect, Cardinal Peter Turkson. The 74-year-old Ghanaian, who was named chancellor of both the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, took the text with him and published it "under the aegis" of the latter.

Although the reflection is still in its infancy, the stakes are high, and go far beyond the financial investments made by religious communities.

Some studies estimate that more than two-trillion dollars of "Christian money" is invested around the world, coming from both Christian institutions and believers. In the United States, some experts put the amount of diocesan savings coming from institutions linked to the Catholic Church as well as from the savings of practicing Catholics at 800 billion.

These enormous sums of money are proof, for the authors of *Mensuram Bonam*, that it is possible to use financial markets to promote Catholic Social Teaching and to exert pressure to encourage virtuous businesses and practices. This text, which is not strictly speaking part of the magisterium of the Catholic Church, is nevertheless an important step. It leaves some hoping for a more official document on the subject, this time directly signed by Pope Francis himself.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/ethics/vatican-sets-new-criteria-for-ethical-investments/16966>



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