

THE CHANGED DIRECTION OF THE RIVER OF RESPECT FOR LIFE

In the Christian Year, today is the supreme respect-for-life day, the day celebrating Life's successful defiance of death. How many times "life" appears in the Easter hymns!....In the mail yesterday I received Ken Woodward's unbound copy of the just-published THE GOSPEL OF LIFE (Vatican Press; original, EVANGELIUM VITAE), Pope Jn. Paul II's simple, profound, utterly biblical* and devout life-affirmation against "the culture of death" (contraception, abortion, infanticide, murder, war, suicide, euthanasia, fetal-tissue experimentation, capital punishment would be the complete list, but see below for the range the text deals with). *In referencing, not always in content.

1 Two wrongs don't make a right, but two **estrangements** may put one's feet on a right path. For reasons of heritage, experience, & study, I'm estranged from Rome. That is something less than being alien to it: as Rome's in the heritage behind my Protestant heritage, I've an indirect offspring relation to the Roman Catholic Church: I can be estranged from, but never alien to, a parent. But the flowing years of my life's river have humbled me with thoughts of the corruptibility of all things human. One form of corruption is the child's arrogance against the parent, & I have known oh so much of that in Protestant antiCatholicism, which I still must guard against when speaking of Rome & her products, including this book. For this caution, I am helped by my increasing estrangement from the particular Protestant church in & through which I live, viz. the United Church of Christ, a "liberal" denomination in all the bad as well as good senses of the word. In the NT, in history, & in the world today, the gospel of Jesus Christ is a many splended & messy thing: I pray to add to the splendor & not to the mess.

2 Look at the life-situation difference between author & reviewer. The Pope is a hero of resistance to communism, his life many years under threat in his native Poland: many years, in my native America, my life never under palpable threat (though my livelihood was), I resisted the ignorant-arrogant anticommunism such as mired us in Vietnam. Karol Wojtyla directly faced, in preaching & living the gospel under a communist government, a culture of death. That confrontation deepened & intensified his commitment to the **culture of life**, vita/bios against mors/thanatos. Indeed, in my opinion he's overdone it: life, human bidlife, deserves less respect than he has for it. For respect is zero-sum: you put a lot here, you've less to put there. You have too much respect for human biolife from zygote to grave, you don't have enough respect for our fragile planet's life-**sustainability**.

3 Back to Woodward. In his intro to my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT, he felt the need to say no to me at only two points, which I mention here because they are precisely pertinent to this book-review: Elliott "and I part company on the morality of abortion, and he is rather more pious toward the environment than I am" (underlinings mine). The heart of this Thinksheet, in the metaphor of its title, is my conviction that as rivers sometimes change their courses, the ecological crisis should change the course of humanity's respect for life. We must change, I believe, from an environment-unconscious, myopic, species-narcissistic respect for human biolife to an environment-conscious respect for the planet as organism (though not necessarily with Gaia mystique). What we were once single-minded about (take care of human life, & the environment will take care of itself), we must come to see as a **trade-off**.

4 (It's now 3.16.99! Why the delay in finishing this Thinksheet? I wanted to give a closer & prayerful look at the Pope's book--which now I've done.) P20: The Pope decries "reckless tampering with the world's ecological balance"--which causes "the spreading of death." Unrestrained population increase, here bewailed by the UN's Pop. Communication International, asked on a recent poll for yes/no on this: "All men and women who want birth control and family planning services should have

World population:

- The first billion took from the dawn of humanity until 1830
- The second billion took only 100 years -- from 1830 to 1930
- Three billion more arrived in the next 60 years and
- *The next billion will take only 13 years (yes, just 13 years!) -- unless there is a tremendous effort to slow world birthrates!* +

access to them." The Pope marks this statement "no": an instance, I think, of "reckless tampering": artificially, modern medicine increased the flow of flesh & now (by conception-&-birth control) can decrease it. It's anthropolatry (I say in this 10.12.95 CCT letter) & biolatry to favor the former artifices (keeping babies & the infirm alive) & forbid the latter. And it's **cruel**: yes, nature will shut down the human faucet (eg, by the scarcity of potable water & arable soil) when (they say) earth's population reaches 7 or 8 billion. But how in Christ's name can we justify the calamity of that vast dying-off? Can we preach (as the Pope does) respect for life without strenuous fresh efforts to enact respect for the biosphere, life's home? This is the question I'm raising in this Thinksheet's title & body.

5 The Pope wants to have it both ways: abortion as the murder of countless millions brutalizes society, & (surprise!) society is becoming less brutal, with "a praiseworthy human and moral sensitivity and a greater respect for life [p48]." FACT: In many places on earth, low abortion correlates with low quality of life; and high abortion (ca.50% in Japan) correlates with high quality of life & high valuing of children.

6 ^{p4n} The book admits that "the Gospel of life" is not a biblical phrase, yet we find the phrase often in contexts where Scripture & Tradition have just plain "gospel," which has a wider meaning. The Pope's rhetorical spin on "gospel" ratifies his parallel phrase, "the culture of life," which then is used polemically against "the culture of death" (which defines me--as pro-choice, pro-capital-punishment, pro-assisted-suicide--as an enemy of life & gospel & Pope). E.g., note on p48 (1) the Pope's novelty in using his "Gospel of life" where the canonical-catholic tradition would expect "gospel," & (2) his comprehensive claim for his phrase: "the *Gospel of life* includes everything that human experience and reason tell us about the value of human life, accepting it, purifying it, exalting it and bringing it to fulfilment." It's a clever debater's trick that makes me smile, but I frown when I realize that the Pope's novelty has become foundational to much of the rhetoric of teaching & preaching among Roman Catholics today.

7 The Pope models for us all the devotional reading (*lectio divina*) of Scripture, but I'm distressed when he precritically **overreads** texts to make doctrinal points. E.g., Eccl.3.11 cannot honorably be used as "the first notion of immortal life" (p56): I have examined the Heb., Gk., Lat., & (Jew., RC, & Prot.) Eng. 20th-c. translations, & there's general agreement on the text's meaning (in context): Even though God has given us time-sense, we can't figure out God's doings from beginning to end. The Pope specialized in philosophy, not Bible; he needs specialists' help on Bible. (I'm not demeaning Eccl.3.11. It beautifully & powerfully gives us [NJB, a Catholic tr.] "an awareness of the passage of time.")

This Thinksheet's concern with the Pope's habit of **overreading** Scripture to support his point-of-view: "life" passages get read as "*pro-life*," an aggressive over-valuing (even sacralizing) of human life, a fanatic defending of every human organism (including zygotes in petri dishes). The syllogism is simple(-minded): (1) Human life is sacred; (2) The sacred is inviolable; (3) Therefore, human life is inviolable (which rules out war, lethal self-defense, abortion, infanticide, capital punishment, [assisted] suicide, murder, laboratory experiments with living human tissue, prenatal surgery involving death, even contraception). Totalistic!

Balancing respect for life and for Earth

Lloyd McDonald's letter (Oct. 8) insults me. He says, in effect, that my position on abortion makes me unfit to serve on the Domestic Violence Community Roundtable.

Indeed, he says, in effect, that if I were on the anti-battering panel, I "should be removed and replaced" by somebody with "strong respect for all human life, born and unborn." The fact that I am what he calls an "abortion supporter" makes me more compassionate toward battered women, more determined to stop the battering -- not less.

Among the pope's last words as he left our country was a phrase we heard often from him the past few days -- respect for all human life "from conception to natural death." That, I say, amounts to anthropolatry, the

worship of our species. Unintentionally hypocritical, the pope accuses Americans of excessive individualism and attributes abortion support to that hypertrophy.

Does he not notice that his form of excessive individualism is to give such high respect to the individual fetus as to blind him to the growing cancer of humanity on the body of the biosphere?

Two can play at the game of more-compassionate-than-thou. It's a game nobody can win, while the quality of planetary life declines with the increasing biomass of humanity. We must learn to balance respect for human life with respect for what supports human life, God's good Earth.

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8 In contrast to Jewish, Christian hermeneuts tend to **overread** "image" (3x in Gn.1.26-27) & "likeness" (v.27). My excuse for repeating this (which has appeared twice before in Thinksheets) is that in this book, the Pope has exploited to the full this overreading. Instead of being the biblical analogy that child is like parent (as in the cases of Adam/Seth [Gn.5.3, "likeness" & "image"] & of God/Adam [Gn.1.26, same two words; v.27, 2x "image"]), the Pope treats the situation as a homology, an ontological upgrading from the analogical: the alleged entity "soul" is the being of the "image"/"likeness": God is eternal, so we are immortal (despite the specific denial of this in both Testaments [Gn.3.22-23; 1Tim.6.16--though "eternal life" is by grace-gift available through Christ]).

The Pope on this is guilty of two further **excesses**:

(1) Unlike the Bible's, his image-likeness doctrine is gender-free: women & men are equally "made in the image of God." If image-likeness is a big deal, I wouldn't deny "image" to women! But since it's no big deal to Paul, he can use "image" flexibly--e.g., in 1Cor.11.7 denying it to women. (Gn.1.27 appears to reflect both Jewish points of view here: 1st & 2nd clauses, as 1Cor.11.7 [though NRSV corrupts the 2nd clause from "him" to "them"], 3rd clause probably wo/man both created in God's image, though "male and female he created them" can be read as independent of the image-analogy.)

(2) Again unlike the Bible, the Pope uses "image" as a sanction against capital punishment, quoting from a passage (Gn.9) in which the Bible uses "image" as a sanction *for* capital punishment! This distortion is so patent & egregious that I must quote in full v.6 (NAB, a well-known RC translation, + footnote): "If anyone sheds the blood of man [Heb. "adam," 3x], by man shall his blood be shed; For in the image of God has man been made." Here the death penalty is argued for precisely because the creature killed bore God's image: no image of God, no murder, no capital punishment. On p69, the Pope uses his doctrine of "the sacredness of life" to affirm that "God is the sole Lord of this life" & man is not to end it. I don't mind his novel notion, but I do mind here his abuse of Gn.9.6 as warrant: this verse clearly contradicts the Pope's novelty, for it states that man (not God as "the sole Lord of this life"!) is to end the murderer's life. To spiritualize a text (as the Pope frequently does) is one thing: to *reverse* the meaning of a text is quite another & (if done knowingly) reprehensible....On this verse, here's H.C.Leupold, EXPOSITION OF GENESIS (Wartburg/42) 333-4: "The crime [of murdering a creature made in God's image] is so great that such a one actually forfeits his own right to life." So here capital punishment is not permitted, it is specifically divinely demanded as the ultimate sanction wielded by man on God's behalf, government in this being "properly authorized by God." Government being "a divine institution,....this power of life and of death is bestowed upon man only in an official capacity....It has remained for the shortsightedness of our day to claim that this verse is in conflict with the basic word of the Decalogue, 'Thou shalt not kill,'" which speaks to "personal morality," not (as in our verse, Gn.9.6) "official conduct."....Further on this verse, a Jewish commentary (THE PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS, ed. by J.H.Hertz [NY: Metzudah/41], I.32): The vs. declares "the native dignity of man" as "created in the image of God": "he can never be reduced to the level of a thing or chattel; he remains a *personality*, with inalienable human rights. To rob a man of these inalienable rights constitutes an outrage against God. It is upon this thought that the Jewish conception of Justice, as respect for human personality, rest." Sounds like our Pope *except* that "inalienable" here (contra the Pope) means that government-unauthorized persons are not to deprive anyone of life. (The same restriction of "unalienable" applies to a U.S. Government founding document: The government has the right to deprive criminal citizens of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.")....C.F.Keil & F.Delitzsch, BIBLICAL COMMENTARY ON THE OT (Eerdmans/49), I.151-3: Gn.9.6 places "in the hand of man His [God's] own judicial power. 'This was the first command,' says Luther, 'having reference to the temporal sword. By these words temporal government was established, and the sword placed in its hand by God.' The command does not sanction revenge, but lays the foundation for the judicial rights of the divinely appointed 'powers that be' (Rom.13.1)....If murder was to be punished with death because it destroyed the image of God in man, it is evident

that the infliction of the punishment was not to be left to the caprice of individuals, but belonged to those alone who represent the authority and majesty of God, i.e. the divinely appointed rulers." Thus God laid "the foundation for a well-ordered civil development of humanity, in accordance with the words of the blessing, which were repeated in vs.7, as showing the intention and goal of this new historical beginning."....I'm tempted to quote later commentators. Earlier or later, I found none supporting the Pope's use of the "image" to proscribe the death penalty, a proscription secular-political in origin (& baptized by the Pope without honorable biblical warrant).

(NB: In the NT, "image" is used far less of humanity's bearing the divine stamp than of Jesus who, while uniquely bearing the divine stamp, in the incarnation took our stamp upon himself.)

9 In the book, the Pope uses "life" in a mantra-like way: the word serves as the verbal center, almost shrine, to which & from which all thought proceeds. The endless repetition of the word has a hypnotic effect upon the unaware, though rhetoricians will deconstruct the performance as an instance of the **fallacy of the ambiguous middle**: "life" is a bridge with religion at one end & ethics-politics at the other, the semantic traffic under the orator's (the Pope's) complete control: at either end of the bridge, he can make "life" mean whatever he wants to by mining & by imports from the other end. (I remarked this phenomenon in my '43 ThD dissertation, "'LIFE' in the Fourth Gospel: An Illustration of a Comprehensive Interpretive Methodology.") Catholic scholars exposing this trick would be in deep doodoo; we nonCatholic scholars are easily disposed of as anti-Catholic or at least antipapal. Authoritarian organizations, by having weak or no self-correcting structures/processes, accumulate tricks & sanctify them as truths.

10 Pp77-9: The Pope grants that the Bible has "no direct and explicit calls to protect human life at its very beginning, specifically life not yet born," but says abortion "is completely foreign to the religious and cultural thinking of the People of God." The statement is false if the Jews are included in "the People of God": abortion to save the mother's life is in the earliest layer of the Talmud, & "Jewish law extends full human rights only to a born and viable being" (art. "Abortion" in THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE JEWISH RELIGION). But the Pope (insultingly) sees only one motive for abortion: "caprice," whim.

11 Four days ago, a late-stage ALS patient phoned to have me confirm what he'd read, viz. that in extremis I recommend fasting unto death. He & his wife were comforted when I did indeed confirm that conviction of mine. But the Pope (p83) condemns all forms of suicide as "arbitrary" (with connotation of caprice), lamely using Ac.17.28 to support his view that "the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone." (Why doesn't it bother him that that stricture is impossible to derive from this text?)....**Absolute tabus** are spiritually, rhetorically, ethically, politically powerful (e.g., in Nazi philosophy, everything Jewish was absolutely evil): the Pope's absolute tabu against human interference with spermata seeking ova (as also against other life-process interferences) is powerful in the way all other fanaticisms are powerful. Powerful, & frightening: frightening because tending to oppression & cruelty & uncritical (mindless) submission. Thus by his bridge process of logic (§9, above) the Pope can arrive at his absolute (p85): "The Law [of God] as a whole fully protects human life."....This reverential attitude toward human flesh from male/female single cells to corpses smells to me like idolatry. And like wicca: "The image of the Goddess inspires us to see...our bodies as sacred" (Starhawk, THE SPIRAL DANCE [H&R/89] 24)....The Pope's tabu is as comprehensive as his term "human life," which he uses in an unbiblical way vis-a-vis "Thou shalt not kill" (p91): "the commandment not to kill human life," an expanded meaning in violation of the Decalog's historical context & therefore of honest usage of the scriptural sanction. The Pope's extensive use of Scripture to buttress his idiosyncratic-expansive doctrine of "human life" (1) impedes honorable hermeneutics & (2) pollutes Catholic doctrine with "the doctrines of men" (Mt.15.9, M.7.7). (It is simply untrue that [p97] "the Church's Tradition has always consistently taught the absolute and unchanging value of the commandment 'You shall not kill'." The Church has supported killing for murder-adultery-heresy.)

12 As in the case of water, truth cannot flow when it is **frozen** into authoritative formulas officially enforced by the community (here, the Roman Magisterium & buttressing structures & officers, right now Card. Ratzinger). In their need for order, all movements have a centralizing-catholicizing tendency, including (1) the selection of a canon of limited official literature, (2) an accumulating body of at least semi-official interpretation, & (3) offices (structures & officers) for the continuing control of interpretation (the hermeneutic authority).

E.g., in 1803 the U.S. Supreme Court highhandedly (& without ground in our founding documents) declared itself the official interpreter of the Constitution--Amendments. Last evening at Woods Hole, in lecturing on the comparative hermeneutics of Constitution (2 centuries) & Bible (2 millenia), Jaroslav Pelikan spoke of this tendency to normativity, producing an authoritative way of reading a foundational text. Applying this insight to his own field, he with a slight smile used the phrase "the papacy of biblical scholars." He implied that what prevents this normativity from sliding into **tyranny** is assiduous attention to "alternative modalities of interpretation." (Before the meeting began, a wise old counselor said to me, who'd brought up the book this Thinksheet is commenting on, "What the Pope calls 'life' feels to me more like death.")

13 Today there's a slight movement of Protestant clergy (who live amid the chaos of change with "alternative modalities of interpretation") to flee to Rome under the protective roof of the Vatican-frozen "truths" & hierarchical order. One such Lutheran minister (p5 FT Apr/99) defends her shift from Lutheran clergy to Roman laity: "Faith in Christ and faith in the Church is one act of faith, and the Roman Catholic Church is the truest manifestation of the Church." Accepting the rigid RC doctrine that abortion is murder, she rejected her church & ordination: "The ELCA is an accomplice in the murder of unborn babies....I personally felt compelled to separate myself from 'evildoers'." On the positive side, she became convinced that she'd go to hell if she didn't flee to Rome--a conviction she supports by reference to the Magisterium's *Lumen Gentium* 14: "Whosoever, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter or remain in her, could not be saved." Two **absolutisms** here: (1) The RC absolutely frozen interpretation that abortion is murder (on which today, 3.20.99, in Boston, four RC hierarchs [an archbishop & three bishops] are demonstrating against the death penalty, soon to be voted on by our state legislators); & (2) Go to hell if, knowing the truth about the true Church, you leave or don't join (the old "Outside the church, no salvation")....CONCLUSION: "Hell" is better: I prefer the fresh air of freedom (at the price of chaos) to the stuffy atmosphere of dogmatic-tyrannous order.^{*} Two mentalities: I'm not antiCatholic, but I am against the mentality that sees freedom as more threat than promise, & order as more promise than threat. So I'm more than wary of the Pope's phrase "respect for life": what he means by it amounts to *disrespect* for life, the life of the mind & of the biosphere (though I respect the personal life-experiences on the basis of which he arrived at his present fanaticism & grant his basic premise that biblical religion, straight through to resurrection, is [in the broad sense!] pro-life).

14 Said a retired Methodist clergyman to me at lunch today, "I now have fewer beliefs & more faith than ever before." Said I, "Beliefs are ideas & faith is trust, & the primary function of beliefs is to deepen & broaden trust." He was responding to what Pelikan said last evening to my question-from-the-floor, "Do you believe the Bible now less or more than when you began your studies?" Instantly P. said "Yes"--which, I said, was my response to the same question (asked by Seward Hiltner, a father of the pastoral-counseling movement) I faced in a doctrinal oral in which P. had asked me 11 questions. More, in the sense of the canon's infallibly granting me access to God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit; less, in the sense of reliance on peripheral details. I thought of Monsignor Ronald Knox's Ps.90.12 in his THE HOLY BIBLE: A TRANSLATION FROM THE LATIN VULGATE (Sheed & Ward/44,56): "Teach us to count every passing day, till our hearts find wisdom." Jn. Paul II is, I have no doubt, a wise old Christian of profound faith-trust for which I can & do honor him (while not being able to

honor, or even respect, some of his mental processes & opinions: his sentimentalism about what he calls "life" impedes the hardheaded thinking of which he's capable).

15 Two uses of the concept of **extension**: (1) I extend the "rights" category to include women's control of their bodies (there being no additional "human being" till the cutting of the umbilical cord) & the biosphere's sustainability needs. What the Pope (p112) calls "the Church's Tradition" opposed the former & was unaware of the latter. (We're not surprised to find [p105] him saying that a woman's "own health...can never justify" abortion.) (2) The Pope extends "Thou shalt not kill" to include abortion (p108): The Bible shows "such great respect for the human being in the mother's womb" as to "require as a logical consequence that God's commandment 'You shall not kill' be extended to the unborn child as well." (In the same ¶, he grants that the B. doesn't mention abortion. As for that "respect," he extends from specific instances in Scripture [e.g., Jer.1.4-5; Ps.71.6; L.1.39-45] to the general notion; as elsewhere [p103] he extends from God's omniscience, his total awareness of all, first to a specific case [Ps.139.16] & then to the inference of "the unspeakable crime of abortion"--though he'd not use this logic, as it would be logical to, in the case of any other creature.)

In view both of the Pope's faulty logic & his failure to honor my two extensions, I can't be impressed by his elaborate demonstration of the "unanimity" in the Church's anti-abortion "doctrinal and disciplinary tradition" (p112) or by his assertion (same p) that "this doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God." "Natural law" is a hat into which you can put the rabbit of your choice, & the Bible is silent on the subject (& can be made to speak only by eisegesis, which is a Greek word for putting your rabbit in a literary text)..... In the public sphere, Catholic prelates in opposing abortion stand on the "natural law" foot so they can claim their anti-abortion need not have the support of religion --an argument as bogus as the fundamentalist claim that "creation science" can be taught in public school because it's not religious! (Against euthanasia [p119], the same two sanctions are applied: "natural law and the written word of God.") (Suicide [p120] also "represents a rejection of God's absolute sovereignty over life and death" [a notion he weakly adduces from Wis.16.13 & Tob.13.2]), & assisted suicide is an "injustice" & [next p] "a false mercy." (P138: Democracy should be qualified by "the 'natural law' ['the moral law'] written in the human heart.") (P133: "a civil law authorizing abortion or euthanasia ceases by that very fact to be a true, morally binding civil law...."Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws....")

16 Ethics distinguishes among absolutes, relatives, & relative absolutes. The Pope's "absolutes" category is larger than mine. As absolutes are enforced by ultimate sanctions, relatives are so by sanctions of consequence. Therefore, when the Pope puts abortion & euthanasia in his negative-absolutes category, consequences-thinking is irrelevant (p137). We who do not absolutize those issues see the Pope's absolutization as irrational (the rational consideration of consequences being ruled out) or, to use another word, **fanatic**. Two consequences of this absolutism are (1) the bombing of reproductive-services clinics & (2) Catholic intellectuals' debating whether our democracy has come to an "end" (FT).

17 Christianity is a trunk (the Faith) & its branches (the Cultures). In the Faith, I am one with Catholics; but my Culture centers in the **will** to say yes to the Lord *as I understand his will*--not (as Catholicism East) in the Resurrection nor (as in Catholicism West) in the Crucifix(ion). For me, tabu-shame-guilt-sin are to be understood primarily vis-a-vis the abuse not of life but of will, the failure to decide-&-act as intelligently & compassionately as one can manage in the lights of Creation, Crucifixion, & Resurrection. I'm glad that the Pope & I are of the same trunk-Faith: I'm sad that I see no hope of reconciling our two branch-Cultures, but I pray for what I find no rational basis to hope on. He would find me an idolater of will (a voluntarist), as I find him an idolater of matter, specifically human matter (a hyloanthropolatrist). To each other, we must appear as evil influences in ethics (behavior), though at least I see him as a good influence in religion (devotion & evangelism).



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At the beginning of my #2728, you may have noticed our mutual friend Ken Woodward as the source of my prepublication copy of the Pope's GOSPEL OF LIFE. I thank you for your FIRST THINGS review of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT--also, my guess is, Ken's idea!

Correctly, your review surmised that I (as a Protestant) am not deeply enmeshed in current Catholic thought. As a biblical scholar, I do try to keep up with my Catholic colleagues, whom I got to welcome into the Society of Biblical Literature ("and Exegesis," as it was then) in the '46 annual meeting, the first after the Vatican's shift of Bible-study base from the Vulgate to the original-language texts.

The **problem** I'm presenting in this letter requires a running start. I'm not anti-self, against myself, when I'm self-critical. I'm not a misogynist when I criticize the excesses of the most recent feminist wave. I'm not anti-Protestant when I deny that Protestantism is a whole religion without Orthodoxy-Catholicism. I'm not anti-Orthodox when I decry the hamhandedness of the present international Patriarch's treatment of the American Orthodox Church. And I'm not anti-Catholic when I criticize, in #2728 e.g., the Pope's(mis)handling of Scripture....

....E.g., in my p3, §8, ¶2, I must complain that the Pope, *in addressing this text*, reverses its plain meaning (viz., **pro** the death penalty), by using its sanction (viz., the imago) **anti** the death penalty. This abuse of Gn.9.6 is only one instance of the distortive effect his novel "gospel of life" ideology has on Scripture & tradition.

Question: Am I alone? Has any Catholic scholar in print taken the Pope to task for his passing off the novelty as though it were everywhere/always/by all? Is there any print-forum dealing with this issue, or would do so (FIRST THINGS, I'm assuming, being too papal to do so)?

Long-term worry: You're more aware than I am that the Pope's "gospel of life" is contextual political rhetoric, but it's being taken & used by at least many Catholic thinkers as "gospel." So much so that I find myself, in dialog with Catholics, up against THE GOSPEL OF LIFE as though it were Scripture & tradition! *Where & how will the corrective come, so this rhetoric doesn't get traditioned as dogma?*

Grace & peace,

encl another c of #2728

c

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Gabriel Fackre