

**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE
IN THE FORMATION
OF AN ETHICAL CONSCIENCE
IN A MULTICULTURAL EUROPE**

Fr. Timothy RADCLIFFE op



Timothy Radcliffe was born in London in 1945, the fourth of six children. He was educated by the Benedictines at Worth and Downside schools. He joined the English Province of the Dominican Order in 1965, and was ordained priest in 1971. He studied at Blackfriars and at St. John's College in Oxford, and in Paris.

He was a chaplain to the University of London in 1975-76, before returning to Oxford, where he taught scripture and doctrine for twelve years. Besides teaching and preaching, he was involved in the Peace Movement and in ministry to people with AIDS.

He was Prior of Oxford from 1982-88, when he was elected Provincial of the English Province. He was President of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. In 1992 he was elected Master of the Order, finishing his term in 2001.

He is now an itinerant preacher and lecturer, based at Blackfriars, Oxford, spending half of the year travelling. He is an Honorary Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and honorary Doctor of Divinity of Oxford University and has honorary doctorates from various other universities. He is the author of 'Sing a New Song' and 'I call You Friends', «Que votre joie soit parfaite», «Etre prêtre aujourd'hui», «Seven Last Words».

When I was in Brussels this Christmas the brothers gave me two books by Eric Emmanuel Schmitt: *Mr. Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Coran*, *Oscar and the Rose Lady*.

I refer to these books because I think they give us a very good sense of where religious seeking is in Europe today, what the young think about Religion today. Also for this lecture I read "*The European Values study 1981-1990*". That is about as different from Schmidt as you can imagine.

✚ Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt actually helps us to see what are the aspirations and the values of the people in Europe today. The two books are part of a trilogy, the Heroes are Jewish, Buddhist, Moslem and Christian.

So the first thing they show us is that **Europe today is truly multicultural especially today** with the vast immigration of Moslems. The European Values study shows us that young people are more tolerant than their elders.

✚ Tolerance is to some extent growing. In both these books you see young people facing death. In one, *Momo*, a young Jew witnesses the death of his beloved Islamic teacher, a Sufi, and in *Oscar*, a child of no religion, he faces death with the help of a very old Catholic woman wrestler, Mamie Rose.

✚ Children and death.

These are two of the key ethical issues that we face in Europe today. Thirdly in each case we see an individual who is seeking faith. That is a key characteristic of modern Europe. I don't think Europe is becoming secularised. That is not the problem. **We are becoming "un-churched". People believe without belonging. There is a profound suspicion of any institution. There is a profound suspicion of any doctrine, the suspicion of many young people that religion indoctrinates.** So there is a movement from doctrine to spirituality. So those are various key things: individual search without belonging, multiculturalism and a movement from doctrine to spirituality. That is the world we live in. That is the world that we have to share our values with our deep values. **I think as one of the tables said there is a profound religious search and hunger for values in Europe and we have to respond to that search, not by the imposition of values from the outside but by helping the young to evolve and develop the values that they hold.**

We have to start where they are and I recommend that if you want to know where they are, read Eric Emmanuel Schmitt!

The first thing that I want to look at is not so much a value as an understanding of religion that you find throughout the young in all parts of Europe today and **that is of the religious person as a pilgrim.**

The man who has a religious conscience is a pilgrim. The young people today in Europe want **to live three crucial values.** How can we help those values to be transformed in the light of Christian wisdom?

The three values:

**Freedom,
Tolerance,
Human rights.**

These really sum up some of the crucial shared values of contemporary Europe and especially of the young.

How we as religious relate to their transformation and their evolution?

■ Pilgrimage

All over Europe we see an enormous revival of pilgrimages, Santiago de Compostela is actively promoted by the Spanish tourist board. Częstochowa, a centre of resistance to communism – still many people go. Lourdes draws millions of sick people and then there is Fatima, Medjugorje, Rome...What is interesting is that the places of pilgrimage don't only attract believers. **They also attract people who are unsure, who seek.** So the pilgrim is, if you like, the image of, I think, the modern young European, hungry for something. *So if we are to be able to communicate with them we have to be seen to be pilgrims, pilgrims in our own heart.* That is to say we must be people who have the confidence to proclaim what we believe the confidence in the Gospel we share but the humility of heart to go on seeking until the end.

For me the one who was the great master of pilgrimage, the one from whom I learnt so much was Marie Dominic Chenu op who, even when he was ninety years old was always at the beginning of understanding, just beginning. Think of Princess Diana, the most popular English person in the last century. Princess Diana was absolutely typical, I think, of the modern pilgrim, baptised a member of the Church of England but always searching, always looking, and Cardinal Hume was such a significant person for her and for millions of people in England because he was seen to be a pilgrim. Indeed his most important book was called: "To be a Pilgrim."

● How are we to be pilgrims?

The first thing we have to do is to communicate the longer story, the longer narrative, which goes from Genesis to the Kingdom. This generation is often called the "now" generation, that is the generation which lives in the present moment, which has lost its dreams for the future. A man called Oliver Bennet has just published a book called *Cultural Pessimism* and he shows that the West, **probably the whole of Europe is suffering a cultural depression because we have lost our dreams of the future.**

When I was young, there was still that sense of the future of humanity. We called it progress. Every year there were

new inventions: planes, and cars that went faster and faster, countries were liberated from the British Empire, even English food got better. You began to be able to eat, I see the French smiling, frogs legs and snails in English restaurants. My mother put garlic in the cooking when my father wasn't looking!

But then I think with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 we entered a new moment when, generally speaking we lost the hope for the future. Fukuyama wrote a book called *History is ended.*

So I think one of the first things we have to do as Religious is to share with young the long story. The story which goes from the Creation to the Kingdom, the dream of a future, the story which shapes our lives beyond birth and death. It is a paradox that most children live in a longer story than we ever knew. They live between the Big Bang and the Big Chill when all the world will grow cold. They know more about dinosaurs than they know about cows and sheep. My young great nephews and nieces can tell the difference between a triceratops and a tyrosaurus rex. More easily than between different sorts of cows. But this story from the creation of the universe until its collapse is a story in which we have no great part. Humanity has no significant contribution. It gives no gives no sense of the meaning of our human lives.

The big challenge for us as Religious is how we can embody that longer story that lives for the Kingdom.

It requires of us great virtues:

Live the joy of poverty

Live the joy of liberty

With courage

■ Live the joy of poverty

In a world of consumerism when people find less and less satisfaction in the ownership of objects, we need a **simplicity of life, a joy of having little, which shows that we are pilgrims.** I'm sure I owe my vocation to a Benedictine uncle. He was very old. He was maimed during the First World War. . He lost his fingers. He lost his eyes. But he was happy and joyful, provided my mother remembered to give him a large glass of whisky before he went to bed at night, not that this is a hint of course! So we have to find ways of communicating the joys of the kingdom.

Cardinal Etchegey said at the end of the Synod on Religious Life **that if there was one thing that he would ask of Religious it would be - find your poverty again. Because it is only by poverty that we can show that it is not here that we find our joy.** Two English Bishops have recently sold their large Episcopal palaces and moved into smaller houses. It is interesting. Immediately in England you find a response. People say "Yes" non-Christians, atheists say "at last we can see a poor Christian".

■ Courage

We live in a very fearful world. I was in Asia during the SARS crisis and it is astonishing to find in travelling around the pure panic in contemporary society. People are very, very afraid. Afraid of an unknown future that they would

rather not think about. In "The Screwtape Letters" by C.S. Lewis, there is an old wise devil which says that it is most regrettable that everybody in the world delights in the beauty and necessity of courage.

It was the courage of the martyrs that the converted the pre-Christian world. So we live in a Christian world because of courageous men and women. I think again in this increasingly post-Christian world what we need above all is courage. Are we courageous? I would say that travelling around the world, I saw in Africa, in Latin America, in Asia I saw men and women Religious of immense courage. In places of Civil War like Rwanda, Burundi, the Congo, in the poorest barrios of Latin America. When everybody else left you would still find men and women, often small groups of sisters who remained.

The business-men went, the diplomats went, the United Nations went, most of the NGOs went but still the Religious remained. That is courage. **But in Europe I wonder how courageous we are? Do our communities form people, young, who are courageous, Are we afraid, afraid to say what we believe? Are we afraid to speak our minds? Are we afraid to fumble after a new word?** Are we afraid to take the risk of a new project? Above all courage is what you see faced with death.

Are we afraid when faced with the death of our own institutions? Are we afraid when we see our communities growing smaller, projects to which we have given our lives failing?

How can we speak of the Resurrection if we are afraid of death?

I remember going to visit a monastery, a community of Dominican nuns in England. There were only four of them left and the brother accompanying me said to the nuns: "Sisters, I'm afraid your monastery is dying" and one old nun said: "But surely our dear Lord would not let our monastery die". He answered: "He let his Son die".

So we have to show immense courage if we are to be credible witnesses to the voyage the pilgrimage to the Kingdom.

Ethics?

To live these fundamental values, we need the ethics of the pilgrimage

Since the Reformation, there is a tendency to consider moral life as a **submission** to external commands. The moral life was submission to God's will and is summed up above all in the 10 commandments. In Religious **Life it often went with a very narrow, infantile understanding of obedience**: unquestioned submission to the will of another. **In this time of pilgrimage we have to discover another vision of ethics, an older vision which I am very happy to tell you can find above all in St. Thomas Aquinas:**

For Aquinas, ethics was not about submission to the commandments. Ethics was about growing in virtue and freedom as you moved towards the Kingdom. The moral life for the old tradition of Aquinas was about the virtues you needed to be a pilgrim, to become strong, to walk.

It is very interesting that all over the world, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, also in France, Scotland (we mustn't forget Scotland there – and I don't think we have any Welsh people here) and in the United States. In all that world we see a rediscovery by non-Christians of fascination with the virtue of ethics, an ethics of virtue, which strengthens you for the journey in which you grow stronger, more liberated, more free. So that is the first point we have to think about.

If you consider the world, the modern religious world in which young people live, then we must be pilgrims with them.

What are the values they cultivate?

What are the values of young people?

If you read Schmitt or the European Values Study you would say there are three values:

Freedom

Tolerance

Human rights

There are others such as ecology that I have not got time to look at.

Freedom

The supreme value for a young modern European, whether he is from Western Europe or Central Europe or Eastern Europe, it makes no difference, is their personal autonomy, the power to make decisions about their lives. They cherish freedom, a freedom to choose who we shall be and what values we shall follow. It is a freedom that resents any interference from outside by any institution. All over Europe, from Moscow to Dublin you will see **the same disillusionment with institutions** which are not trusted whether they are Government or Church. So there is the understanding of freedom which is always freedom from: liberation from those who might interfere with us. Now as you know the word religion suggests a different kind of freedom. **Religio means to be bound, to belong, to belong to each other and to belong to God.** So I think that one of the fundamental challenges for us is to show that freedom can actually be found in belonging to other people. In belonging to each other.

We have passed from a religion of obligation to a religion of consumption. That means that people will make their religious choices rather like they buy their clothes. They will get a little bit of what they want: a little bit of Pepsi or Coca. So freedom is the consumerist freedom. People go into the religious market and they take what they want from the supermarket shelf. The trouble is that this freedom turns out to be almost entirely impotent and vacuous. It is the freedom of the market to choose between almost identical objects.

While I was trying to write this lecture the mouse on my computer broke down and I went into the internet to discover that I could choose from two or three thousand computer mice (mice?) and they were all almost identical. **So what this shows is that the world offers you an empty and meaningless freedom, a freedom that does not give you life.** What we need at this moment is **"A Pedagogy of Freedom"**.

Our communities should offer a vision of freedom whereby we give our lives away to each other. **It is the intoxicating freedom of Jesus Christ. Who gave himself to the disciples saying: this is my body and I give it to you. It is a Eucharistic freedom.** Freedom as choice is necessary and good but it is just a first superficial level. **We have to embody that freedom of gift.** I think of one of my brethren, a Breton, Jean-Jacques Perenez. He worked for fifteen years in Algeria. He was deeply happy. He was an expert on irrigation. He had mastered Arabic. Then after fifteen years the Provincial asked him to come home and teach Economics at the University of Lyon. First of all Jean-Jacques was destroyed. He did not want to go. Then he realised the intoxicating freedom of having given his life away, of being gift. So being a good Frenchman he went out, bought a bottle of champagne and with his brethren he drank to the freedom of Religious Life. After he had been there for a few years, I was elected in Rome and I needed an assistant for the Apostolic Life. So I tracked down Jean-Jacques I said to him "I want you to give up your position and come with me". He said "Could I think about it?" I said "Yes". He said "For a month?" and I said "Well, could you make it a day?" He said "Yes, another bottle of champagne". Now Jean-Jacques is the Vicar Provincial of the Arab Vicariate of the Order which goes from Iraq to Morocco and he rang me up the other day and asked if I would be prepared to go to Iraq at least for some time each year to help in the foundation of a new noviciate there. So of course I had to say "Yes" but I said "This time Jean-Jacques you will buy me the Champagne". **I think it is the intoxicating freedom that we have to offer the young, that is the transformation from freedom from to being a freedom for, a freedom of belonging.**

Because there is a profound suspicion of all institutions in Europe: that means that we need institutional creativity. If we look at the founders of our own Orders: Benedict, Dominic, Ignatius, Francis De Sales Don Bosco, **what they all showed in their time was institutional creativity.** They made new forms of belonging which made us free for the mission, free to be alive. St. Francis perhaps not so much. That was not his gift. **It did not matter the Franciscans had the Dominicans to show them how to govern themselves.** **At this moment, we need in the Church immense institutional creativity.** The new movements have shown it to a certain extent, Opus Dei, the Catechumenate... If you don't like them, invent others. **Our society offers all sorts of new ways of belonging, whether in NGO's, fraternities, the internet. If we have the creativity to use them.**

Tolerance

Modern Europeans like to think of themselves as tolerant. The Church is judged by the young largely by whether it is seen to be tolerant or not. At this very moment in Argentina there is a young man who is making each Church pass the tolerance test. What he does is he goes in front of churches of every denomination and strips naked to see how they react. **So on the one hand we live in a society which values tolerance. That is perhaps its second great value. At the same time we can see growing intolerance.**

So on the one hand we live in a society which values tolerance. That is perhaps its second great value. At the same time we can see growing intolerance. In nearly every European country attitudes to immigrants are becoming less tolerant. In this multicultural Europe there are growing movement for the expulsion of foreigners. I think most of us have seen the developments in Holland in the last few days which will lead to the expulsion of some 26,000 immigrants. So here we have a contradiction. Increasingly we value tolerance though increasingly we fail in tolerance. So what can we make of that? I can only share intuition, though I don't think it has been established. I think we accept tolerance when it is understood as the assertion of sameness, when it refuses to give value to difference. **Racial and religious tolerance is acceptable when the other person is seen as just the same as you. You know we Catholics and Protestants, we all believe the same things, don't we?** When I think of a friend of mine who is an African Bishop coming back to England and some acquaintances said: "Well you know, Bishop, we don't see you as black." And he said, "Open your eyes, because I am." So tolerance is widely accepted on the understanding that it means the suppression of difference. That kind of tolerance is basically a form of self-love.

I think as Religious we have to offer an alternative understanding of the nature of tolerance. **Which is not the acceptance of sameness but it is the acceptance of the different.** I think here we see how Christian doctrine actually forms us as those who are able to cope with difference. People usually see doctrine as indoctrinating. Doctrine is believed to be making us narrow. Doctrine is believed to give us prejudices. It is my profound conviction that true Christian doctrine forms us as those who are able to embrace the other. Think of St. Paul: "The foundation of the Church of Jews and the Gentiles, when Christ broke down the wall of hostility", not so that we could all be swallowed by a muddy sameness but so that the Church could have difference at the centre of its identity. The diocese of Rome is founded on the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul, the apostles of the Jews and the Gentiles.

So at the centre of our ecclesiology is the acceptance of difference. For the first 400 years we see the Church grappling with the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christology: trying to have some vision of the Triune God, three persons with one nature. Probably at no other moment in Western history has there ever been such a profound reflection on the nature of unity and difference. **Trinitarian theology gives us an immensely privileged gift of how to understand, how to embrace the other.**

Think of Christology, the labour of the early Church to understand one who was truly human and truly divine. One in whom the greatest difference imaginable, between creator and creature was embraced. It took 400 years to evolve the Chalcedonian doctrine which is an absolutely beautiful meditation on the embrace of the same and the difference, un-confusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly inseparable.

So Christian Doctrine has an immensely important role at this moment at the birth of a new Europe. We grapple with how to have a tolerance that embraces the truly different. We are formed for it.

That means that as Religious we dare to create communities in which we live with brothers and sisters who are different. The temptation in times of trial and tension is to create communities of the like-minded. People who have the same theological options, the same political options, who want to live the same sort of Religious Life.

But if we cannot learn to live with our own brothers and sisters who differ from us, with whom we disagree then we have got nothing to say about tolerance to the young of today. Enzo Bianchi, the founder of the Benedictine monastery of Bose where I have just been. He says that: "to accept the otherness of the brother, the otherness of the sister, is the centre of Religious Life. The other rests other is different from me and with him I can find a communion in the essential which is the vocation. But for the rest I must let him or her have the liberty to be completely themselves. I must neither have an aggressiveness towards him nor the voracity to assimilate him to myself".

Human Rights: third major value

The roots of our human Rights language are twofold as you know: they are Christian, with a northern protestant strain and a Catholic tradition that came to birth, I am happy to say, among the Dominicans in Salamanca in the sixteenth century. **But today and really to mention that it from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 the language has become the shared discourse of everybody in Europe about issues of justice and they have immense importance and value for us all.**

I think though that the conceptions of Human Rights are very often linked to an individualistic understanding of human flourishing. "It's my rights, what I need to flourish, over and against you and yours". So that justice becomes a matter of negotiation between competing rights. A man called Ian Linden who used to be the director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London, an extremely important institution, said that: **"The time has come to put less stress on human rights and more on the Common Good. So I'd say that here we have to rediscover the language of the common good"**.

It is not just a matter of whether I put myself first or others. It is about a different understanding about being a human being. A human rights discourse which is good, - if it's the only discourse - implies that my flourishing as a human being is above all a private individual matter. The recuperation of the language of the common good, again from the middle ages, which you find strongly in Thomas Aquinas, suggests that **"I cannot flourish apart from other human beings"**. It is only together that we can attain our full humanity. When the war in Iraq was about to break out the American Dominican family made bumper stickers to put on their cars which said: "We have brothers and sisters in Iraq". Of course in the first place that meant that they had Dominican brothers and sisters in Iraq but it also pointed to something much more fundamental – that we have Moslem brothers and sisters in Iraq. It showed that our identity has to be found ultimately with those with whom we do not immediately identify. **When Archbishop Helder Camara was in Brazil** sometimes he would hear of some poor person who was in prison and he would go to the police and he would say: "I'm sorry but I think that you have arrested my brother". They would say: "Your Excellency we are extremely sorry. We did not know that he was your brother. Of course we will release him. It is very easily done. But we notice that he has a different name to you. And Helder Camara would say: **"Every poor person is my brother and my sister"**.

So recovering the common good is about moving beyond the narrow sense of identity which we have within our own communities towards what you might say is **the eschatological identity of the Kingdom, the pilgrimage.** We Religious are uniquely well-positioned to do this.

Every single one of us I'm sure belongs to religious families which link us beyond Europe and when we make our profession we acquire brothers and sisters who are not European. At that moment we acquire a larger identity. So we have an enormously important role inside Europe precisely as those who are not just European as those who belong beyond the boundaries of that little world.

So I'll come to the conclusion now. What I have tried to suggest is that if we are to be in touch with the religious sensitivities of the young, we must be pilgrims, who travel light, who are poor and who have a humility of heart, who are seekers. That will give us the ability to look at the fundamental values of modern Europe, not to oppose them or to bless them, but to transform them, to deepen them; turning freedom from "freedom from", the freedom of not belonging, to freedom as gift; transforming tolerance as being the embrace of the same to being the embrace of the other, the different. Finally moving beyond just a language of human rights, I don't think it should be stopped but moving beyond just a language of human rights to a vision of the common good, which, ultimately, is the life of the Kingdom in which all men and women will be gathered into one.

