Fraternity and the Crisis of Cognition: Pastoral Reflections on Intergenerational Reconciliation

If your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.
If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Matthew 6: 23

Introductory Remarks

Many thanks indeed for the invitation to speak to you this morning. The topic of our "wounded fraternity", which is a sign of our times, is an urgent issue which many Catholics in Europe and the other countries of the West are keenly aware of. It is true that it manifests itself in surprisingly different ways in the various regions of our world. The Basic Text of this Congress highlights eloquently, for example, the causes and consequences of the violence which is currently such a problem here in Ecuador. Wounded fraternity in my country is not quite so easy to make out. British political culture has been on a trajectory of decline for the last decade or so. Emblematic of that is the decision to leave the European Union after more than four decades of membership. This tumultuous event ushered in a period of political turbulence unprecedented in modern times during which our constitution was pushed to what felt like breaking point. A severely wounded fraternity within British society was both a causal factor of that decision and one of its consequences. And yet, even if the particularities of that story are confined to our small island, the deeper dynamics at work touch every corner of our interconnected planet. I hope that my visit from the land of the Greenwich Meridian to the magnificent nation of the Equator will help us all to understand more deeply what is at stake in some of these axial realities. I am convinced that the differences only serve to disguise hidden commonalities which I hope my reflections will help to bring to light. I am glad that we can explore these topics together in such depth and in such a

significant ecclesial forum. And I am deeply grateful that we do so within the hope-filled context of the reconciling power of the Eucharist.

WOUNDED FRATERNITY AND TODAY'S YOUNGER GENERATION

The Basic Text composed for this Congress on wounded fraternity shows the magisterial influence of Pope Francis as well as the features of the particular context of the Church in Ecuador. In what follows, I would like simply to offer a supplementary footnote to that document which I hope will function as a modest correction to the lens through which we read the signs of our times. Ecclesial documents are generally written by women and men of a certain age. It is truer of our day than of most that this will result in a deficiency: the effective sidelining of the perspective of the younger generation. For various reasons, it is extremely easy for those of us who belong to older generations to think that we understand how the world looks to people in their teens and twenties; these days, nothing could be further from the truth. In my experience, gleaned from sustained interaction with international students at the University of Oxford, the gap which divides consecutive generations has today become a vast abyss of mutual incomprehension. I will endeavour below to draw attention to some of the key issues. Moreover, the burden of my positive argument is that consideration of intergenerational understanding requires a shift in the centre of gravity of our thinking about wounded fraternity away from moral factors (such as selfishness, violence, hatred *etc.*) to more epistemological ones, for examination of the wounds which afflict us indicates a crisis in what and how we see and know.

To this end, I propose to explore four aspects of the culture in which today's young people live which bear on their social epistemology. Pope Francis briefly broaches the topic of the contemporary digital environment in his 2019 post-synodal exhortation on young people, *Christus Vivit* (86-90), highlighting both the positive and negative impacts of its impact on the young; I propose simply to broaden his insight in the light of recent research and of my own pastoral experience. The four fields are:

1. A new modality for the social construal of "identity"
2. New generational identities and narratives
3. The perceived ubiquity of violence and oppression
4. A crisis of the real.

I will then share some philosophical reflections drawn from contemporary neuroscience, before closing with some thoughts about how the Eucharist is a genuine source of healing for intergenerational fraternity.

SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND IDENTITY

Every generation of the modern world has to grapple with questions of personal identity. Since the Romantics, there has been a sense that identity is invested in one's inner depths and that the ethical principle which ought to govern the process of identity-discovery and -definition is *authenticity*. That said, the contours of this process are constantly shifting as culture evolves. The novelty of the way today's young people engage with identity-discovery resides in an unprecedented reliance on new digital technologies to mediate and shape both the process and the outcome. To summarise the recent analysis of Roberta Katz and her colleagues, the discovery of an individual's identity consists in the choice of multiple markers from an existing array of choices covering the domains of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, professional or other

interests and even mental health status.[1] (Significantly, socio-economic class is not typically included.) So, to give an example, an undergraduate student at university today might articulate their identity as that of being a cis-gendered queer British Asian Muslim with ADHD.[2] The influence of social media is easy to detect here, specifically the need to be able to summarise rapidly the essence of one's biography for a profile page.

These markers disclose not only a certain content but also an epistemological framework. Once selected and asserted they must be performed and will go on to ground and frame a person's social relations. Each of these identity tags provides a form of group belonging in itself; online social networks facilitate easy communication with other members of such groups, however statistically insignificant they may be as a proportion of the general population. Although an individual might choose to be a member of their different groups without reference to the tensions which can arise from various combinations (such as religious affiliation and sexual identity), there is also the possibility of approaching this modular identity as a "composite whole of separate attributes".[3] Taken together, identity markers provide something approaching a unique definition of one's personal identity and a platform for even more specialised online encounters and, crucially, the creation of a shared online culture.

An important caveat is that these identity markers function less as definitive labels than as a point of departure, a locus of ongoing exploration. Rather than accept these markers as given, individuals will nuance, modify or even reject them in favour of new ones. This reflects the fundamental conviction that this generation has of *choosing* its own authentic self-description. This is easy to understand in the case of a religious affiliation, for example, frequently qualified so as to overcome the perception that one subscribes to an authoritarian or otherwise oppressive grouping. It is striking to me how attached Catholic students can be to labels such as "tradcath" or "leftcath" even though their religious practice and experience often defies the boundaries one would expect from such labels. But it also applies to gender and sexual identity, where a newly chosen marker will often reflect experiences or attractions which do not fit a simple label such as gay, lesbian or even bisexual. The felt need to describe desires, attractions and appetites experienced internally by the correct word bears directly on the theme of authenticity, tantamount to a moral imperative. In my experience, the excessive rigour of this demand can have the effect of leading young people to opt for a less exigent solution: the co-opting of the word "queer", for instance, to signify a non-specific non-conformist sexual identity. More striking still is the way even ethic identities can be chosen, obviously within limits, according to a desire to express solidarity with an oppressed group.

This current version of the ethics of authenticity requires unconditionally that these identity markers be recognised, accepted and respected. The value of tolerance is paramount and any reservation in this regard is counted as ignorant bigotry and an injustice. Traditional religions, conservative political ideologies and the parental generation are often demonised and dismissed for their failure to subscribe to this straightforward moral code.

Does this represent rampant individualism? Not necessarily. Of course, it is the individual who freely makes the choices concerned and those choices might well appear narcissistic and bear on trivialities. But this need not be the case. Identity assertion is performed in a framework with a

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[1] See for what follows Roberta Katz, Sarah Ogilvie, Jane Shaw, & Linda Woodhead, *Gen Z, Explained: The Art of Living in a Digital Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.
[2] Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
[3] Katz et al, p197.

strong communal dimension. Group affiliation is essential not only as a place of belonging but also as a site for exploration. Online affiliation can make for transitory solidarities, but it does constitute social engagement nonetheless. As Katz *et al* indicate:

> Individuals discover their uniquely personal, fine-grained identities largely by becoming familiar with various communities, and, once they accept a particular attribute of identity as their own, they also accept that they have become members of the "tribe" associated with the attribute.[4]

The commitment to a certain demanding transparency with others is also impressive, and hard for older generations to understand. Again, it belies an exigent solidarity with others about what it means to be human and a distaste for hypocrisy, understood as failure to be honest about one's own identity. The role social media platforms play in imposing a format for the display and structuring of one's social identity is a major contributor to what is clearly a radical reconfiguration of identity with demanding social implications. Indeed, the social dimension can be so strong that a kind of tribalism kicks in. Much online interaction does not so much resemble a conglomeration of individuals in pursuit of the truth as competing tribes defending their members almost regardless of what they have said.

Before leaving this topic, it is instructive to compare this thumbnail sketch of a generation's sensibilities with that given by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor some thirty-three years ago, writing about the culture of authenticity as he saw it among students in North America towards the end of the 1980s (in other words my generation).[5] Outwardly, the Romantic ethic of authenticity of the day ("being true to oneself") was identical to that espoused by today's teens and students, but its modalities differed somewhat. Taylor's brief definition of identity, for example, is "the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense".[6] This is a fundamentally different, more transcendental way of locating identity than that described by Katz *et al*. The "background" of which Taylor speaks is the unarticulated, *given* sense of things which can only find expression through long processes of reflection and attentiveness to emerging dissonances. Four important differences flow from this:

1. Instead of identity markers, Taylor identified the espousal of *values* as key to the pursuit of personal authenticity.
2. He notes that one is instinctively *drawn* to one's system of values, whereas with Generation Z identity markers are first discovered and then chosen.
3. With regard to the consequences for political philosophy, the generation Taylor was looking at would favour a liberalism of neutrality (the state is not permitted to favour one value system over another) whereas the commitment of today's young generation to the affirmation of each person's identity markers suits a liberalism in which the state actively enforces self-definition even to the extent of curbing the free speech of those who attack the legitimacy of this or that marker.
4. Taylor notes that the older modality of being drawn to a set of values is couched in what he calls a "soft relativism" which makes discussion of the matter – and therefore of identity itself – awkward and so leads to an eery silence, an "inarticulacy". Contrast this with the noisy assertiveness which accompanies the proclamation of individual identity markers.

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[4] Katz *et al*, p192.
[5] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992.
[6] *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p34.

GENERATIONS IN CONFLICT

Sociological reflection on the way in which membership of a particular historical generation impacts on both individual identity and social and cultural phenomena is usually traced back to the work of Karl Mannheim (1893 – 1947), the Hungarian sociologist whose seminal 1928 paper "Das Problem der Generationen", published in English translation in 1952,[7] provides a theoretical framework for understanding the role of childhood experience in framing the acquisition of knowledge. A Kantian with Marxist influence, he posits that social class, location and generation are the most impactful conditioning factors in social and cultural learning.

Generational theory made its passage from the academy to popular culture in the early 1990s with the publication of Strauss and Howe's *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584–2069*.[8] This formulated a theory of four types of generation which appear every twenty years or so, the characteristics largely determined in reaction against the parental cohort. Around the same time, Canadian author Douglas Coupland published a novel called *Generation X*, a tag he applied to his own generation as an emerging group of young adults who studiously did not want to be defined (hence "X"). Slowly but surely, conventional terms were supplied to designate clearly demarcated generations: the Silent Generation (born 1928–45), the Boomers (1946–64), Generation X (1965–80), the Millennial Generation (1981–96) and Generation Z (1997 – 2010). It has now become a standard way of talking among the younger generations and therefore a way of structuring their understanding of their own identity and place in the world.

The question of wounded intergenerational fraternity arises with particular acuteness because of the ways in which generational identities lend themselves to use in narratives of grievance. If this is true most especially of Generation Z, it is also striking to see the extent to which generational grievance feeds a sense of being a uniquely crisis-ridden generation. A westerner born in 1997 will have picked up at the age of four the spectacular violence of the 9/11 attacks, and witnessed the seemingly unceasing war on terrorism which ensued. At the age of 11 they will have known the collapse of the banking system and the full financial crisis which was the direct cause for so much that ails the world economically, socially and politically in our own day. The horrendous violence broadcast by the ISIS regime in the Middle East exposed them in their mid-teens to atrocities which must have numbed their moral senses. The prevailing sentiment of social collapse which surrounded the outbreak of populism in 2016, with the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump, inculcated a despair which still finds common expression in apocalyptic nihilism. The Covid lockdowns added a final (for now) insult to injury, denying the new generation months if not years of opportunity for educational and social development. And all the while, economic deterioration meant that they face ever fewer prospects of obtaining housing, professional success and even a life partner. The students I have come to know feel in their heart of hearts that their futures will be dominated by a combination of war, environmental disaster, civilisational collapse and the detrimental impact of Artificial Intelligence on the workplace. They have reason to feel aggrieved.

The strongest intergenerational narrative in western countries pits the Boomer Generation against the Millennials and Generation Z. The topos is vividly manifest in popular culture, as in the dystopian science-fiction movie *The Hunger Games* (2012). The grievance is invariably directed

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[7] K. Mannheim, "The problem of generations", in P. Kecskemeti (ed.), *Karl Mannheim: Essays*, New York: Routledge, 1952, pp276–322.
[8] W. Strauss and N. Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584–2069*, New York: Morrow, William and Co., 1991.

against the postwar generation's perceived selfishness, entitlement and greed, and is centred on the generations' contrasting trajectories. The precise content of the grievance varies according to the country concerned; in the UK, for example, the Boomers enjoyed home ownership and massive state subsidy when it came to university education, whereas Millennials have had to pay for their own university fees and maintenance and can barely even afford to start acquiring property for themselves.[9] Boomers presided over an economy which has led to global heating, but it is Millennials and Generation Z that will suffer the consequences. More recently it was for the sake of the health of elderly Boomers that Generation Z pupils sacrificed months of their education by enduring a lockdown during the Covid pandemic. In the recent British General Election campaign, the polarisation of generations was extremely pronounced, the then ruling Conservative party not even attempting to disguise its preference for policies supporting elderly pensioners even if it entailed penalising the young.

Working as a University chaplain, I have been struck how much the Catholic Church is also affected by a sense of intergenerational grievance, even among those young Catholics who feel least at home in the cultural pre-suppositions of their generation. The recovery of a more traditional liturgical style and a pre-conciliar ecclesiology goes hand in hand with a conviction that these things were handled in bad faith by the older generation. Hence, the Boomers are blamed by some young people for fostering the decline of the post-conciliar Church. A reciprocal contempt is also palpable, with older Catholics finding themselves mystified by the conservatism, formalism and rigorism of the young, and interpreting it as though it were identical in meaning and content to the conservatism which their generation encountered as resistance to the changes of the Council.

The emergence of this intergenerational discourse in popular culture can be situated as part of the broader quest for identity described above. It is almost banal to point out that a generation of youngsters who have grown up almost obliged to project a performance of their identity on social media apps, such as TikTok and Instagram, which have come to dominate their lives, should find it second nature to appropriate almost any identifier which helps to locate them in an overwhelming morass of data: pride flags, political groupings, favourite online games *etc*. A generational identity is just one more way of saying where you fit in.

If intergenerational reconciliation is a vital moral project, and surely it is, one question which arises is the validity of the tags and narratives which have grown up around the discourse surrounding intergenerational injustice. They yield more than a modicum of truth, but they also distort grievously and leave out other vital truths about intergenerational transactions. There is an Oedipal quality to the desire for retribution against the previous generations, for example, but little recognition of the way in which previous generations have contributed in a positive way to the world in which young people live today.

THE INEVITABILITY OF VIOLENCE

We have drawn attention to the positive aspect of Generation Z's project of identity formation and hinted at the moral energy behind their pursuit of authenticity. The negative aspect consists in a prevailing sense that a counter-energy is at work actively promoting oppression. This is described and analysed through recourse to the various philosophies and social theories which have abounded since the second world war. Generation Z is an educated cohort, in the UK the

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[9] An early contribution to this literature from a politician is by David Willetts, *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future – And Why They Should Give It Back,* London: Atlantic Books, 2011.

generation with the highest rate of university attendance in history. The working assumption that violence and oppression are ubiquitous is shared as an ideological orthodoxy which accounts for many social problems encountered in daily life.

At the height of the Covid lockdown in the summer of May 2020, huge energies of frustration and rage were released in the US, UK and elsewhere in various protests, violent and non-violent, in response to the murder of George Floyd by police. The previously existing Black Lives Matter movement became a locus of solidarity, struggle and defiance. BLM in turn became a totemic enemy for conservative groups which analysed its philosophy as an expression of "cultural Marxism". The rhetorical riposte, "ALL lives matter" cleverly presented opposition to the BLM protesters as motivated by a genuine openness to all injustice while in practice making light of the actual atrocities perpetrated against black Americans. The instant polarisation of views along "culture wars" lines effectively prevented any genuine public debate regarding what could be done to alleviate the ongoing suffering of an important minority community in the US.

The BLM affair is just one of many theatres of protest and counter-protest, peopled principally but not exclusively by the younger generation, hinging on the conviction that some malignant force is at work in the world, generating hatred and violence against persons and groups and to which the only adequate response is vilification and, in extreme cases, destruction of property. In the case of BLM, the purported enemy is "white supremacism".

To this we can add another movement which came to prominence from 2017 onwards, following the exposure of American film producer Harvey Weinstein as a sexual abuser, the #metoo movement. Rallying the ignored voices of many thousands of (mainly) women who had suffered sexual abuse and predation, this movement rapidly gained ground once it became clear that sexual predators could be brought to justice if victims were empowered to come forward together. Less obviously rooted in any ideology, #metoo has been successful in identifying the ways in which power structures censor and silence women's voices, effectively protecting powerful men who abuse. It has made itself felt in the ecclesial setting as well. In practice, this extreme sensitivity to systemic violence resonates with certain forms of radical (i.e post-liberal) feminist discourse, such as that of American legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon, which hypostasise "the patriarchy" as an abstract entity and understand sexual relations as being inherently coercive, with men as subjugators and women as subjugated. In such a framework, the possibility of harmonious relations is out of the question.

Such a view would obviously be contested by many religious believers. It also arouses the critique of other so-called third-wave feminists such as Judith Butler, for whom MacKinnon's theory remains entrapped in a rigid deterministic model of gender roles. Butler, for her part an exponent of "gender theory", seeks to break down such rigid models in favour of recognising that gender roles are socially constructed. Butler's contribution to the debate also flags up the disruptive tension which has emerged recently between certain feminist and trans activists. Politics in the Anglosphere has found itself severely troubled by the question: "what is a woman?". So-called progressive voices insist that a woman is "anyone who identifies as a woman", an evidently circular definition which has nevertheless garnered sufficient support in some parts of the political left to enshrine itself in law. On the other hand, a body of feminists (vilified by their enemies as TERFs – trans-exclusionary radical feminists) have seen this move as fundamentally hostile to women's demands for, among other things, their own safe spaces. University spaces in the Anglosphere have become sites of contestation; gender theory's blanket espousal of gender self-identification has emerged almost by default as an institutional orthodoxy with the result that dissent is targeted as "transphobia" and can lead even to loss of an academic employment.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that generational divides are particularly pronounced on this topic. The exasperation of Generation Z with older people (notably their Generation X parents), who do not fully subscribe to this view of "trans rights", is palpable. As a pastor, I have been privy to both sides of the story. There are, of course, dissenting voices from the prevailing orthodoxy among students. Very much the minority, they tend to gather in conservative milieus, not least religious ones, and are usually males, young females being overwhelmingly of a liberal persuasion, a gender divide which is also unprecedented.[10]

Other issues find themselves lumped in with those already mentioned. Anti-capitalist movements reached their zenith with the Occupy movement of the early 2010s. However, this has been eclipsed, in the UK at least, by the environmental movement, Extinction Rebellion. And most recently, the eruption of a new phase of the conflict in Israel-Palestine has led to the phenomenon of university "encampments" both in the UK and the US as expressions of support for Palestinians. The encampments demand that universities disinvest from Israeli companies, and disrupt university life by occupying public sites and university offices.

The concept of intersectionality, coined in the late 1980s by American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, conjoins all these struggles against oppression with the result that the struggle against white supremacism, "the patriarchy", "heteronormativity", environmental degradation, capitalist exploitation of the poor, and Israeli colonialism are all subsumed under a single struggle against violence. The effect of this analysis is to depict a world in which oppression and violence are omni-present, saturating the structures of political and social reality. Although protest points towards the possibility of emancipation, in practice there is no vision of what a world free of such oppression would look like or how it might be governed. Instead, a miasma of oppressive violence bears down on its various human victims, leading to a generalised despair palpable on the university campus.

The term "woke" is customarily invoked, now mostly by its enemies, to designate this broad array of concerns typical of young people. Inevitably, right-wing campaigners routinely define themselves as being "against woke" as a way of dismissing the sensibilities of Generation Z. A single example of how that ramifies in a place like Oxford will be of interest. Acute sensitivity to the race question has fuelled a growing awareness of the impact of past British colonialism and involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The British establishment has long foregrounded Britain's role in bringing slavery to an end. The problem is that this happy memory has tended to occlude awareness of the long period during which the British Empire had been at the forefront of the trade in human beings, not to mention the thought that reparations to the descendants of slaves might be in order. In the last ten years or so, a significant body of popular historical literature criticising British imperialism has grown up.[11] This literature has led, among other things, to calls for the removal of monuments to those involved in slavery and colonialism, a statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oriel College, Oxford, being a case in point. It fell, somewhat surprisingly, to an Anglican priest and theologian, Professor Nigel Biggar, to articulate the "case for colonialism".[12] The presence in Oxford of a number of right-wing think-tanks sympathetic to Biggar's position and sponsored by American and Hungarian backers, has significantly inflected the debate on such matters in the University.

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[10] John Burn-Murdoch, "A new global gender divide is emerging", *Financial Times*, 26th January 2024. Available online at https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998 .
[11] Some of the authors would be William Dalrymple, Matthew Parker, Richard Gott and Shashi Tharoor.
[12] See his *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*, Glasgow: William Collins, 2023.

The impact of extreme sensitivity to interpersonal violence of every kind as a kind of default cultural disposition among young people cannot be over-estimated. It tends to interpret all relationships as the domain of potential aggression. The word "abuse" is readily invoked. Masculinity becomes inextricably associated with sexual threat and so maleness has become another focus of polemical exchange.

It is not clear how best to trace the intellectual genealogy of all this. The label "cultural Marxism" comes readily to hand for American conservative commentators who can rely on the taboo surrounding Marx to arouse automatic hostility. But there are commentators, such as Canadian professor of politics Eric Kaufmann, who have alternative stories. Kaufmann defines wokeness as the sacralisation of historically marginalised race, gender and sexual identity groups and sees it as the fruit of liberal self-loathing. Still others, including the influential North American Catholic apologist, Bishop Robert Barron, prefer to trace a more postmodern line of descent through the category of critical theory.[13] It is not hard to see Nietzsche's hand at work in the nihilistic diagnosis of some elements of protest culture among Generation Z. Given that protest seems to have become the only end which many young people have in mind, this might be the most persuasive analysis of all. And yet, surely there is an evangelical edge to contend with when it comes to the central moral concern: a hyper-sensitivity to endemic violence and a deep conviction that violence must not be allowed to have the last word. It is a voice which the Church must hear and learn from to if she is to attend to her own abuse crisis.

ONTIC-EPISTEMIC WOUNDEDNESS

January 2017 saw the launch of a viral conspiracy theory in the US, the so-called "Birds Aren't Real" movement. Playing on the rising trend in conspiracy theories among the general public, the movement, founded by a psychology student in Memphis, was an exercise in satire. It was alleged that over the course of the second half of the twentieth century the US government had exterminated the entire avian population, replacing birds with drones designed to spy on the populace. The sight of birds sitting on electricity cables was taken as evidence of the drones recharging their energy banks. The joke was played out by a generation which had been immersed in conspiratorial thinking but which had also seen through the madness involved in a generalised hermeneutic of suspicion and had decided to subvert it by humour. It is, in that sense, emblematic of a post-millennial response to a long-term cognitive conundrum afflicting many western and other countries (though it should be noted that there is also research evidence suggesting that Generation Z is even more susceptible to conspiracy theory propaganda than older generations)[14].

The fundamental question of what is real presents itself in the centre of popular western culture right at the end of the twentieth century. The years 1998-1999 saw Hollywood release a group of films which each in their different ways held a mirror to the face of postmodern culture and detected something sham. Note that all these releases preceded the widespread availability of the internet, let alone of the social media platforms which came to occupy such an important

[13] Bishop Robert Barron, "The Philosophical Roots of Wokeism", 8th January 2024. Available online at https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-34-number-1/philosophical-roots-wokeism#:~:text=Some%20of%20the%20names%20associated,1970s%2C%20into%20the%20American%20academy.

[14] Center for Countering Digital Hate, "Belief in conspiracy theories higher among teenagers than adults, as majority of Americans support social media reform, new polling finds", 16th August 2023. Available online at https://counterhate.com/blog/belief-in-conspiracy-theories-higher-among-teenagers-than-adults-as-majority-of-americans-support-social-media-reform-new-polling-finds/

role in the second decade of the new century. A profound sense had already crystallised that the way things appear belies a darker truth. *American Beauty* shone a critical light on life in the north American suburbs; *The Truman Show* turned its attention to the then young genre of "reality television" and raised ethical and cognitive issues applicable to ordinary life; *Fight Club* critiqued contemporary consumer lifestyle through the lens of emancipatory male violence; and most influentially of all *The Matrix* created a science-fiction mythology dramatizing the old philosophical conceit that reality might just be the projection of a brain in a vat, only with the added idea that the human bodies in those vats were enslaved by exploitative machines.

Fascination with the suspicion about mainstream perceptions of reality would go on to find expression in cyber-slang derived from a crucial scene from *The Matrix*. The main protagonist is offered the choice of taking either a red or a blue pill. Consuming the latter will confirm him in his adherence to the benign narrative that what appears to be real really is real; he will then live out his days in fact as, in truth, an exploited slave, though only conscious of the comfortable illusion manufactured for him by the matrix. The red pill, however, will initiate him into the painful truth that he and all other human beings are in fact being physically used as batteries while their consciousness is embedded in a vastly complex computer simulation of "ordinary life". Being "red-pilled" came to betoken, therefore, initiation into the difficult and demanding truth about the nature of reality, rather than settling for all that seems normal and mainstream. In this narrative, cognition dictates a new moral engagement, because to have gone down the "rabbit hole" (the allusion is to the Victorian children's book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) means entering into a new life of resistance and struggle against the sinister forces which really do control the human masses.

If the red pill awakens the individual to an authentic moral crusade, "taking the black pill" is a descent into absolute despair at the inherent and inescapable violence of the world. The black pill is most commonly associated with groups such as the incel (involuntary celibate) movement, a grouping of young men who believe that their inability to find women for sexual gratification is the inescapable result of genetic factors which consign them to lives of frustration and loneliness. The incel movement is marked by the practice of various forms of violence, especially against the women who are judged to be withholding their sexual availability.

This profound pre-occupation with the sense of reality was, we have stressed, already in evidence before digital technologies pushed it into overdrive. One can only speculate on its origins and meaning. Perhaps it is simply the logical consequence of the postmodern conviction that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore to be interrogated, lest occult forces hold sway against the interests of human beings. Perhaps, alternatively, the culture was picking up on a fundamental shift in the geopolitical balance as hopes for Russian democracy collapsed under the Yeltsin regime, all during a period in which assumptions about US hegemony in a unipolar world were taken for granted: things really were not as they seemed and the old reign of progress had already come to an end, though it took some time to be apparent. Or again, perhaps the topos of unreality reflected a deepening crisis of belonging in a world of unprecedented social and labour mobility.[15] For what it is worth, my view is that the central anxiety expressed here did not pertain to reality as such but to the apparent unchangeability of "the system". The replacement of politics by a digital technocracy which allowed no real social or economic change to occur had

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[15] A recent addition to the literature, and well worth reading, is John Ganz's *When the Clock Broke: Con Men, Conspiracists, and How America Cracked Up in the Early 1990s*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc, 2024.

the effect that the space which used to be occupied by politics was now for all intents and purposes taken over by entertainment and other forms of diversion. The idea that reality was machine-like and could not be altered – certainly not improved – was surely so intolerable that all those who hungered for change would be forced to buy into ever more outlandish critique (conspiracy theory) simply to handle the mismatch between aspiration and the *status quo*.

Since the early 2010s, social reality has taken a prodigious step further along the path of the mechanisation of consciousness, greatly to the detriment of Generation Z. The American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt seeks to explain the massive rise in mental illness among teenage boys and girls in many parts of the world that took place in the years 2010-15. The evidence he has marshalled points overwhelmingly to what he refers to as "the great rewiring", a transformation of childhood development brought on by two simultaneous processes: the abandonment by parents of normal experience-based play and learning (physical games in the real world); and the introduction of the phone-based childhood subsequent to the pairing of smartphone and social media technology which became ubiquitous from 2012 onwards.[16] The combined effect of these two changes, he argues, has been immensely consequential and had largely negative effects on members of Generation Z, those who are now students at colleges of higher education. His main concern is their mental health and well-being, and so he points to the massive rise in depression, attention deficit, addiction and other forms of mental illness among the group in question, along with diminished levels of socialisation and social learning. But his work also indicates an altered sense of reality among members of Generation Z now emerging into young adulthood.[17]

The culture of "safetyism" which persuaded parents to clamp down on physical risk-taking for their children coincided with the sudden ubiquity of online gaming in which simulated risks are taken which have none of the real-life consequences which lead to learning and the healthy overcoming of fear.[18] This, he maintains, has prevented youngsters from learning how to handle risk and to learn from mistakes. Furthermore, it has brought about a fundamental shift in young people's responses to reality. Human brain networks, he argues, have evolved two systems for dealing with diametrically opposed scenarios. On the one hand a "discover mode" (*behavioural activation system*) for situations of abundance and safety, in which the person will be open, curious and able to engage; and on the other, a "defend mode" (*behavioural inhibition system*) for situations of threat and danger, and in which reactions of flight, fright and fight are more typical. Haidt points out that one of these will function as a default mode. The result of the new parenting regime has been that young people are now more prone to adopting the defend mode as their default, with the result that they are in a more or less constant state of anxiety and so hindered in their attempts to to learn and grow. The change in college campus culture was sudden when, in 2014, the first Generation Z students began to arrive. The millennial generation's default discover mode was replaced by the heightened sense of anxiety and fear which came naturally to

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[16] Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: how the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, London: Allen Lane, 2024.

[17] *The Anxious Generation*, p67ff.

[18] The spread of a parenting style which imposed an over-protective regime on children is, interestingly for our purposes, to be blamed on a collapse of fraternity. Frank Furedi's research indicates that it was a result of the collapse of trust between adults in society to care for and discipline children effectively. See Frank Furedi, *Paranoid Parenting: Abandon your Anxieties and be a Good Parent*, London: Allen Lane, 2021.

Generation Z. Haidt reports: "Books, words, speakers, and ideas that caused little or no controversy in 2010 were, by 2015, said to be harmful, dangerous, or traumatizing."[19]

Haidt points out that during the period of early puberty the brain undergoes an intense process of neuronal pruning and myelination which locks the brain into its adult configuration.[20] This is a period in which the experiences the child has are determinative of its long-term development. As Haidt says: "Puberty is therefore a period during which *we should be particularly concerned about what our children are experiencing*."[21] But instead, parents in the 2010s allowed their children's experience to be pre-set by the algorithms of the new social media platforms. Experience in the real world was replaced with online experience. The superabundance of material on the internet even had the effect of reducing interest in non-screen experience. And so the door was opened to an experiential diet that was totally unstructured and unconducive to helping the socialisation of children. That process of deconstruction also got to work on the rites of transition by which a child acquires new rights and freedoms as they get older, because on the internet, "everyone is the same age, which is no particular age."[22]

The evidence that social media is more damaging to girls than to boys is striking. Several of the reasons for this are immediately germane to our concerns about fraternity.[23] Haidt points out that young people are motivated by two strong pulls: towards the acquisition of agency (making an impact on the world) and towards communion (integrating into a larger group). Girls, it has been shown, are more drawn to the latter. Social media platforms have played on this by appearing to offer girls the communion experience they seek. Subsequently, however, this expectation is frustrated. Girls are more sensitive and vulnerable than boys to physical comparisons with others of the same sex. Constant exposure to photos of the physical beauty of other girls of the same age, often enhanced by beauty apps, generates not only anxiety but also self-loathing. The aggression of girls, in contrast to that of boys, tends to be played out by attacking the relationships of its victims. Hence cyber-bullying ushers in a living hell.

Digital culture has exacerbated pre-existing cognitive anxieties about the nature of reality with devastating effects on the lives of young people. Clearly, this fact ought to ramify in our discussion of wounded fraternity. It betokens, surely, two profound wounds. On the one hand there is the simple reason that people who disagree on the fundamental nature of the real cannot possibly collaborate on any social or political project. But more deeply, the logic dramatized by the *mythos* of blue and red pills sets the disagreeing parties up as enemies because their very takes on reality are mutually exclusive. There are echoes here of the *Genesis* story alluded to in the basic text (15) in which suspicion is aroused in Eden against God and His intentions regarding humankind, leading to a breakdown in fraternity between Cain and Abel (16). Loss of confidence in a benign narrative about the way things are ushers in the collapse of a stable relationship with God and of solidarity with neighbour. If humanity today is uniquely wounded (19) it may be not so much through a foundational contempt which polarises it as by virtue of a primeval cognitive trap which has us in its thrall.

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[19] *The Anxious Generation*, p71.
[20] *The Anxious Generation*, p95ff.
[21] *The Anxious Generation*, p97. Italics in original.
[22] *The Anxious Generation*, p105.
[23] *The Anxious Generation*, p143ff.

COGNITION IN CRISIS

We have explored in depth aspects of the cognitive landscape faced by our young people. I hope it is clear by now why it is so important to understand the contemporary woundedness of our human fraternity as primarily a cognitive matter. This angle allows me to bring into the conversation a thinker who deserves to be better known, both in his native Britain and further afield, and most especially in the Catholic Church, to whose mission I judge him to be largely sympathetic. A rapid sketch of his project will allow us to situate the matters discussed above as part of a much larger cognitive crisis.

The long-term research programme of psychologist and polymath, Iain McGilchrist, has been to explore the two modes of attention which human beings bring to the world by virtue of their possession of two cerebral hemispheres.[24] Those with a background in twentieth century French philosophy will detect a reprise of the analysis of Henri Bergson and will be mindful of the renewal he brought to so much Catholic theology. McGilchrist, while not primarily influenced by any particular philosopher, traces the foundations of his project to the world of neuroscience, and his argument proceeds not from metaphysical speculation but from empirical data. However, as he has developed his thesis, it has led to a full-blown engagement with philosophy and theology.

In nuce, McGilchrist understands that although each hemisphere is capable of maintaining consciousness separately, the right hemisphere is hierarchically the senior component of the brain, being capable in itself of generating an account of the whole of reality. Its particular form of attention is holistic, involving a scanning of the horizon, as it were, which opens it up to otherness, to living beings and therefore to relationality. It dwells in a world of constant flux and flow, working with symbol and metaphor to put together its picture of the world, a representation it knows to be fallible and partial. The left, by contrast, is given to analysis and dissection of those parts of the world which are deemed of instrumental value to the human agent. It calculates, strategizes and manipulates the parts of reality of interest to it as dead or inanimate objects. Fatally, it judges itself apt to grasp the entirety of reality. Although it dwells in a static world, it is possessed of an epistemic certainty which it asserts even against evidence of its own fallibility.

McGilchrist narrates the trajectory of the last few hundred years of western civilisation as a descent into a new cognitive situation in which the usual hemispheric hierarchy has been reversed. Whereas the right brain (the "master") would normally have delegated to the left (its "emissary") the limited tasks of analysis and instrumental control which it accomplishes so well, in the modern world the left has assumed a dangerous position of dominance, with the result that the intelligences associated with the right brain (art, religion, symbol *etc.*) are downgraded by a dominantly left-brained culture. The cognitive style of the left brain (mathematics, science, technology) has attained cultural supremacy. McGilchrist thus offers an analysis of our modern predicament in terms that are rooted in science, philosophically sophisticated and favourable to religious discourse, even if not committed to Christian faith as such.

Seen through the lens of McGilchrist's penetrating thesis, the cognitive situation of today's Generation Z takes on a new significance. It shows us, in short, how radically left-brain domination has taken root and how the process of domination still plays out in new ways as we become ever more like the machines we construct. If technology is itself the dominant medium

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[24] See his *The Master and His Emissary*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2009 and *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World*, Volumes I & II, London: Perspectiva Press, 2021.

in which social relations are lived, then inevitably those relationships will take on the qualities favoured by the left-brain. Human life is reduced to the two dimensions of the computer screen, our relationships vulnerable to the left and right swiping of the dating app. Identity is pared down to a series of objective markers to be compared or matched like playing cards. Authenticity, instead of pertaining to the obscure depths of our personhood, is subjected to a simple metric of whether one's behaviour corresponds to the expectations set off by the identity-markers one has appropriated for oneself.

McGilchrist provocatively argues that life under left-brain dominance exhibits characteristics typical of conditions such as schizophrenia and autism, and that first-hand accounts of people suffering from these conditions can yield precious insight into the way the world presents itself to us in a left-brain dominated culture.[25] The following features are worthy of note and shed some light on issues identified above:

- Impairment in the sense of the unity and integrity of the body
- Emotional indifference, passivity and lack of initiative
- Difficulty in dealing with the implicit and with "tone of voice"
- Difficulty in understanding another's point of view
- A breakdown in *Gestalt* perception, including one's sense of a whole identity
- Lack of intuitive sense
- A feeling that "all is play-acting"
- A lack of common sense
- Feeling overwhelmed by detail
- Alienation from the body: living life in the third person.

McGilchrist writes eloquently – and darkly – about a profound change to the sense of self in a manner which speaks to our own questions:

> The subject no longer has a self: in its place, a disembodied eye clinically inspecting the shell where the self should be.[26]

> Loss of self may be experienced in a number of ways: as loss of boundaries between the self and other, as the self breaking apart; as alteration in the form of the face or body; in a lack of the ownership of the body and its actions; as well as in an alienation of the self from empathic connexion with the world and with others, from which in normal circumstances the self draws its life. [...] No wonder people emphasise (with tragic and damaging results) something called identity, in which, ironically, their true identity is swallowed up.[27]

McGilchrist also highlights a certain devitalisation which distances the sense of reality and authenticity of experience:

> The natural givenness of experience makes what we call reality possible at all. Without it we become no longer the subject of experience, in the normal sense, but its object, experiencing our *experience*, as if at second hand; confronting a representation, no longer inhabiting a presence.[28]

McGilchrist's account here is far more dramatic and extreme than anything we see in the normal culture of Generation Z. And yet, his insights allow us to see how a fragmented sense of self, the

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[25] *The Matter with Things*, Vol I, p305ff.
[26] *The Matter with Things*, Vol I, p.333.
[27] *The Matter with Things*, Vol, p.333-4.
[28] *The Matter with Things*, Vol I, p.337.

flattening out of the notion of identity, and a mistrust in the givenness of things might together betoken part of a larger crisis, rather simply than being the consequence of engagement with digital media. The point in evoking this larger theoretical framework is not to suggest that members of Generation Z are effectively schizophrenic or autistic (though diagnosis rates of the latter are certainly high among them). Rather, it is to indicate that the issues which we have delineated under the rubric of intergenerational fraternity are in fact part of a larger and even more consequential wound to human identity and flourishing. This certainly deserves the attention and concern of the Catholic Church, for the Eucharist which she celebrates and which in turn makes her, is indeed a source of the healing and wholeness much needed by humanity in the modern world.

EUCHARIST AND COGNITIVE HEALING

My contribution to these proceedings is supposed to end by showing how Eucharistic life, which we are celebrating so fully in these days, can bring healing to the wounds of fraternity, a process which entails "healing the human heart's wounds that obstruct healing and reconciliation" (Basic Text 3). As a Jesuit priest, I have no doubt that this is in fact the case. That said, it is not entirely appropriate for me to set out the saving task to be accomplished by the Body and Blood of Our Lord as if the Eucharist were some instrument to be applied as a solution to human problems. But a few observations will indicate, I hope, the direction our pastoral care of the younger generations might take.

A preliminary observation would be that much of Pope Francis' magisterium expresses the intention, though plainly not avowed, of promoting a truly right-brained Catholicism in an age when left-brained Catholic identities are to the fore. His dictum, "time is greater than space"[29], with its Bergsonian resonance, expresses the huge importance he places on *processes* in the life of the Church and of the human family. His transformation of the ecclesial institution of the Synod of Bishops gives eloquent testimony to the same abiding conviction. His current endeavour to help the Church live out more fully her synodal nature also belies a decidedly right-brained concern, committed as it is to the transformation of intra-ecclesial relationships, to the empathetic practice of listening and to the development of that intuitive faculty by which we come truly to understand another. This, in turn, reminds us of the Holy Father's call to the whole world to rediscover a politics of fraternity, and to contemplate the life-flow of our social and political institutions. His care for relationships beyond the Church – with popular movements, for instance, other religious traditions and with the earth itself – also belies the holistic intelligence of the right hemisphere. His repeated appeal to root social action in contemplation also indicates an underlying conviction that so much evil springs from a misperception of the reality of God.[30] With that in mind, it should not be surprising to find a Bergoglian flavour to my conclusions about the ways in which Eucharistic participation might heal the cognitive wounds afflicting the lives of many of our young people.

We have seen the way in which digital culture encourages young people first to make identity a crucial issue in their lives and then to construe identity in a surprisingly flat and superficial way, somehow reducible to a series of markers which need to correspond to a felt sense of self. McGilchrist's account of a culture marked by left-brained dominance as bearing a resemblance to the lived experience of the schizophrenic may strike us as dramatic. But he is surely right to

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[29] *Evangelii Gaudium*, 222-225.

[30] See the suggestive remarks to this effect of Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times*, London: T&T Clark, 2021, p264.

speak of a two-dimensional quality which we detect in the working model of selfhood which young people have, so redolent of life lived in intimate proximity to the computer screen. McGilchrist invites us to think about the sense of self which the right-brain brings: the flow of life, an openness to self-transcendence, the intuitive sense of our human depths, the call of the mystical and the encounter with the reality of another. We are far from saying that young people as a whole do not have access to these dimensions, but some, perhaps many, might benefit from exploring them and coming to understand them as crucial aspects of identity formation.

For the Christian, the question of identity is a truly theological mystery and the task of receiving its disclosure has an eschatological timeline:

> See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (*1John* 3: 1-2)

Hence, when we participate in the Eucharist we enact joyful acceptance of the call to divine filiation. Identity markers pertaining to sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social status, religious affiliation and all the rest are not erased by subsumed in the **depth of the mystery of our incorporation into the divine life**:

> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3: 28)

The Christian quest for identity is an all-encompassing journey into a new life the nature of which we can only partially intuit in this world of shadows (Cf *1Cor* 13: 12). But we are assured of eventually retrieving the identity of an integral human person, a transcendent subjectivity whose wholeness will somehow reflect the integrity of Christ's divine personhood. It is beyond our current knowledge and words, but we participate in it as we share in the divine life through reception of the sacrament of the altar. Indeed, in the Eucharist not only is our deep selfhood reconfigured through adoption by our heavenly Father, but by ourselves sharing in the one loaf we become one body in the community of believers. A pastoral approach which initiates young people into the rich, multi-layered and transformative practice of Eucharistic participation and which helps them to reflect on the depths of their true personhood as reflected in the liturgy of the Mass is surely a promising way of making intelligible the healing our wounded fraternity needs so urgently. And this always begins with the contemplation of Christ as he gives Himself to His people in all His fullness.

From this contemplation of the eucharistic Christ flows the possibility of **peace** instead of ubiquitous and endless violence. The Eucharist marks the end of animal sacrifice, the endless bloody repetition of a failed expiatory regime:

> And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God', and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' (*Hebrews* 10: 11-13)

The original violence of so much postmodern theory gives way to the original peace of the Christian vision.[31] The contemplation of Christ in majesty as He awaits His eschatological triumph creates a space and time of freedom for the Church in which we suffer the injustices

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[31] Cf. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, pp278-9.

which still afflict the world in expectant hope of future vindication. In the meantime, Christ's solidarity with His people gains for them access to the heavenly sanctuary, the assurance of faith and the purity of a clean conscience.[32] And as we gaze upon Him, we find ourselves imitating the peaceful victim whose rejection of violence is final and definitive. In the Eucharistic rite, we stand at peace with our Creator and with our sisters and brothers.

The sign of peace, sadly atrophied in our post-Covid liturgies, anticipates and lays the foundation for the rite of communion. For as agents of God's peace, we discover the Eucharist as being always **communion** with our brothers and sisters, because in the Eucharist "God dwells in us and we in Him" (*Jn* 6: 56). The believer enters into a mysterious space of unity and mutual indwelling with others which is founded not on the solidarity of this or that minority group but on prior friendship with Christ. As the basic text says, "the Eucharistic celebration breaks down every wall and frontier of rivalry, violence and selfishness." (BT27) Mutual in-dwelling is something that can only be sensed by subjects who are self-possessed, whose sense of life is open to the possibility of welcoming-receiving the other and giving oneself to the other. It is this capacity for communion which allows us to perceive the other as part of our story, not an enemy or a threat. As Pope Francis points out, this has serious social and political implications:

> When one part of society exploits all that the world has to offer, acting as if the poor did not exist, there will eventually be consequences. Sooner or later, ignoring the existence and rights of others will erupt in some form of violence, often when least expected. Liberty, equality and fraternity can remain lofty ideals unless they apply to everyone. Encounter cannot take place only between the holders of economic, political or academic power. Genuine social encounter calls for a dialogue that engages the culture shared by the majority of the population. It often happens that good ideas are not accepted by the poorer sectors of society because they are presented in a cultural garb that is not their own and with which they cannot identify. A realistic and inclusive social covenant must also be a "cultural covenant", one that respects and acknowledges the different worldviews, cultures and lifestyles that coexist in society. (*Fratelli Tutti* 219)

In the light of what has been said about the currency of narratives of intergenerational conflict, this passage is germane in that it appeals not just to the criterion of justice which must obtain but also to a "cultural covenant". Although I am sure that the cultural differences between generations we have examined were far from Pope Francis' mind when he wrote this, they are an unavoidable reality with which Catholic thinking must engage.

With peace comes the possibility of **solidarity**. It is often noted that Generation Z seeks to change the world and to make it more just. The complexity of the manifold injustices at work in the world is met by the concept of intersectionality which is to be criticised for promoting an oversimplified and Manichean account of social reality. But this is not to deny the obligation to live in solidarity with those who suffer genuine injustice. Younger people hunger for recognition and for acceptance of who they are. They yearn for connectedness with those whose experience echoes their own and to express respect and acceptance of others, regardless of the extent to which they conform with or deviate from societal norms. Yet they struggle, as we all do in this age, to envision concrete ways of living, expressive of the peace they long for. Again, this model can be critiqued for a certain ethical "flatness" and for the flimsiness of a tolerance which tolerates everything except the intolerant. Yet, the Eucharist is precisely the locus of recognition, acceptance and God's effective and affective solidarity with His people. In the Eucharist we are all equal in dignity, even the saint and the sinner. God's unconditional embrace offers solid ground on which to build relationships of unconditional solidarity, making the Church a tent for all (Cf BT 36), because the

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[32] Cf *Hebrews* 10: 19-23.

"you" that is in "me" and vice-versa can lead us not only to remain in each other but to stand shoulder to shoulder. And true solidarity will include the intergenerational solidarity which Pope Francis insists is "a basic question of justice".[33]

Finally, in the action than flows inevitably from effective solidarity, we discover that the Eucharist is the great source of **transformation** (BT 50), renewing the Church and through her all of humanity and of creation. Instead of the paralysis and stasis of the mechanised, technocratic world which arouses the hostility of modern women and men and the cynicism of the young, God offers human beings a new agency as co-workers in the vineyard, sisters and brothers sent out on mission bearing the Word of Life.

CONCLUSION

If the above account is correct, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that work to foster the possibility of social and political friendship for a generation whose humanity is increasingly shaped by its digital environment must be grounded in an encounter with the depths and integrity of selfhood in Christ. Only then can the work of advancing true intergenerational fraternity proceed because the communion which the Church exists to live and to promote is first and foremost communion in Christ.

As Pope Benedict XVI was so keen to emphasise, at the heart of this mystery is the lived encounter with divine gratuity, a super-abundance of relationship and encounter which provides a radical reframing of social existence, subsuming, certainly not cancelling, the categories of contract, exchange and duty, in a larger framework of gift. This gratuity is, arguably, the point of the most extreme divergence between the social order as envisaged by computer intelligence and that of an authentically human intelligence suffused by charity. We have already entered an era in which these two intelligences must find themselves in ever more intense conflict, in which we must expect that the human will be repeatedly crucified by the machine. Tempting as it is to think of our mission to heal our wounded fraternity as the restoration of some *status quo ante*, it will be more accurate and fruitful to see it as vital preparation for a prolonged era, already upon us, in which our principal call will be that of resistance in Christ's name.

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[33] *Laudato Si'* 159.