



The Way of the Lamb

The Spirit of Childhood and the End of the Age
By John Saward

In the pre-Christian world, children were slain on pagan altars, and now, in the post-Christian world of the affluent West, children are again the object of adult hostility. In the U.S.A. the abuse of children has been called a "national emergency", while in almost every country on earth the killing of children still unborn has become an ideology of "choice".

In this challenging book, John Saward examines the work of several Roman Catholic writers, including St. Thérèse of Lisieux, G. K. Chesterton, Charles Peguy, Georges Bernanos and Hans Urs von Balthasar who rose up in defense and celebration of childhood. This is a ground-breaking work in the theology of childhood and the analysis of modernity.

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REVIEWS

"The clarity of Saward's style, the bounty of his sources, and the profundity of his topic—the sacredness of human life, especially the life of the child—make *The Way of the Lamb* a tour de force of insight and perspicacity necessary for us all. I highly recommend it."

—**John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York**

"One of the most original and insightful books of recent years. A singular beauty and intellectual passion describes the elegance of spiritual childhood and the terrible darkness of a world at war against children. Saward's account of St. Therese of Lisieux is superior to anything written about that new Doctor."

—**Fr. George William Rutler, Author, *Crisis of Saints***

'John Saward has written what almost amounts to a manifesto for spiritual survival in our time, painting a compelling picture of the crisis of our age.'
Leonie Caldecott, *The Catholic Herald*

'John Saward is an unsung hero of contemporary English Catholicism. The beautifully crafted essays on writers of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries which make up the substance of this book can and should be read as contributions to scholarly literature. But by means of them John Saward is asking from his readers a deeper and more effective recognition of the everlasting youthfulness of God, Christ, Our Lady and the Church. In an often tired and jaded Western Christendom, it is a plea that will reward heeding.'
Aidan Nichols, Blackfriars, Cambridge, The Tablet

'John Saward writes books of a kind no other British theologian does. What makes him distinctive is the unembarrassed retrieval of certain highly-charged spiritual writers and themes, combined with a firm dogmatic underpinning. This is a doctrinally secure, exuberant Catholicism that proposes to change lives and be counter-cultural.

Robert Ombres OP, New Blackfriars

Preface

**A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning;
Rachel bewailing her children and would not be comforted,
because they are not. (Matt. 2:18; cf. Jer. 31:15)**

The sin of the century is the sin against the child. The tears of Rachel have become an ocean. In the richest and most powerful country on earth, child abuse has been called 'a national emergency'[1]. More children have been willfully killed by adults during the last hundred years than in the whole preceding history of the human race. The fact is beyond doubt. The numbers can be checked in the annals of every nation on earth. Sixty years ago the neo-pagans of National Socialism were appointing bureaucrats to implement a programme of children's euthanasia.[2] In the last thirty years, hundreds of millions of the unborn have been butchered in dark satanic mills from Adelaide to Zurich[3]. Pharaoh and Herod massacred the innocents in sudden nights of rage, but their successors slay the lambs in the calm light of the day with industrial efficiency. The death of a little one can be secured by a consultation of the Yellow Pages. Arguments for infanticide are set forth with academic *sang-froid* in journals and dissertations [4]. One author, while claiming not to 'condone' the evil, has presented child abuse as 'an evolutionary mechanism associated with population-resource balance'[5]. A crime whose depravity once robbed moralists of speech is now loquaciously promoted in parliaments. The small and weak are robbed of their freedom to live by the great and mighty insisting on their freedom to 'choose'. Throughout Western Europe and North

America there are well-endowed societies for the prevention of cruelty to children, but better funded by far, backed by national governments and international agencies, are bodies for the prevention of children[6]. And in China, under a tyranny whose abominations rank with Hitler's and Stalin's, there is state coercion into contraception coercion into contraception, compulsory abortion, and widespread infanticide.

Modern men and women seem to have declared war on their children. In societies dedicated to the pursuit of unrestrained sexual pleasure, the child has become an obstacle to be circumvented, even an enemy to be destroyed. The dominant contraceptive mentality is intrinsically contra-child, for the contracepting person wills a child not to be. The cult of homosexuality, too, is a practical hatred of the child because it is the rejection of woman and therefore of the fruit of her womb, an ultimate compact with sterility and death[7].

The sin against the child is the sin of this and every century, the sin of the world. From the beginning, the fallen angel, who is proud and will not obey his Creator, has struck out at the child, whose very being signifies humility and the receptivity required for entry to the Kingdom. The Serpent is a perpetual enemy of the Seed of the Woman (cf. Gen.3:15) he wants to kill and devour her Child (cf. Apoc. 12:4) - and in Him every child. In the ancient world only the Hebrews consistently raised their voices against the slaughter of children. The old religion of Canaan worshipped and sacrificed children. In dark groves they offered up the innocent to Moloch. The very name of the Jewish Hell, 'Gehenna' refers to the vile valley of slaughter, just south of Jerusalem, where children were butchered and burnt to placate 'the idols of Canaan' (cf Ps. 105:38; Jer. 19:3-6). King David was in no doubt: 'the gods of the Gentiles', those false deities who demand the blood of children, 'are devils' (Ps. 95:5).

The words of Hans Urs von Balthasar 'Everywhere outside of Christianity the child sacrificed'[8]. Not every individual pagan is guilty of the hatred of children. of children, but most pagan cultures tolerate the murder of children: if not by cult, then through abortion and infanticide. Reverence for the child is the gift of Christianity, the gift of Jesus Christ, to the world. It is part of the newness that, according to the Church Fathers, the divine Word incarnate brought into human history. And as the modern world turns away from the Virgin and her Child, who makes all things new, so it falls into the old vice of killing its young. The Norwegian Catholic writer Sigrid Undset once wrote:

Where [the Virgin Mother] is driven away, there Herod slinks on his way back and people are seduced by the Idumean's dreams of power and pleasure, of feasts in newly built palaces and blood in dark cellars, and in their hearts

Herod's hatred for his own descendants and his fear of children awoken. And the old visions of the goddesses of material change, gods of birth and decay, rising and falling life, again spring up.[9]

The spiritual combat of this and every age is the battle of the Lamb of God and His Bride against the child-devouring Dragon. At the dawn of the twentieth century, to equip His Church with fresh light and strength for the struggle, God raised up a band of prophets who proclaimed anew the truth, goodness, and beauty of childhood, both the natural childhood of the sons of Adam and the supernatural childhood of the adopted sons of God. The princess among these prophets is a saint and doctor of the Church, St Thérèse of Lisieux. In her retinue are four men, her spiritual brothers, whose writings are an amplification and development of her Little Way. Only one of them is a 'theologian' in the formal sense: the priest Hans Urs von Balthasar. The other three are laymen, fighting for Christ in the battlefields of literature and journalism: Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Charles Péguy, and Georges Bernanos. Chesterton makes his appearance in each chapter of the book. This is only fitting. He had a special gift of understanding and appreciating the work of his fellow writers. As once in his own career, so now in this book, G.K. plays M.C. In each chapter he offers a generous word of introduction and speech of conclusion.

Chesterton, St Thérèse, and the other members of our famous five were born between the Franco-Prussian World War. They are prophets of the end of the age. The study of their lives disturbs the complacent ideological readings of the conflicts of our century. There is only one *grand bataille*: the fight for the Christ Child against the Antichrists who deny him and seek to destroy Him in the smallest of His brethren. There is only one way to victory and to peace: the way of the lamb.

These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie.
(Apoc. 14:4-5)

1. In 1990, the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse outlined the proportions of the emergency in its official report *Child Abuse and Neglect. Critical First Steps in Response to a National Emergency* (Washington, 1990). In 1989 there were 2.4 million abused children in the USA.

2 'On 18 August 1939, the Reich Committee introduced the compulsory registering of all "malformed" newborn children ... In return for a payment of 2RM per case, doctors and midwives were obliged to report instances of

idiocy and Down's Syndrome; microcephaly; hydrocephaly; physical deformities such as the absence of a limb or late development of the head or spinal column; and forms of spinal paralysis' (Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance. 'Euthanasia' in Germany, c. 1900-1 945* [Cambridge, 1994], pp. 93- 129). Three or four years later, 'the killing of children, adolescents, and young adults had become routine and systematic.... As many as 6,000 children died, although many more were killed under the adult "euthanasia" programme' (ibid., p. 111).

3. See the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development, *Abortion Policies. A Global Review* (New York, 1992).

4. Michael Tooley concludes his book *Abortion and Infanticide* as follows: 'If the line of thought pursued above is correct, neither abortion, nor infanticide, at least during the first few weeks after birth, is morally wrong' (Oxford, 1983), p. 419. Peter Singer of Monash University in Australia describes as 'speciesist' any distinctions between human persons and non-human animals. He maintains that 'killing, say, a chimpanzee is worse than the killing of a gravely defective human who is not a person' (cited in M. Burleigh, op. cit., pp. 297f.).

5. David Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents* (San Francisco, 1971), p. 3.

6. See R. Marshall and C. Donovan, *Blessed are the Barren. The Social Policy of Planned Parenthood* (San Francisco, 1991). The links between the eugenicists who fathered the Birth Control movement in the USA and the architects of the euthanasia programme in Nazi Germany are well documented. Foster Kennedy, a eugenicist and member of the Euthanasia Society of the USA, received an honorary doctorate from the Nazis. He resigned from the Euthanasia Society because they favored only 'voluntary' euthanasia, while he urged systematic extermination of 'creatures born defective'. 'Kennedy continued to promote euthanasia in the United States, even after the mass killings of mentally handicapped people in Nazi Germany had been revealed to the American people' (Stefan Kohl, *The Nazi Connection. Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York and Oxford, 1994), pp. 86f.). In the very year in which the Second World War ended, the Jewish convert to Catholicism David Goldstein pointed out these same links in *Suicide Bent. Sangerizing Mankind* (St Paul, 1945).

7. The great Christian humanist Lactantius says this of pederastic corruption of the young: 'What can be sacred to these men who supplied their lust with children of tender age and in need of protection, destroying and defiling them?'

So great is this crime, I cannot speak of it. All I can say is that these men are impious and parricides' (Divinae institutiones 6, 23; PL 6. 717A).

8. *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie*, new edition (Einsiedeln, 1990), p. 282.

9. Sigrid Undset, 'A Christmas Meditation', in *Sigrid Undset on Saints and Sinners. New Translations and Studies* (San Francisco, 1993), p. 285.

Postscript

And a great sign appeared in Heaven: a Woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered. And there was seen another sign in Heaven. And behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and on his heads seven diadems... And the dragon stood before the Woman who was ready to be delivered, that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her son. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. And her son was taken up to God and to His throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that there they should feed her, a thousand two hundred sixty days. (Apoc. 12:1-6)

The Dragon is poised to attack the Child of the Woman, but the Woman and her Child overcome him. This Woman, whom John saw shining in the Apocalypse, is the Woman Moses saw shadowed in Genesis (cf. Gen. 3:15). She is the Ever-Virgin Mother of God, the New Eve, the Woman who mediates with the Mediator (cf. John 2:4) and co-operates with the work of the Redeemer (cf. John 19:26). Here John catches sight of her as the glorious Lady of the Assumption. The sun that clothes her is the risen splendor of Christ the Sun of Righteousness, the radiance He poured out upon her when He took her, soul and body, into His Father's house in Heaven.[1] But the Woman clothed with the sun is also the Church Triumphant on the last day, of whose glory Maria assumpta is the 'image and beginning'.[2] And the Woman is every woman, all the daughters of the Old Eve, and the sun is the honour done to their womanhood through God's choice of the Virgin to be His Blessed Mother.[3]

The moon under the Woman-Mary's feet is the Church, which is a moon in relation to Christ, brilliant with His reflected light.[4] The Church is placed beneath Our Lady in the sense that Our Lady is the Mother of the Church and the pre-eminent member of the Church, the Church's 'mediatrix with the Sun of Righteousness'.[5] The moon under the Woman-Church's feet is the waxing and

waning moon of worldly wisdom, which is foolishness to God (cf. Ecclus. 27:12; 1 Cor. 1:20).[6] The Church preaches Eternal Wisdom Crucified, which is foolishness to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18ff.). The moon under the feet of Every-woman is the same mad wisdom of the world in its contempt for true womanhood: the receptivity which is the natural mark of femininity and the 'communion with the mystery of life' which is the glory of maternity.[7] The twelve stars on Our Lady's head are the Twelve Patriarchs, the Fathers of the Hebrews, of whom Mary of Nazareth is the fairest daughter, 'the joy of Israel . . . the honour of our people' (cf. Judith 15:10). The twelve stars on the head of the Church Triumphant are the totality of the saints, that is to say, the multiplication of those who, from the four corners of the earth, have had living faith in the Three-Personed God. The twelve stars on the head of the Church Militant are the twelve Apostles and all who share their ministry in the Church. This masculine priesthood, acting in the person of the 'man child' Christ, is at the chivalrous service of the Woman-Church. The twelve stars on the head of Everywoman are the fruits of the Holy Spirit borne by any woman who corresponds with the Spirit's Grace and Gifts.

The Dragon is the Old Serpent, 'who is called the Devil and Satan' (v. 9), and his seven heads are the seven capital sins to which he tempts the children of Eve.⁸ The Woman crying out, travailing in birth, is not the Virgin Theotokos in Bethlehem, who brought forth her Son without pain and corruption,[9] but the Virgin Co-redemptrix on Calvary: *cruciabatur ut pareret*, 'she was crucifyingly in pain to be delivered'. By her night of faith, she shared in the dereliction of the Son and co-operated under Him in restoring divine adoption to men. The Woman crying out is also the Church Militant, as she strives, in the face of Satan's fury, to bring forth sons in the likeness of Christ.[10] And the Woman crying out is every woman, every daughter of Eve, despised by the Devil for the receptivity of her femininity and the generosity of her maternity.

The Child is the Christ Child persecuted by the Devil through the instrumentality of King Herod.[11] There was and ever will be enmity between the Serpent's brood and the Woman's Seed (cf. Gen. 3:15).¹² The Child also signifies the children of Mother Church, who can be called collectively a 'man child' because all the members of Christ's Mystical Body are 'one Son' with Him.[13] The Devil wants to expunge the grace of adoptive sonship from their souls. The Child is also, without doubt, every mother's child. [14] Satan wants to devour him because he knows that, in every age and culture, by the wisdom and love of the Creator, every child is an icon of the Christ Child and a model of the Christian disciple.[15]

The wilderness to which the Woman flees is the wilderness of Egypt, where, safe from Herod's hatred, Our Lady and the Child-God were fed and guarded by St Joseph.[16] The wilderness also symbolizes this present age in which the Church Militant, the New Israel, is fed with the manna of Christ's flesh and guarded by the fiery pillar of the Spirit.[17] And the wilderness is the desert of Christian non-conformity to the world, a desert strangely fruitful for the soul of every woman, as it is for the soul of every man. [18]

The Child taken up to God's throne is the ascended Christ, the victorious Lamb. By His Cross and Resurrection, He has defeated the Dragon, and now, in the very flesh in which He died and rose from the tomb, He sits in glory at the Father's right hand.[19] The Child taken up to God's throne also represents the children of the Church, who have the great hope that where their Head is, they, His members, may also be. And the Child taken up to God's throne is all human childhood objectively raised up to a marvelous new dignity through the human childhood of the Father's eternal Son. Only in Baptism will individual children be incorporated into Christ, but already, by the fact of His Incarnation, their childhood has a fresh grandeur and renown.

For the sake of every mother's child, the Virgin's Child has conquered. He has cast out the accuser of His brethren.[20] Even now He reigns as the slain Lamb (cf. Apoc. 5:9), carrying the marks of the Passion in His risen flesh as an unfailing supplication of mercy. His Sacrifice once offered on the Cross is not locked away in the past but daily renewed on His Church's altars, and its saving power is applied to the healing of men and the harrowing of Hell. Through the teaching and Sacraments of His Catholic Church, and by the intercession of His Blessed Mother, the Lamb-Shepherd feeds His lambs and leads them to the fountains of life (cf. John 21:15; Apoc. 7:17). Every child has someone on earth to speak for him and defend him. There is a Mother, standing on rock, over whom the child-consuming gates of Gehenna cannot prevail (cf. Matt. 16:18). There is a Mother, a 'valiant woman' (Prov. 31:10), who will crush the head of the Serpent (cf. Gen. 3:15). At the end of the age, through the Woman, Holy Mary and Holy Church, the Father's Lamb will bring His flock into the fold and city of the free (cf. Apoc. 22:14), and the Spirit of the Child will triumph.

And I heard a loud voice in Heaven, saying, 'Now is come salvation and strength and the Kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ, because the accuser of our brethren is cast forth, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame Him by the Blood of the Lamb and by the Word of testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death' (Apoc. 12:10-11).

NOTES

1. According to St Bonaventure, Our Lady is clothed with '**the light of eternal radiance**' (cf. *De annuntiatione Beatae Virginis Mariae sermo* 4, 1; Sancti Bonaventurae opera omnia, vol.9 [Quaracchi, 1901], P. 672), the 'beauty of the Sun of Righteousness' (*De assumptione Beatae Virginis Mariae sermo* 2, 2; *ibid.*, p. 692).

2 Cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 68.

3. Mary is the "new beginning" of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every woman' (Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 11).

4. Cf. St Bernard of Clairvaux, *In dominica infra octavam assumptionis sermo* 3, 5; J. Leclercq OSB and H. Rochais, eds., *Sancti Bernardi opera*, vol. 5 (Rome, 1968), p. 265.

5. *Ibid.*, n. 15, p. 274.

6. *Ibid.*, n. 3, p. 264.

7. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 18.

8. Cf. Richard of St Victor, *In Apocalypsim loannis*, lib. 4; PL 196. 799D.

9. 'This cannot be applied literally to Blessed Mary, because just as she conceived without pleasure, so she gave birth without pain' (Haymo of Halberstadt (± 853), *Expositio in Apocalypsim* 3, 12; PL 117. 1081D-1082A). 'Of course, with the whole Catholic tradition, I believe that [the Blessed Virgin] was spared the physical tortures [of childbirth], which are a consequence of our fallen nature. Those words of Genesis (3:15) could not be addressed to the Immaculate: "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children" (Gen. 3:16)' (Paul Claudel, *Paul Claudel interroge l'Apocalypse* [Paris, 1952], p. 86).

10. 'This Dragon stands before the Woman about to give birth, because the Devil attacks Holy Church who longs to give birth to Christ in the fruit of good works. And when she does give birth, he wants to devour her child, because he wants to take Christ from her through the corruption of the works' (Richard of St Victor, *In Apocalypsim loannis*, lib. 4; PL 196. 799D-800A).

11. Cf. Rupert of Deutz, *Commentarium in Apocalypsim*, lib 7. cap. 12; PL 169. 1048C.

12. Cf. St Bernard of Clairvaux, *In dominica infra octavam assumptionis*, n. 4; p. 265.

13. Cf. Emile Mersch, *The Whole Christ*. The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition, ET (London. 1949). pp. 414ff.

14. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, n. 104.

15. As Cardinal Newman says, 'childhood is a type of the perfect Christian state' ('The State of Innocence', *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 5, p. 102).

16. Cf. Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram*, vol. 21 (Paris, 1966), p. 244.

17. Living in the hope of things eternal, the Church rejoices in the pilgrimage of this present desert. She has received power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and all the might of the Red Dragon, as were the People of Israel, who were fed with heavenly bread in the desert and, by the sight of the bronze serpent, overcame the fiery serpents' (St Bede the Venerable, *Explanatia Apocalypsis*, lib. 2; ITh 93. 167A).

18. On the symbolism of the desert, see Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, ET (London, 1960), ch. XIII.

19. This Child is taken up to God and to His throne, because in His humanity He ascends into Heaven, and sits with the Father, and rules and judges the world' (Richard of St Victor, In *Apocalypsim loannis*, lib. 4; PL 196. 800A).

20. St Bonaventure says that Lucifer was first cast out at his fall, and then he was cast out in a second battle between the good angels and bad 'when the Church was founded in the Passion of Christ, from which the Sacraments derive their power' (*De angelis sermo 5; Sancti Bonaventurae opera omnia*, vol. 9 [Quaracchi, 1901], p. 630).

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