

*A talk given at the Vatican Symposium on "Literature Between Reality and Fantasy: the Anglo-American Experience" organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture in 2006, and published in Cultural & Libri, n. 156/157 (2006).*

## CULT OR CULTURE? SOME REFLECTIONS ON ROWLING, PULLMAN AND THE CONTEMPORARY FANTASY SCENE

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*"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." - C.S. Lewis*

In his essay 'Magic and Fantasy in Fiction', G.K. Chesterton speaks of the net of St. Peter, and the snare of Satan, each of which represents a different kind of magic in which one can become enmeshed. "I am convinced," he wrote, "that every deep or delicate treatment of the magical theme, from the lightest jingle of Peacock Pie... to the most profound shaking of the phenomenal world... will always be found to imply an indirect relation to the ancient blessing and cursing; and it is **almost as vital that it should be moral as that it should not be moralizing.**"

When discussing the impact of contemporary British fantasy writers on the lives of young people, one could do worse than take Chesterton's double distinction as a basis for discernment. Are these writers in the venerable tradition of faerie, and thus part of the continuing culture which has nourished so many generations before them? Or are they no more than pied-pipers, leading children away into their own strange and cultish dead-ends? This question is particularly acute in the case of two British writers. **Philip Pullman**, whose fantasies use specifically Catholic terminology as he enacts the death of God in a toxic melding of Gnostic and Enlightenment ideas. Pullman won the Whitbread Award for the last, and actually weakest novel in his *Dark Materials* trilogy, the first time a children's novel has won the prize. He was recently awarded a CBE by the Queen, an honour which serves to confirm his establishment status in my country. Those who have dared to criticise Pullman, myself included, have been misquoted and caricatured to an astonishing degree by the mainstream press.

The other author is **J.K. Rowling**, whose Harry Potter books have provoked a much more heated debate among Christians, a number of whom have accused Rowling of creating an anti-moral universe for her trainee wizard and his struggles with the forces of darkness. Relying on an imaginal world in which children learn to cast spells and hurl hexes, the Harry Potter books do indeed seem to play into the hands of those forces in contemporary culture which are obsessed with the occult, and which as a consequence are logically opposed to Christianity as a value system. I have to say that the films that have been made of the books do not help in this respect, pushing the material further into the sinister and burlesque, even in places altering the meaning of dialogue which in the books has very different connotations. One critic of the Harry Potter books, the German writer Gabrielle Kuby, claims to have received support from the Holy Father himself, at a time when he was still prefect of the CDF.

"It is good that you enlighten people about Harry Potter," wrote the then Cardinal Ratzinger to Ms Kuby in March 2003, "because those are subtle seductions, which act unnoticed and by this deeply distort Christianity in the soul, before it can grow properly." The publication of this letter by Ms Kuby last year at the time the sixth and penultimate Harry Potter book came out, albeit with permission from its author, engendered a bit of a media fire-storm. 'Pope condemns Harry Potter', etc. Likewise, some fairly cautious comments from a former member of this Council, Msgr Peter Fleetwood, had earlier occasioned a similar over-statement from the press: 'Vatican approves of Harry Potter' - eliciting the predictable hate-mail from those who reacted to the situation without

having first ascertained what the hapless Monsignor had actually said, or intended to convey.

Of course neither statement, taken in its proper context, implies either blanket approval or condemnation. In any case, condemnation of the ‘subtle seductions’ of the occult world-view, which His Holiness is right to point out distort the capacity to develop as a Christian, is something a little separate from the considered opinion that the Harry Potter books, on close reading, embody the occult seduction. It has not been claimed that the Holy Father has read these books personally. In any case, the media reaction to both incidents is instructive in itself, prompting a self-examination as to how the world perceives us: members of a Church which makes certain very specific truth-claims, and holds values which are not necessarily self-explanatory.

That self-examination is an essential part of any discernment concerning fantasy literature in our time. As a mother, a catechist and occasional lecturer on theology and media issues, I am constantly struck by the way in which contemporary culture revolves obsessively around religious questions. It is as if the further away we move from a Christian culture in the West, the more the seminal questions that faith grapples with come back to haunt us. What is the human person? What is the secret of a happy life? What do our relationships, our experiences, our memories *mean*? All topics examined in great depth by both our present Pope and his great predecessor, not least in his final book *Memory and Identity*. At the same time, I am also struck by the extent to which Christianity, and the Catholic faith in particular, is radically misunderstood by a post-Christian culture which has lost the very vocabulary of faith. There is a huge re-evangelisation project to be accomplished here; and we would do well to discern who our potential allies are, and what the enemy is up to amongst those who for the moment, at least, bear us nothing but ill will.

One of the foremost English fantasy writers, who does not get as much attention as the more controversial Rowling and Pullman, but who deserves at least equal popularity, is **William Nicholson**. I am going to take the case of Nicholson to illustrate my thesis about the conditions in which fantasy literature is thriving in English speaking culture today, firstly because I admire him as a writer. Nicholson actually grapples to a remarkable extent with those central questions of identity and memory, or anamnesis, in the formation of human culture. And secondly, because his own biographical curve – which he willingly and straightforwardly adumbrates, provides a highly instructive framework for our enquiry.

Nicholson was brought up a Catholic, his parents having converted to the faith when he was seven. Educated both by the Dominicans and the Benedictines at the time of the Second Vatican Council, he recalls the excitement of being encouraged to question his faith as a teenager, confident that this would only strengthen it. Then, as a student at Cambridge, he lost the ability to believe in God as an objective reality. Nicholson has not, to my knowledge, gone into the details of this falling away, but he has written a fascinating account of how his human relationships developed in the decade or two that followed, how the quest for the ideal partner with whom to share his life foundered constantly on the premises that he was now bringing to the search. His story ended happily, with a late marriage and three children, and his writing career also thrived, as he wrote for film and television, including the award-winning *Shadowlands*. It is interesting that he should choose C.S. Lewis as a subject, particularly since he projects into Lewis at the most painful moment of his life his own desperate struggle between doubt and faith.

It is also interesting that when Nicholson started writing fantasy literature for children, beginning with the *Wind on Fire* trilogy, he found himself using philosophical and religious material which the Jewish psychologist Viktor Frankl would have had no hesitation in classing as ‘logotherapeutic’. Nicholson maintains that children’s fantasy literature has stepped into a cultural breach that the post-modern novel has left wide open, satisfying the need that adults, as well as children, have for fictional forms which explore the deeper meaning of life. He has defined the kind of fantasy that he writes, as part of an increasingly large group of authors flourishing in what is loosely known as the older children’s market, as ‘*seeker fiction*’. Indeed the first book in a new trilogy which he has embarked upon is called just that: *Seeker*. Nicholson has an interesting

response to questions about religious themes in his fantasy novels. "I don't believe in God as usually understood," he has said. "But I do feel there's more going on than I can understand, and I'm extremely interested to pursue that. I was brought up as a Roman Catholic, and still retain a respect for mysteries." And again: "I have a great respect for, and fascination with, the Christian faith - but for some years now I haven't been able to share it. This has left quite a hole, which perhaps explains my books."

Nicholson explicitly understands fantasy writing as having something to do with theology: "Through fantasy stories," he writes, "we can open our minds to non-realistic possibilities and play games with spiritual longings, without having to insist that they be true, or even sensible. This is a very good way to open up the mind to realms beyond our experience - though of course all we're really doing is using imagination to recast what we know. Some forms of theology are very similar. The ones that claim to offer truths revealed by God, truths to which all are subject, are of course different. I would not classify such revelation as fantasy. I treat the faiths of others with respect."

There are numerous interesting aspects to this last statement, not least that he is capable of distinguishing between his own highly individual exploration of religious themes, and the truth claims of Christianity which he acknowledges are not perceived by its adherents as being merely subjective, or, to use his words, "using imagination to recast what we already know".

In emphasising his respect for the faith of others, Nicholson is in marked distinction to **Philip Pullman**, whose fictional agenda, while similarly fascinating from the point of view of the imaginal creation, is disastrously grounded at a theological level. For, unlike Nicholson, Pullman buys wholeheartedly into the enlightenment project of relegating God to a construct of minds existing in a universe for which cogent ideas must be empirically verifiable, or perish. The core premise of the *Dark Materials* trilogy is a kind of inverted Gnosticism, which recasts spiritual phenomena in materialistic terms.

I have written elsewhere about how Pullman holds up a distorted lens, like the diabolical mirror at the beginning of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, to the Catholic Church. I don't want to repeat myself here, except to remind you that at the core of his novels is a radical re-working of Genesis, in which Eve is a true heroine for engaging in the voyage of self-discovery that the forbidden fruit represents. Revealingly, Pullman, who is a close friend of the militantly atheist Richard Dawkins (Oxford Professor for the Public Understanding of Science), has referred elsewhere to Eve as being the *first scientist*.

On this occasion, I will simply take one example from Pullman's oeuvre. In the final part of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass*, there occurs a scene in which the hero and heroine, Will and Lyra, literally harrow hell, that is to say, the realm in which the dead, good and bad, exist after their bodies die. In this Hades, a harpy called No-Name and her sisters are permitted by the Authority (the fraudulent god-figure who rules the universe until extreme old age entails his demise) to torment human ghosts with all the reprehensible things they have done in their lives. All these poor souls want is to forget who they are and what their lives were like. A vicious amnesia, as opposed to the anamnesis of faith, is the order of the day in this false heaven, which one early martyr condemns as a 'place of nothing'... She urges her fellow ghosts to follow Lyra back out into the world of the senses, in which only their scattered atoms will remain as testament to their former existence.

"Even if it means oblivion, friends, I'll welcome it, because it won't be nothing, we'll be alive again in a thousand blades of grass, and a million leaves, we'll be falling in the raindrops and blowing in the fresh breeze, we'll be glittering in the dew under the stars and the moon out there in the physical world which is our true home and always was."

Having practised asceticism for nothing, and died for nothing, this nameless martyr-saint has now seen the light. She prefers to be obliterated in the only union possible: the impersonal absorption by a strictly material universe. Providing the opposition to this view in the debate of the shades,

Pullman gives us a hollow-eyed monk berating the others for not seeing their circumstances 'through the eyes of faith' and therefore being unable to appreciate the experience of heaven. I can't help wondering if Pullman here is not pursuing his much publicised animus against C.S. Lewis, inverting the scene in *The Last Battle* so that the dwarves who see nothing but dirty straw in the stable are actually correct, and the children who see the new Narnia are deluded. *His Dark Materials* is able to offer us only the crudest caricature of what Luigi Guissani has called 'the religious sense'. Pullman cannot seem to conceive of a believer who is not full of self-deception, their zeal merely a life-denying lie.

At the end of his trilogy, Pullman separates his hero and heroine, Will and Lyra, back into the different universes from which they came. Because he has trapped his characters in a purely material dimension, he is not able to envisage a union between them which transcends this dimension. Whilst attributing a quasi-metaphysical power to adolescent sexuality, to the point where he accords it a salvific role in the repairing of a damaged universe, he cannot allow the union to subsist in a truly nuptial sense. It is interesting to note that in his earlier, non-fantasy teen-fiction Pullman several times kills off his characters just as they have experienced sexual union for the first time.

Suffice it to note here that the dynamic is one of division and diminishment. This is the dynamic of the cult, inward-turning and dependent on subjective investment. A human culture, as opposed to a cult, needs persistence through time, through continued significance, through blood ties, and, for a Christian, through the relation with a life-giving divine reality which cannot be subsumed under a mechanistic notion of authority or power. The works of a divine clock-maker will always run down. The ongoing creative act of a heavenly father will live beyond time, whilst still incarnating itself in its own creation. Justice obliges me to suppose that when Philip Pullman wrote *His Dark Materials*, he did not grasp the balance between the spiritual and the material that Christianity maintains in the face of the constant temptation to dualism. The fact is that we do care for and rejoice in the created universe, precisely as showing forth the beauty of its creator... Yet Pullman felt compelled to create a simplistic opposition: the scientist Mary Malone, who left her religious order so that she could live life to the full, against a jansenistic Father Gomez, who has received advance absolution in order to murder children on behalf of a Pope called Calvin.

**William Nicholson**, on the other hand, whilst prepared to grapple with the theme of personal sacrifice for the sake of the greater good, has a much more down-to-earth grasp of the nuptial relationship and its value through time. The family ties at the heart of the *Wind on Fire* cycle are beautifully portrayed: they are the pivotal force which embodies the survival of the Manth people as they wander in the desert looking for their promised land. Familial love becomes the paradigm of that which unites a body of people in the face of forces which otherwise would divide and conquer them. This is why I would cast this series of novels as a kind of Old Testament stage in Nicholson's exploration of the themes which compel him as a writer. What he is exploring now, in *The Noble Warriors* trilogy, is the actual nature of God. Whilst it remains to be seen whether he will reconnect with his religious roots in a fictional pattern which reflects the New Covenant, it is worth noting that already he is referring to the mystery of a child, to be found in a garden, at the heart of a monastery.

It is a mistake to want fantasy or fairy-tale to deliver a particular religious message. The land of the imaginal has its own rules. It is at best – and this is actually a more important role than many people realise – a pre-evangelical sphere. Tolkien is of course the ultimate exemplar of this, concerned with the nature of man and original sin, but setting his self-sufficient sub-creation in a time prior to salvation history. Authors such as Tolkien, George MacDonald, Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis and Madeleine L'Engle ask deep questions about the *mystery of man*. Plenty of people enjoy their work, as they enjoy the work of non-Christian fantasy writers like Ursula Le Guin, though they would not wish to be driven into any conclusions about the nature of God. Tolkien actually issued a warning to Lewis about the dangers of allegorical writing. For allegory, especially in the modern era, always risks *flattening* the divine reality, rendering it two-dimensional,

promoting a limited agenda: and this is exactly what Philip Pullman accuses Lewis of doing, a resentment which seems to me to provide a mainspring for his own clumsy anti-religious rhetoric. Pullman himself should perhaps be mindful of Chesterton's distinction between a moral tale, and a moralistic one. In the post-Miltonian universe where Paradise is never regained, Lucifer can be as passionate a moraliser as the dull deity he is set up to oppose.

But what of parents, priests, and teachers who wish to know if a particular fantasy form is actually *inimical* to the development of the Christian soul? How can we discern if an author is on the side of the angels? Can we work backwards to a divine reality by looking with integrity at the phenomenon of human experience in all its richness? On the feast of the Assumption last year **Pope Benedict XVI** gave us an important insight: "Previously, it was thought and believed that by setting God aside and being autonomous, following only our own ideas and inclinations, we would truly be free to do whatever we liked, without anyone being able to give us orders," said the Holy Father. "But when God disappears, men and women do not become greater; indeed, they lose the divine dignity, their faces lose God's splendour. In the end, they turn out to be merely products of a blind evolution and, as such, can be used and abused. This is precisely what the experience of our epoch has confirmed for us."

It has long been known by Christians – Romano Guardini pointed it out – that obedience to God, unlike obedience to a tyrant or to a government, does not diminish man but makes him more truly himself. This is because of the unique relationship that exists between man and his creator. God is both exterior to us and interior, transcendent and immanent. God and man are intimately related, even before the Incarnation. Certainly after the Incarnation, we can say that the mystery of man has been revealed in a dazzling light, for those who gaze on the face of Christ. I think the theme of the human face will provide a vital clue for our discernment.

The passion, death and resurrection of Christ are inseparable from the contemplation of the divine face, and thus the human face which reflects it. Tolkien, in his essay *On Fairy-Stories*, coins a term for the way this mystery is explored in fiction: he calls it the *eucatastrophe*. A story which requires hardship, sacrifice, and even the ultimate pouring out of self which appears at first glance to be a catastrophe, will feed the need of the soul for deeper meaning. Pullman's fantasy contains plenty of this. The problem is that in his books there is no 'joyous turn', no release of glory at the end of the process. There is no eucharist at the heart of the re-examined catastrophe: nothing to give thanks for except the banal observations of the post-modern world. Pullman is in good company in this respect. There are plenty of writers out there who express the existential anguish of a godless age, without the redemptive force of an incarnate God at its heart. And there are plenty of children out there who experience this anguish every day, as families, education systems, social cohesion all break down around them, and the world of technology asserts its impersonal, instrumental, anti-contemplative hold.

It is for these children, in my opinion, that the Harry Potter books are the most significant. At this point, I need to step aside briefly to the film version of *The Lord of the Rings*. Peter Jackson and his screen-writers, at least one of whom is a practising Christian, present Aragorn in a very different light to the book. At first he hides in the shadows, the ranger, not the king, unable to escape the sins of his fathers. He has to be called out, bit by bit, into his destiny – something that interestingly is achieved through the sacrifice of Arwen, obliging Elrond to reforge Anduril – again something that deviates from the book. The film-makers also make much more of Frodo's temptation and consequent conflict with Sam than the book does. I believe they had very good reasons for making these changes, even apart from the constraints of the cinematic medium. We live in a different era to the one in which Tolkien was writing: ours is the era of the anti-hero. You have to go via a different route to bring contemporary consciousness to the eucatastrophic goal. You have to plunge a little deeper into the purgatorial experience of our time, before you can take your audience with you.

It is perhaps no coincidence that some of the most cogent critics of **J.K. Rowling's** books,

such as Michael O'Brien, have been home-schooling parents or adults who have succeeded in shielding children from the worst of the cultural melt-down in the developed world. It is also significant that the most vocal critics have come from a non-British background – for example from Germany or the United States. These critics do not understand the books' humour, their satire on all those phenomena of the modern world which Chesterton himself would have been swift to lampoon: teenage political correctness, football hooliganism, snobbish families, pompous and blinkered civil servants, spin-addicted politicians, EU-style standardisation, and voyeuristic journalists with a cavalier attitude towards truth. "Curiosity is not a sin," says the headmaster Albus Dumbledore to Harry Potter when the latter has discovered something he ought not to have known about another pupil. "But we should exercise caution with our curiosity... yes, indeed..."

It is said by Rowling's critics that Harry is not a good role model for children. And indeed the boy-wizard, whilst having many heroic qualities, is also portrayed throughout his development as suffering from the faults that any contemporary child may be prey to: lying, pride, disobedience, impatience... Nonetheless, Harry is shown as suffering, and causing suffering, for failing to correct those faults in time, and his *curiositas* is a particular case in point. In the middle of the series, in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry experiences a full-blown adolescent crisis, which involves an attraction to knowledge as a form of power. This leads him into danger whilst stopping him from confiding in and trusting adults who could have helped him. His flirtation with darkness actually causes the death of the person he loves most, outside of the parents who died to save him as a baby.

So has **Harry Potter** become a dangerous cult which lures children into these same murky regions? Obviously the marketing men will always be unable to resist selling their more dubious merchandise alongside the Potter display stands. Rowling herself has been very explicit about this. There are two types of person who think she supports the things they believe in: proponents of boarding school education, and practitioners of Wicca or witchcraft. In fact, she insists, she supports neither.

Whatever criticisms one might have of the Potter books, I really do not feel, after several careful readings, that they can be read as propaganda for the occult. What they are doing is using two well-established literary devices in English children's literature: one is the school story, and the other is the use of magic to express the interior quest. Even C.S. Lewis uses magic as a foil for his Christian plotline: Aslan refers to the paschal mystery as 'deep magic from beyond the dawn of time'. Likewise, Dumbledore's reminders to Harry that he is protected by something which goes beyond magic – namely Love – are increasing in emphasis as we move towards the seventh and final instalment of the series. Along the way, major characters are paying with their lives to defeat the evil that Harry must confront. I would not presume to second-guess Rowling on the devastating death of Dumbledore, except to point out that he willingly commands his killer to proceed, and that Harry glimpses a phoenix arising from the fire in which Dumbledore's body is consumed.

There is no time to take up a point-by-point defence of Rowling's intentions here. For that I would recommend the work of John Grainger, author of *Finding God in Harry Potter*. While I myself would stop short of attributing conscious Christian motives to her – she wisely keeps her religious views to herself, unlike Pullman - there is enough evidence to exonerate her from the worst of the accusations levelled at her by Christian commentators. In any case, I suspect Rowling herself might be tempted to poke a little fun at those of us earnest enough to treat her books as great works which merit close textual analysis! However, I would like to end my reflections on Harry Potter with a discernment about the core plot which runs through the seven books, a plot which must be satisfactorily resolved in the last book, in order for Rowling to earn the right to Tolkien's eucatastrophic prize.

At the heart of the Harry Potter books is the battle between Harry and his arch-enemy, Lord Voldemort. The name has been picked up by commentators as implying 'flight of death', but actually I think it means 'will to death' – as in the latin *volere*, or *vogliere*, *vouloir*, even *veu*. In any case, the core issue which animates this appalling character is the desire to make himself immortal,

something he can only achieve by giving death to others. It emerges in the latest book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, that Voldemort has split his soul into seven parts and hidden six of these in various objects, which are known as horcruxes. It is as if he were enacting a kind of anti-sacramental ritual: for each horcrux can only be created by the most heinous act of all, namely murder. Thus if Voldemort is killed, he can be revived merely by accessing one of the other divided parts of his soul. But there is a price to be paid for this Faustian bargain with artificially engineered immortality. With each horcrux, each cold-blooded murder, Voldemort has been diminished. This shows itself *in his face*. The once good looking man becomes uglier and uglier.

You recall the words of the Holy Father: “Their faces lose God’s splendour.” This is absolutely central to what Rowling is doing in the Harry Potter books. She is painting a portrait of the will to power, the logical conclusion of that original fault whereby man abrogated judgement to himself rather than to his Creator: “And you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” The knowledge of good and evil is something which in Harry Potter only the most evil wizards arrogate to themselves. It is notable that Dumbledore, whilst an immensely powerful wizard in his own right, frequently refuses to pass judgement on individuals, to the puzzlement of Harry and others, even with seemingly catastrophic results... His most notable traits are his patience, his appeal to the better nature of those he encounters, and his humility. Christian critics have said that Dumbledore lets Harry get away with too much. But in the most recent book, we see Dumbledore tick Harry off, and we see the moral force this has precisely because it comes from someone that Harry knows *loves him very much*. Evil wizards can compel others through the imperius curse. Dumbledore compels through love, or not at all, unless it is a case of emergency protection for someone weaker than himself.

If there is a cult involved in the Harry Potter books, it is not the cult of Harry himself, for all that he commands the excited admiration of his readers (a phenomenon at which, incidentally, Rowling also pokes some gentle fun). The real cult figure is Lord Voldemort, the former Tom Riddle. Out of an abandoned boy whose beginnings are weighed down by the sin of his human father, the mysterious, isolated doubter grows into the power-hungry wizard. We should note that it is Voldemort, not Dumbledore, who calls himself Lord. Dumbledore is merely the Head Master. The Magister. And note that it is only in certain capital capacities that Dumbledore is infallible: on everyday matters, as he reminds Harry constantly, he is as capable as the next man of making mistakes.

It is the dark wizard, so fearsome that timid souls cannot bear to pronounce his name, who wishes to be the object of worship. Think of the cult of youth, beauty and celebrity in our culture today, and what happens to those who surgically enhance their faces so they can retain their status as gods and goddesses. The face becomes ever more pinched, the complexion drained; the eyes turn into slits... This is the face that Joanne Rowling confronts us with at the heart of a tale which, while carefully refusing to moralise, is, in my opinion, a true morality tale. A tale in the tradition of those ancient cursings and blessings Chesterton refers to. Wizards do have the power to curse, in the world of Hogwarts. But they are expressly forbidden to do so, and the blessing which will ultimately make of Harry the true alchemical vessel – perhaps even the final horcrux – is a blessing which comes from God, not from the power of man, for all that it has reached him through the love of his mother. It has to be pointed out that there is another kind of immortality, even for those who confine themselves to the material sphere: having children. In the Harry Potter books, the happiest family is of course the Weasleys, who have no worldly riches, but they do have as many children as Voldemort has horcruxes.

It is tempting to think that as Catholics today we have become something of a side-show, culturally. The reign of Voldemort – the culture of death – seems almost absolute. The shards of Hans Christian Andersen’s mirror seem to be embedded in so many hard and cynical hearts. Yet we should remember that even the coldest of hearts can be washed clean by the tears of someone who loves us enough to go through hell for us. We should also remember that the net of Peter goes back a long way, and that our faith has persisted through many historical storms and still pulled in a good

catch. “Duc in altum!” Through my contact with young people, I can say with conviction, holding the hand of Karol Wojtyla, that the world is still thirsty to hear about the power of good over evil. But first of all we must *show* that love, we must help others to *fully imagine* it, if they are to come of their own free will to the Source from which it flows.

*Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus.*  
(As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God.) We must discern who is actually leading souls towards that source, even if they are not yet aware of it, and even if they are taking a roundabout way. It may be that the Lord knows what he is doing, even if they don't.

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