The Acton Lecture on Religion and Freedom

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Catholicism and the Architecture of Freedom

George Pell

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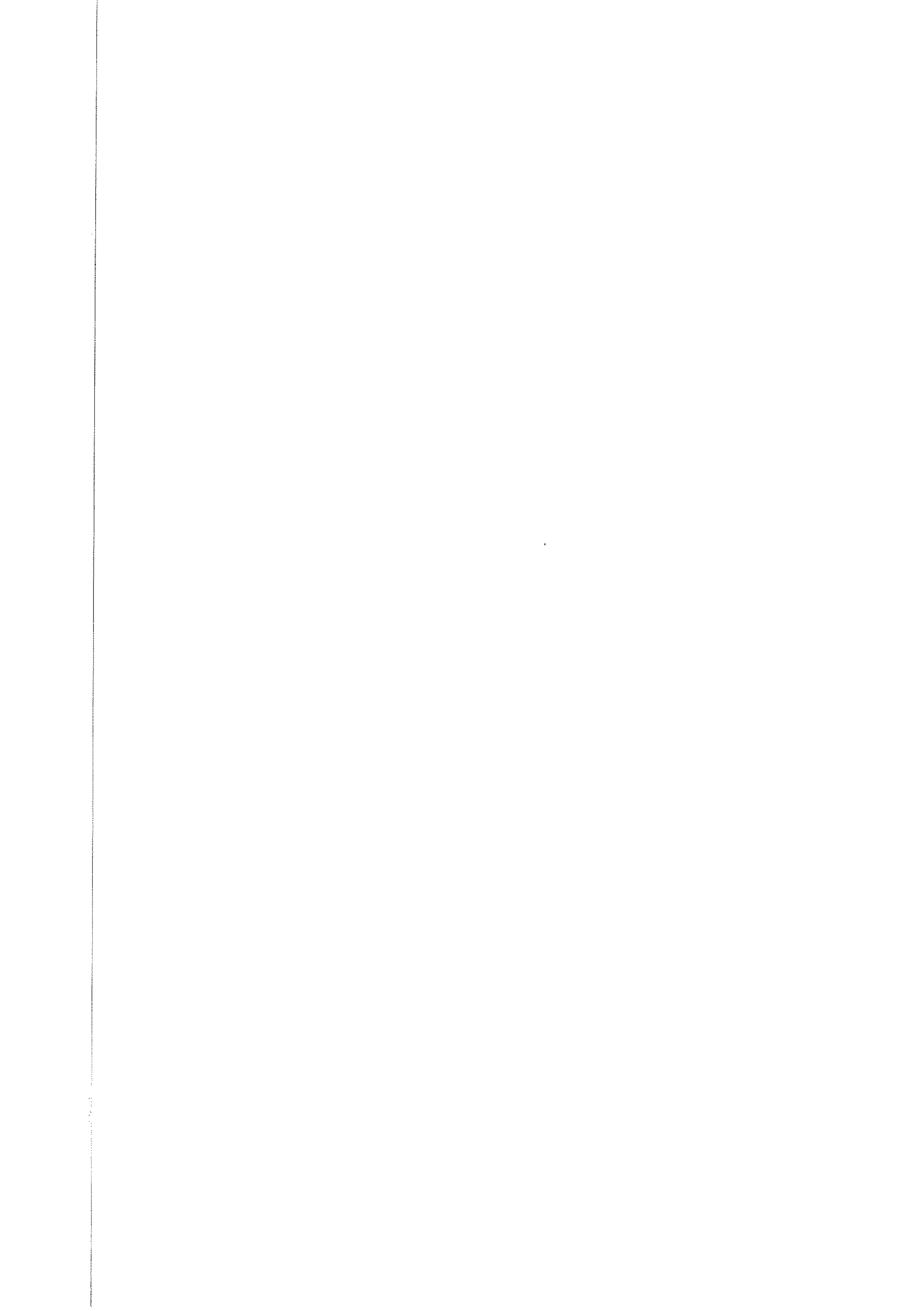

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Introductory Remarks

Samuel Gregg
Resident Scholar
The Centre for Independent Studies

Your Grace, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Centre for Independent Studies, I would like to welcome you to its inaugural Acton Lecture on Religion and Freedom. The lecture is named after Lord Acton, the eminent nineteenth century Anglo-German historian and religious thinker, who was deeply concerned with the meaning of freedom, the growth of the free society, and the role that religions should play in such societies.

The purpose of this lecture is not, I feel bound to stress, to discuss those internal matters of discipline and organisation with which all faiths and churches wrestle from time to time. There are plenty of forums for those discussions, but this is not one of them. Instead, the lecture serves to provide a public platform for prominent individuals from all faiths and churches to offer us their own particular reflections upon religion and freedom in the modern world, as well as the role of religion in free societies, so as to facilitate public discussion of such themes.

Why, some of you may ask, was it decided to inaugurate a public lecture on this particular subject? The answer really is quite simple. In Australia today, we hear a great deal from the various faiths and churches about questions of justice. Yet the meaning of freedom is a subject that is crying out for attention and is just as fundamental to the essence of religious belief and the emergence and maintenance of a truly free society as issues of justice.

This was brought home to me in a very vivid fashion a few years ago, when I was invited to talk at a church secondary school in England about ethics. During the discussion, I posed the question: 'is a destitute person entitled to steal from others?' Before any of the students had a chance to say anything, their teacher, a priest of one of the Christian churches I might add, responded by insisting very firmly that: 'The destitute person should do whatever he thinks is right'. 'But', I asked the priest, 'what do *you* think the destitute person should freely choose to do?' The priest responded by saying: 'He should do whatever he thinks is the right thing for him to do'.

Now you do not need to be a moral philosopher to detect the ethical relativism underlying that response. As the priest said to me afterwards, for him, morality was nothing more than a matter of subjective preference.

Of course, in a world where such an outlook prevails, words like 'good', 'evil', and 'justice' quickly become devoid of any objective content, and instead become filled with ideological rhetoric or whatever happens to be the latest transitory intellectual fashion. Even more seriously, in such circumstances freedom itself slowly but surely becomes little more than a synonym for a thinly disguised nihilism, in which the 'good' becomes merely whatever 'feels good' at the time, or, even more disturbingly, the expression of the naked will of whoever happens to be the stronger.

I am no fan of Nietzsche, but as the eminent Jesuit scholar, Cardinal Henri de Lubac, S.J., pointed out in his seminal book, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée* (1945), Nietzsche was at least honest enough to recognise that such positions logically follow from the separation of freedom and truth. The same separation also encourages people to deny two of the anthropological truths that give man his unique dignity and make him different from the animals: our capacity to know, through our use of reason, the truth about good and evil, the difference between them, as well as our subsequent capacity in light of such knowledge to choose freely to do good or to do evil. On these grounds, it would seem that the great twentieth century Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, was correct when he stated in his multi-volume tome, *Church Dogmatics* (1961), that the separation of freedom from truth leads inevitably to humanity's denial of its own uniqueness and dignity.

Such questions are, of course, extremely important when it comes to thinking about the nature of a free society. For if freedom and truth are mutually dependent – if it is indeed true that, as both Lord Acton and Count Alexis de Tocqueville put it, liberty is not about doing whatever we want, but rather freely choosing to do what we ought to do – then we have to ask what role should be played by the state, the legal system, religious faiths, and Edmund Burke's little platoons of civil society in maintaining this connection in democratic and pluralist societies.

This evening, we are privileged to have Dr. George Pell, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, addressing us on the subject of freedom and truth, and how Christianity, specifically the Roman Catholic tradition, has developed its thinking about such matters.

The Archbishop will be bringing some formidable skills to bear upon this task. Apart from being one of the better-known members of the Catholic hierarchy in Australia, Dr. Pell is unquestionably one of its leading

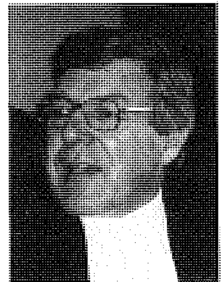
intellectuals and scholars. As well as being fluent in five languages, his academic qualifications include a Masters of Education from Monash, a Licentiate in Theology from Rome's Urban University, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in history from Oxford University. Alongside later stints as a visiting scholar at both Cambridge and Oxford, Dr. Pell was the Foundation Pro-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University between 1991 and 1995. He is also the author of many articles and papers on theological, moral, philosophical, and historical issues. He has been published in many secular and religious journals as well as by Oxford University Press, and has lectured widely at universities in the United States, England, New Zealand, and Australia. As well as being the Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr. Pell is also a Consultor to the Pontifical Council for the Family and a member of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was also a delegate to the Australian Constitutional Convention where he delivered what many commentators regarded as one of the most important and powerful speeches of the convention.

It gives me great pleasure, then, on behalf of the Centre for Independent Studies, to ask Dr. Pell to deliver the inaugural Acton Lecture on Religion and Freedom.

About the Author

George Pell is the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne. Born in Ballarat, he was educated at Loreto Convent and St. Patrick's College. He studied for the priesthood at Corpus Christi College, Werribee, and Propaganda Fide College, Rome, and was ordained a Catholic priest in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, 1966. As well as having several parish appointments, Dr. Pell was Director of the Aquinas Campus of the Institute of Catholic Education (1974-84), Principal of the Institute of Catholic Education (1981-84), and Rector of Corpus Christi College (1985-87). He was installed as Metropolitan Archbishop of Melbourne in 1996.

Dr. Pell has a Licentiate in Theology from Urban University, Rome, a Masters of Education from Monash University, and a Doctorate of Philosophy in history from the University of Oxford. A visiting Scholar at Cambridge (1983) and Oxford (1979), Dr. Pell was Foundation Pro-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University (1991-95). Since 1990, he has been a Member of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Dr. Pell is also a Consultor to the Pontifical Council for the Family, and was a Member of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (1990-95). Dr. Pell has been published widely in religious and secular journals, as well as by Oxford University Press, and lectured extensively in England, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia.



CATHOLICISM AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF FREEDOM

George Pell

I. Introduction

In 1894, the English Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, appointed Regius Professors of Modern History to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, neither of whom had published a book or would do so in their lifetimes. The first of these was Rosebery's old tutor at Oxford, Frederick Powell. The other had been debarred from entering Cambridge in 1850 by the unrepealed religious tests against Catholics. His name was John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, better known to us as Lord Acton.

Acton was a man of immense erudition, who became an inspiring public speaker. He is remembered today primarily for his aphorism that 'power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely' (Acton 1988: 519); changed by a contemporary cynic into 'power corrupts and the loss of power corrupts absolutely'. Even amongst churchmen, his influence has been significant. In September 1964, as a student in Rome during the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, I remember Cardinal Cushing of Boston reminding the Council Fathers of Acton's claim that 'freedom is the highest political end', a sentiment which the Council partly endorsed in its Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965). It is a pity that his great project for a universal history of liberty never eventuated.

Acton was born in 1834 into an old landed family of English Catholic recusants. His studies in France, Germany, Scotland, as well as England, helped him become a cosmopolitan figure, conservative and aristocratic in temper, although a Liberal rather than a Tory in politics. A largely silent member of the House of Commons for the Whigs for six years (1859-64), he was a trusted adviser to the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone. Acton drew his political philosophy from Edmund Burke, believing firmly in the importance of custom, tradition and what we today would call civil society or social capital as the guarantee and 'organic foundation' of individual freedom against the power of the state.

Throughout his life, Acton was a devout Catholic, while sceptical and often critical. He believed that faith had nothing to fear from history, and that Catholicism was by nature liberal rather than clerical and obscurantist. This outlook ran counter to the Catholic spirit of his times. The restoration of the Catholic hierarchy to England in 1850 reinforced an ultramontanism there that was at once triumphalist and defensive, and sometimes narrow and ungenerous in intellectual and theological matters. This was compounded by international developments which saw the end of the temporal power of the pope over the Papal States, the declaration of the First Vatican Council concerning papal infallibility in 1870, and the publication of Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), including condemnations of the separation of Church and state, religious freedom, and the proposition that the Roman Pontiff should reconcile himself with progress, liberalism and contemporary political life [*civilitas*]. It was not a good time for Catholic liberals.

Acton sought to apply to the story of the Church the critical historical scholarship he had learned in Germany, and he held firmly to the view that the Catholic scholar should be free to discuss without restriction all religious questions that were not defined doctrine. As a consequence, he was often in conflict with leaders of the Church, particularly during the late 1850s and the 1860s when he was editor of Catholic intellectual periodicals, such as *The Rambler* (his predecessor here had been John Henry Newman) and *The Home and Foreign Review*. The provocative and sometimes arrogant manner in which he asserted his views did not help his situation.

Although Acton had been a leading (although pseudonymous) critic of the First Vatican Council and had worked closely with his teacher, Fr. Johann Ignaz von Döllinger, in opposing a solemn definition of papal primacy and infallibility, he refused to join Döllinger in repudiating the conciliar definitions of the papal prerogatives. Thereafter, Acton turned away from active involvement in religious controversy and lived undisturbed in his faith until his death in 1902, although with a deepening sense of isolation from his co-religionists.

Acton was influenced by contemporary ideas of progress and human perfectibility, and although his optimism was tempered by his dark view of human nature and his wide historical knowledge, he came to see the course of at least modern history as largely one of progress towards freedom (Acton 1885/1987: 520-521). His thought here parallels the secular optimism of many of his contemporaries, including the highly influential theories of the German evolutionary idealist, G.W.F. Hegel, who believed

that truth, indeed, the whole universe, progressed through a spiritual dialectic: a succession of interactions between thesis and antithesis to produce a new synthesis. Karl Marx turned this upside down with his theory of a dialectical materialism progressing inevitably to the freedom of the workers' paradise – a myth which the brutal history of the twentieth century has completely extinguished. In his historical writings, Acton was always harsh on forces which opposed liberty, subjecting some popes to special condemnation and being no less severe on saints who countenanced the activities of the Inquisition. Unlike most late twentieth century Western thinkers, however, Acton's liberalism was rooted in Christianity and he saw religion as fundamental both in politics and history. As he once said: 'I fully admit that political rights proceed directly from religious duties, and hold this to be the true basis of Liberalism' (Acton 1885/1987: 516).

II. The Best and Worst of Times

What would Acton say now about freedom in our Western world nearly one hundred years after his death? Certainly, the terms of the debate have been changed radically since his time by the events of this best of centuries and worst of centuries.

At the time of Acton's death in 1902, the British Empire appeared to be at its zenith and European power was everywhere predominant. Today, the United States is the only superpower, and unusual among superpowers because it has no external territories and its empire is cultural and financial. Europe is still divided while Japan, China, and India have huge economies and could well assume superpower status in the twenty first century.

The nationalism which contributed so much to the destructive frenzy of the First World War has, at least in Europe, changed its focus in many places with Wales and Scotland, for example, replacing Britain, and a collection of small nations, most recently in ex-Yugoslavia, replacing the Habsburg Empire. Elsewhere, however, especially in the Middle East and Asia, the fires of nationalism burn fiercely, and sometimes dangerously for both internal critics and opponents as well as external enemies, especially when joined to Islamic fundamentalism. Regionalism and tribalism continue to present long-term threats to peace and freedom in, for example, Africa and possibly Indonesia.

The nation states are also constrained in new ways by the international financial markets and the international business conglomerates. Governments of countries with small economies such as Australia have

little room for manoeuvre, especially if they prefer to live beyond their means, or close to the limit.

Acton would have applauded the Western alliance with Stalin to defeat Nazism and Japan in the Second World War and would have been firmly on the side of the Free World in the Cold War against Communism, which concluded so unexpectedly and conclusively only in the last decade. He might not have been surprised by the triumph of the free market, of what Australians call 'economic rationalism', although I know no one who predicted its present almost universal preeminence. Acton would certainly have been pondering how long this will continue, whether the seeds of decay or collapse are internal or external, and to what extent the free market system is an example of social or economic Darwinism, except that the survival of the fittest still requires the defeated, the rejects, to retain the ability to consume and purchase (or does it?). Marx's prediction of the progressive impoverishment of the workers under capitalism has proved to be completely false, as most in the Western world live in unprecedented comfort, and enjoy standards of education, health, travel, and access to information never dreamt of previously.

In the Third World, almost everywhere except in parts of sub-Saharan Africa after the departure of the colonial powers, the preconditions for freedom have improved. The rise in life expectancy, the fall in infant mortality through better food and water, and improved health care have produced a huge rise in population (except in the Western world where no country is giving birth to a sufficient number of babies to keep the population numbers constant) and better living conditions. Billions have escaped from illiteracy, and university education, at many different levels of excellence, has proliferated. India is a successful democracy (with an English-speaking middle-class which provides a market for English books larger than in England itself) and democratic governments exist, sometimes precariously, throughout South America, Africa, Russia, and many parts of Asia as well as Europe and the English speaking world. This represents progress and improvement.

The greatest intellectual puzzle for liberals in twentieth century history, however, is the pervasive cruelty of the Communist empires in Russia, Eastern Europe, and China. Mass cruelty is neither rare nor novel in world history, but Communism was originally idealistic. It did set out to improve the living conditions of the proletariat and peasants, and tens of millions of communists struggled and died because they saw themselves in a fight for justice. From its origins, however, Communism was poisoned by its espousal of violence, hatred of God and religion, and systematic falsehood.

This is the other side to the twentieth century, and its nature and its significance for nineteenth cèntury liberal intellectuals like Acton is well captured in these lines from Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*:

> If the intellectuals in the plays of Chekov who spent all their time guessing what would happen in twenty, or thirty or forty years time had been told that in forty years interrogation by torture would be [routinely] practised in Russia; that prisoners would have their skulls squeezed within iron rings; that a human being would be lowered into an acid bath; that they would be trussed up naked to be bitten by ants and bedbugs; that a ramrod heated over a primus stove would be thrust up their anal canal ('the secret brand'); that a man's genitals would be slowly crushed beneath the toe of a jackboot; and that, in the luckiest possible circumstances, prisoners would be tortured by being kept from sleeping for a week, by thirst, and by being beaten to a bloody pulp, not one of Chekhov's plays would have gotten to its end because all the heroes would have gone off to an insane asylum (Solzhenitsyn 1986: 39).

By the most conservative estimates, at least one hundred million people have been killed this century by Communist governments. The largest number of deaths occurred in Russia and China, 'to the point where the million or so executed by the Khmer Rouge are well within the margin of error for the total' (Morson 1999: 21-30).

The Nazis also killed millions through internal oppression, as well as the forty to fifty million dead in the Second World War which they unleashed: the deadliest war in history. The best known example of this Nazi infamy is the Holocaust, the systematic extermination of Jews simply because they were Jews. In most Western eyes, this crime against humanity is the crime of the century.

This is certainly appropriate, but I regret the silence and negligence which surround Communist crimes. Nearly all the twelve year olds to whom I speak know of Hitler; very few have heard of Stalin. I could not even obtain a tax deduction for donations to the descendants of the prisoners of the Gulag who survive today – millions of them – in Siberia, originally from many different nations.

The immense killing power of the totalitarian state in this century has been increased by the superior technology of our age. But this is not the whole story. Stalin killed fourteen million in his war against the peasantry – as many as were killed in the First World War – through the primitive

means of starvation, beatings, and exposure. The same applies to most of Pol Pot's one or two million victims. Even the Nazis, who industrialised human extermination at Auschwitz and other places, managed to kill hundreds of thousands of Jews in Russia by the simple means of burying them alive. None of this required high technology. What it did require was a certain sort of '*social* technology' (Morson 1999: 21-30) – a combination of bureaucracy, rationalisation, ideology, and total power; a lethal combination of lying propaganda spread by modern communications, evil leaders, compliant followers as well as technology.

So much of this death and destruction has been caused by or in the fight against the savage anti-God parties of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Pol Pot. The struggle against these ideologies has been a struggle against lies: lies about human nature; lies about the worth of the human individual and certain ethnic or social groups; and, not least, lies about man's freedom. One of the great lessons of this century concerns the conditions under which human freedom and human dignity can flourish, and they do not flourish under regimes based on lies.

At this stage, one might be tempted to remark that we have wandered far from Acton's world, and indeed far from our local Australian concerns where the One Nation party seems the most significant threat (and not too threatening at that) to the freedom of some Australians. Australians, however, fought in both World Wars as well as the anti-Communist wars in Korea, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The Communists were never an electoral threat here, but were powerful in many unions during and after the Second World War.

Given our geography, we must be interested in Asia. Even in this age of jet travel and instant communications, we remain very far away from our rich and powerful English-speaking friends who protected us and indeed saved us in this century.

Australians are great travellers. We realise that we must know the wider world and be involved with it, not least to learn what might befall us if we betray our heritage of law, democracy and freedom. Most people are tempted to condone some levels of totalitarianism in what they judge to be a good cause; we are and will continue to be susceptible to these temptations – like everyone else. But more to the point, I feel, is the need to identify the forces in Western culture which will help us make sense of our changing world, especially as they touch on the themes of freedom and Christianity, the predominant religion of the West and in Australia where 70 per cent of the population still call themselves Christian.

III. Manent

One such thinker is the French philosopher, Pierre Manent, who teaches at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. A convert to Catholicism, he trained under the great French sociologist, Raymond Aron, and locates himself expressly in the tradition of Tocqueville.

For Tocqueville, the democratic revolution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century brought into existence the new human type that we call modern man. In describing the nature of the democratic revolution and what it portends for the future, Tocqueville was at once troubled and absorbed by the particular human type or ideal that it called into being, although he tells us very little about its origins. This provides Manent with his point of departure and in his most recently translated book, *The City of Man* (1998), he traces the intellectual developments in European history which were to make modern man possible. The title itself is a poignant contrast with the early fifth century work of St. Augustine, *The City of God*, which this North African bishop wrote to allay the fears of his fellow Christians after the city of Rome had been sacked by the barbarian Goths, the first such desecration for 800 years.

Manent is quite clear that the concept of modern man is no mere self-flattering conceit. Our historical predecessors can appear to us as an entirely different sort of animal, and we can feel ourselves to be separated from them by an enormous gulf. This is compounded by the wilful manner in which history is often misrepresented, as a means of both encouraging a sense of superiority over the past and of denying its hold on us either as authority or tradition.

This is particularly so, in Manent's view, when it comes to understanding the origins and meaning of Western culture and the dynamic at work within it. The West is the product of a dialogue between what Manent calls 'the party of nature' – that is, the classical inheritance of the Greco-Roman world – and 'the party of grace', by which he means the Revelation of the Christian religion. The party of nature emphasises pride, magnanimity, and the cultivation of the virtues that are natural to man. The party of grace, on the other hand, emphasises humility, renunciation, and the cultivation of the soul. The dialogue between them is 'fraught with conflict', and the tension that this generates gives Western culture its peculiar dynamism. But the dialogue was only made possible by an underlying 'solidarity' between the two 'parties', something which St.

Thomas Aquinas made explicit in his great philosophical synthesis of classical and Christian thought in the thirteenth century.

The dialogue, however, took a different course in the eighteenth century. Over time, the parties 'turned on one another like two grindstones' and sought to deny each other legitimacy. Modernity was born when the relationship between the two parties became cultural war, where victory is impossible and the two sides are pitted against each other to forge a new humanity: Revelation's demand for holiness and renunciation against the self-assertion of the party of the nature; the grace of freedom against the demands and restrictions of nature.

In this way, modern man emerged, who understands himself as someone above and beyond both nature and transcendence, and who rejects both those traditional authorities. Emphasising freedom against nature and animality against transcendence, he celebrates the fact that he, not any source of authority, creates his own values and ignores the concept of holiness as superfluous. All this is reflected in the world that modern man makes – a world dominated by technology and utility, where people are urged to become radical individualists who are their own supreme measure of things and incorrigible consumers, for whom comfort and good health are absolutes.

Manent's style of analysis is not Australian, or even typical of the English-speaking world. But it is illuminating even for Australia where the two grindstones of the Greco-Roman inheritance and an articulate public expression of Judaeo-Christianity have never been at war in quite the same way as the French have been intermittently since at least 1789. Both these traditions retain considerable influence in our parliaments and law courts and perhaps in business circles, though less among academics and the media, where a variegated secularism flourishes.

IV. Catholics and the Donald Duck Heresy

What contribution might the Catholic intellectual tradition make to this debate on freedom and the closely related question of human rights? How might the Catholic communities throughout the world work to maintain or develop and change the notion of freedom? Is the Christian concept of freedom much different from the freedom admired by Australians, if there is any such single concept? After all, Christians have been talking about freedom since the first New Testament writings of St. Paul, who was certainly very bossy with the communities that he led.

The Oxford historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin, in his celebrated 1958 lecture, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', followed Acton in mentioning that two hundred different meanings of the word freedom have been recorded (Berlin 1958/1998: 193), although he introduced the terminology of negative freedom (i.e., freedom to be or to act without external interference) and positive freedom (i.e., the ambition of most people to be their own master, to be self-directed, a subject with a capacity to do this rather than that). He also remarks that these two concepts of freedom can come into conflict (Berlin 1958/1998: 194, 204). Most Australians would interpret liberty in the classical English sense, following John Stuart Mill (unknowingly), as doing our own good in our own way, without hurting others, and without too much government interference, much less imprisonment or other forms of violence. We each want a fair go.

But once we try to implement these commonplace notions, we are confronted with an interesting series of dilemmas. Should a person be free not to wear a seat belt in a car? Should a woman be free to have an abortion? Does the father of the child have any rights here? Does the embryo, foetus, human being, or unborn child (however defined) have any rights? Should persons be free to perform 'mercy-killings' (euthanasia)?

These dilemmas also touch governments and business. To what extent should governments be morally neutral or indifferent, leaving the strong to triumph and the poor to go to the wall? Or should governments work for the common good? To what extent should businesses be free to maximise profits or do they have obligations to build up the positive freedom of their workers and customers through just family wages, reasonable hours, and accessible prices? Are business answers found entirely in economic imperatives and Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', or are there ethical limits? Is business constrained by virtue as well as economic necessity?

The old centrally-controlled Communist governments used the economy and every other aspect of the state apparatus ostensibly to work for equality. This was never achieved, although the living standards of hundreds of millions were raised, but at a terrible cost to freedom. With Communism's collapse, we now see more clearly that it is impossible to reconcile freedom with egalitarianism and even equality in most situations. Even with children, do we work for equality of opportunity or equality of outcomes? Or does a truly free society, or human nature itself, require that there cannot even be equality of opportunity?

These are hard questions. In order to throw a little light, I want to take up one theme from the writings of our philosopher-pope, the Polish John Paul II. He has the unusual advantage of having lived under the Nazis,

Communists, and in the free world, and to have experienced this as a lay university student and conscript to forced labour, then as a seminarian, priest, and bishop. He went into the conclave which elected him pope reading a Marxist intellectual journal.

John Paul II is the first pope to give a thorough critique of culture. He is popularly portrayed as driven primarily by an interest in specific and tough moral norms: against abortion, contraception, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc., despite his powerful encyclicals on public life and the economy. But the truth is that from his early days as a young philosophy teacher, one of his central preoccupations has been the topic of freedom and responsibility. His major ethical contribution to date is, in fact, a critique of Western culture's view of freedom and a demonstration of freedom's connection with truth, particularly the truths expressed in the natural moral law.

The Pope believes that one section of affluent Western thought (Manent's modern man) has radically misconceived freedom. Freedom is generally understood by them on the model of a smorgasbord of options: the more options we have, the greater our freedom. No matter if the options on the table include fatty foods, foods low in nutrition, foods full of sugar and preservatives or even poisons: freedom is simply having the widest possible range of options and making one's *own* choice, regardless of whether or not this is actually good for oneself and others. Any attempt to influence choice-making – law, duties, rights, religion – is seen as an unfortunate restraint to be resisted.

The Pope's own view is that there is no true conflict between freedom of choice and moral law. All Christians believe, despite Freud, that each human person has a rational intellect and a free will, rather than being 'a jungle chaos of hidden emotions and inner conflicts with an irrational character'. We are free, in different measures, to build slowly an integrated personality, without gross contradictions. But this is a life-long spiritual quest. God-given law is not some arbitrary, legalistic imposition but consists rather of truths meant to help human persons make good moral choices and in this way truly to fulfil themselves. In this alone will they achieve the dignity of persons who pursue their true end freed from subservience to arbitrary feelings and obsessions in a free choice for the good.

Ultimately, then, the view of positive freedom that I take is not one of increasing options and reducing guidance concerning them, but one of encouraging intelligent deliberation about which options best accord with real human fulfilment. Unlimited negative freedom, the absence of external restraints, would produce chaos in our society as surely as it would on our

roads. A key need for thinking about freedom today is to explore further this notion of genuine human fulfilment in the face of the many crude versions of subjectivism and relativism sweeping our society.

One practical conclusion from this is that Catholics should stop talking about the primacy of conscience. This has never been a Catholic doctrine (although this point generally cuts little ice). Moreover, such language is not conducive to identifying what contributes to human development. It is a short cut, which often leads the uninitiated to feel even more complacent while 'doing their own thing'.

Sometimes primacy of conscience advocates also insist that the Church apologise for the crimes against freedom committed by Christians in, for example, the Crusades, the Inquisition or against the Aborigines. But against what standard might these deeds be judged? Who is to say that our conscience is superior to theirs? It is only when we concede that our consciences stand under the principles of truth and justice, or perhaps under the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures, that we can begin to consider the prudence of apologies for particular crimes.

Another way of explaining the task of all in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is to insist that we must resist what the English historian, Felipe Fernandez Armesto, calls the Lone Ranger heresy and the Donald Duck heresy. In the Lone Ranger syndrome, the hero is always an outsider who spurns society, who will not acknowledge that genuine individuality always needs reciprocity. Even well intentioned Lone Rangers are dangerous and alienating.

Of greater import for our purposes is the Donald Duck heresy, which rests squarely on the fallacy of overwhelming natural virtue. All you have to do to fulfil yourself is follow your natural impulses. Donald Duck always does this and always gets into trouble. It is a heresy that sanctifies mistakes, provided one is genuine, being oneself.

Donald Duck is amusing, even lovable up to a point and I do not want this intriguing but trivial example to distract us from the dangers already around us, especially visible in the United States. Here, we need to pause because what happens in North America today recurs on many occasions in Australia at a later date.

The recent Woodstock happening, held in New York State at an old B52 bomber base – inappropriately called Rome – is particularly disturbing. Unfortunately, all the rioting, arson, looting of $170,000 from a mobile bank, drug taking, and gang rapes at the thirtieth anniversary of Woodstock '69 did not represent an untypical lapse; it was not just another example of the passing foolishness of youth, but an inevitable progression from the

first love fest – as sure an indication of social disintegration as the Columbine High School massacre.

Thirty years of myth-making should not conceal the darker side of the first Woodstock, celebrating peace and love. As one participant said, there was a shortage of toilets, mud, delays and drug overdoses everywhere as well as the inevitable measure of sexual exploitation; but it was peaceful. The participants of both gatherings rejected their parents' values. This time, it was the pacifism of the sixties which was spurned as more than a dozen bonfires of trucks and tents blazed, and mobs used iron bars to smash and trash. A violent minority, no doubt influenced by an ugly mixture of drink and drugs, were heavily into fighting as well as fornication. Either the restraints of thirty years ago were no longer effective, or the self-hatred, anger, and alienation of the destructive minority were stronger and incited rather than restrained by the music. The last song of the gathering, as the ambulance sirens wailed through the smoke and the mayhem, boomed out from a rock group called 'Cracker'. Its chorus summed up the scene: 'Don't f— me up with peace and love' (Franklin 1999: 11).

It would be unfair to the United States and too bleak and pessimistic to conclude at this point. The violent were only a small part of the 300,000 people at Woodstock '99. Woodstock, in turn, is only a small part of the United States and, very definitely, Australia is different from North America.

In Australia, we already have a long tradition of stable government and stable communities. We are part of that proud minority of nations whose birth was not accompanied or followed by war or violence. We cherish our freedom and protecting these freedoms is, for the moment at least, the major issue in the debate about the republic. We value the separation of powers, the benign separation of church and state, and practise the politics of persuasion. Political parties regularly move from government into opposition, and vice versa; and all sections of society, including the religious groupings, understand that, in a democracy, you have to be prepared to have the majority decide against you. In other words, there is at present no discernible and significant threat to our traditional freedoms. Neither George Orwell's *1984* nor Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is on the horizon.

This is not a claim to Australian innocence: not a denial of our mistakes and crimes with the Aborigines; of the sad number of abortions each year; or of the high level of youth unemployment. Nor does it deny the possibility of a new permanent underclass emerging, battered by family

breakdown, unemployment, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and sexual irresponsibility. In fact, the greater danger to freedom is likely to come from the evil consequences of spreading social disintegration, rather than from the exponents of political correctness imposing their precepts on us all. But it is a claim that we have a culture of freedom that we cherish, and a tradition of robust, sometimes confrontational dialogue that rests confidently on our social solidàrity.

Nor does any major religious group in Australia make claims to innocence, least of all the Catholic Church. But the Christian contribution to shaping Australian consciousness has been profound.

There is an architecture of freedom, which is a human construct, not a natural ecology, built on that longing for freedom which is one of the hallmarks of our time (John Paul II 1995: pars.2-4). Perhaps the Catholic task is not only to teach and explain that life is good and meaningful, but that just as peace is the fruit of justice, so true freedom requires truth and is the fruit of consistently striving for what is good. The public benefits and consequences of Christian living need to be spelled out and defended at the ballot box. The dialogue with tradition should continue within our contemporary pluralism, while we work relentlessly to show that the Woodstock conception of liberty only traps people into 'the jungle chaos of their hidden emotions', damaging and sometimes destroying them and their victims.

The Christian tradition reveres the martyrs, those who sacrifice their freedom and indeed their life for a higher cause. Despite their misfortune, we claim that in their soul, their heart of hearts, they retain not only their integrity, but their personal freedom to choose. For all people of integrity, the Truth has set them free.

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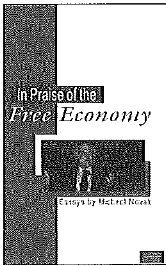

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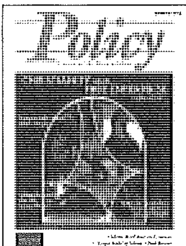

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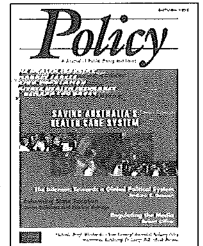

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DR. GEORGE PELL is the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne. Following a Masters of Education from Monash University, a Licentiate in Theology from Rome's Urban University, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in history from Oxford University, he has been a visiting scholar to both Cambridge and Oxford. He has been published in many secular and religious journals as well as by Oxford University Press, and has lectured widely at universities in the United States, England, New Zealand, and Australia.

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