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on Abortion in 1964J. Brian Benestad

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THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Thinking about Apologetics

by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.

Not long before his death, the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J. († 2008) updated his *History of Apologetics* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005). It is a book we would all do well to consult, if for no other reason than to remind ourselves of how important the task of apologetics is for the Church. But even the briefest perusal of its pages will readily remind us of the axiom that must govern all apologists: *quidquid recipitur secundum modum recipientis recipitur*—whatever is received is received in the manner of the receiver. The apologist needs to identify carefully just what needs a defense, and then must consider how best to get that defense across.

The primary application of this maxim to our own efforts at apologetics is this: we must always consider how to formulate our message so that it will be more likely to be heard by those who need to hear it. While there is no way to predict with perfect accuracy how anyone will take what we say, we have a better chance of doing the good that we want to do if we try to envision first how someone is likely to receive what we offer. Sometimes one needs a hard-sell, sometimes a soft-sell. To appreciate better the prudence involved in knowing which course to take on a given occasion, we have much to learn from our past and from contemporary social movements.

Some Lessons from History

A recent history of the Catholic revival in England by James R. Lothian¹ gives a fine example of this point in its description of how various apologists shifted their tactics. Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward, for instance, initially saw their challenge as a matter of meeting what they presumed to be the most pressing objections to Catholic teaching (e.g., the charge that the Church had substituted Mary for God or the suspicion that the Church was anti-scientific in its stance toward the theory of evolution). In time, however, they came to see that the problem was better conceived as a matter of eliciting in people who simply did not care about religion a conviction that Catholic teachings have incredible importance for their lives.

Likewise, one can see in the recent history of the pro-life movement a willingness to alter the way of delivering the message, so as to make the message itself better heard.

In the mid-nineties pro-life billboards started focusing less on the violence of abortion and more on the concern of the pro-life movement for mothers and their children. Important in the process of changing directions here was a realization about the identity of the audience that the billboards were supposed to reach— what Paul Swope called “the mushy middle” of American public opinion.² There has been similar success in re-shaping the political context of the abortion debate that has come from the campaign designed by Robert P. George, Hadley Arkes, and

others to work at banning partial-birth abortions. To make progress in convincing people of the wrongfulness of legally permitting abortion it has proved helpful to put the focus on this particular technique and thereby to re-open what had seemed like a closed debate on the whole abortion question.

There is every reason to think that New York Archbishop Dolan will enjoy similar success in moving people to take a fresh look at abortion. At a news conference on January 6, 2011, the Archbishop pointed out the high percentage of pregnancies in the New York metropolitan area that end in abortion. At the same conference he was also able to announce the reception of a grant from the Chiaroscuro Foundation that will allow the Archdiocese to renew an offer originally made by Cardinal O'Connor, namely, the readiness to provide any needed financial support for women in the area considering abortion. Further, the Archbishop's presentation of the astounding percentage of abortions among minorities in the Bronx has already galvanized political leaders among these minorities to make statements and undertake actions that no one would have predicted. Perhaps one of the next steps for apologetics in the service of the pro-life movement will be to challenge the unspoken assumption that there is no realistic way significantly to bring down the raw number of abortions in this country.

Within the field of religious apologetics, considered more strictly, an area in which there is need for considerable work is the defense of the right of the Magisterium to shape consciences. The essay by Lawrence J. Welch, for instance, in a helpful new volume entitled *Reason and the Rule of Faith*,³ argues that the Magisterium's ability to teach concrete moral norms pertaining to the natural law infallibly rests on understanding Christ as fully revealing "the true identity of the rational creature that is man." This is to rest one's case on a claim that John Paul II recurrently made so often in the course of proclaiming that Jesus Christ "reveals man to man." What seems badly needed is defense of the prerogative of the Church in regard to moral education and the formation of consciences.

One of the most crucial areas where this needs to be applied is in the arena of same-sex marriage, for generations of young people are being brought up to venerate the principle of tolerance for diversity and are being led to think that acceptance of homosexual unions as if they were marriages is simply a matter of tolerance. They are being given little to no help in distinguishing one kind of diversity from another. The respect that is genuinely due to human dignity in the area of race relations, for instance, gets easily transferred to questions of sexual diversity and undermines the Christian understanding of marriage as necessarily between one man and one woman, open to children, for life. What we need is a better apologetics for traditional marriage that will help people to be articulate in this matter.

Removing Obstacles as a Strategy in Apologetics

The trio of Advent Reflections that Father Raniero Cantalamessa, the preacher of the papal household, offered in December 2010 for Pope Benedict and the Roman Curia provide a fine example of how we might think of preparing ourselves for apologetics today.⁴

Father Cantalamessa begins by identifying certain "obstacles" that stand in the way of evangelization in countries that have had a long Christian history but that are now forgetful of God. Chief among these obstacles are scientism, secularism, and rationalism.

By scientism he means not science but the notion that only the methods of empirical science is valid for producing genuine knowledge, and that the likes of conscience, morality, and religion are to be relegated to the confines of imagination rather than respected as genuine sources of knowledge.

A robust apologetics, we may suggest, will begin with the same healthy respect for science that *Fides et Ratio* provides in its defense of reason against post-modernism and deconstructionism. But it will also involve taking on the likes of militant atheists like Richard Dawkins, whose *God Delusion* tries to shame into compliance those scientists who continue to identify themselves as believers. Likewise, it will mean teaching people to make a distinction between the legitimate conclusions reached by theorists like the English astrophysicist Stephen Hawking when operating in his own field and the fallacies he professes when he leaves true science and enters into scientism, such as the simple violation of the principle of sufficient reason that he commits when commenting that "spontaneous creation is the reason why something exists"—as if the knowledge that has genuinely been attained by physics now renders useless belief in God the creator of the universe.

To repudiate scientism, however, is in no way to undermine genuine science any more than to repudiate rationalism is to undermine good reasoning. In this context rationalism may be defined as the attitude of insisting that reason must be the final judge in matters of faith and religion—as if human reasoning alone were capable of deciding what is true and what is false in religious claims. Citing one of John Henry Newman's university sermons, Cantalamessa shows how to press the case for a distinction between reason and rationalism as part of apologetics, and for wariness in the face of the "imperialist" tendency of reason both to subject every aspect of reality to its own criticism and to refuse to recognize the existence of fields other than its own.

To the efforts of these apologists we need to be ready to join our own efforts. It is a work of Catholic intellectuals of every age, and a work to which the members of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars should readily apply themselves. ✠

(Endnotes on next page)

ENDNOTES

- 1 James R. Lothian, *The Making and Unmaking of the English Catholic Intellectual Community, 1910-1950* (South Bend IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).
- 2 Paul Swope, "Abortion: The Failure to Communicate" in *Life and Learning: Proceedings of the University Faculty for Life Conference 6* (1996): 199-210.

- 3 *Reason and the Rule of Faith: Conversations in the Tradition with John Paul II*, edited by Christopher J. Thompson and Steven A. Long (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2011).
- 4 See <http://www.zenit.org/article-31156?l=english>

THE BISHOPS' CORNER

Introductory Remarks by Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Chairman of the Committee on Doctrine

March 30, 2011

In response to requests from bishops concerning the pastoral implications of the teaching in Sister Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J.'s book, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, the Committee on Doctrine, with the authorization of the Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a statement pointing out the theological and methodological inadequacies of the text finding that many of its conclusions are incompatible with authentic Catholic teaching.

The book in question, published some time ago, is not directed to professional theologians for theological speculation, but rather is used as a teaching instrument for undergraduate students, many of whom are looking for grounding in their Catholic faith.

The Bishops' Committee on Doctrine is first and foremost concerned about the spiritual welfare of those students using this book who may be led to assume that its content

is authentic Catholic teaching.

Although an *imprimatur* is not required for all books that treat Sacred Scripture and theology, it is still a recommended practice (see c. 827 §3). By seeking an *imprimatur*, the author has the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the bishop concerning the Catholic teaching expressed in the book. Thus, clarifications concerning the text can be made prior to its publication. It would have been helpful if Sister Elizabeth Johnson had taken advantage of this opportunity.

The Bishops' Committee on Doctrine is always open to dialogue with theologians and would welcome an opportunity to discuss Sister Elizabeth's writings with her.

But it must be kept in mind that *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* has already been published and is being presented as Catholic teaching. The bishops have a responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the faithful and the oversight of authentic teaching. This statement is an effort to assist bishops in the exercise of their teaching office. ✠

Statement on *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, by Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson

24 March 2011

Committee on Doctrine
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Committee on Doctrine of the USCCB has undertaken an examination and evaluation of the book *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (Continuum, 2007) by Sister Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., a professor at

Fordham University. The Committee has concluded that this book contains misrepresentations, ambiguities, and errors that bear upon the faith of the Catholic Church as found in Sacred Scripture, and as it is authentically taught by the Church's universal magisterium. Because this book by a prominent Catholic theologian is written not for specialists in theology but for "a broad audience" (2), the Committee on Doctrine felt obliged, as part of its pastoral ministry, to note these misrepresentations, ambiguities, and errors.

This statement will first consider the importance of the topic and the method proper to Catholic theology. It is here, at the level of method, that the book rests upon a false presupposition, an error that undermines the very nature of the study and so skews many of its arguments, rendering many of its conclusions theologically unacceptable. The statement will then examine various topics addressed in *Quest for the Living God*, following the order of the chapters and noting the misrepresentations, ambiguities, and errors.

A False Alternative: "Modern Theism" or Radical Reconstruction of the Idea of God

The heart of Christian theology is the study of God not simply as one, but also as a Trinity of persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 234). It is laudable then that Catholic theologians undertake such studies, especially when their writings advance the Church's understanding and appreciation of the mystery of God, and build up and confirm the faith of all believers. Because the mystery of God as a Trinity of persons is the foundational mystery of the Church's faith, it is all the more important that those theologians who do embark on the study of this mystery do so from within the very heart of the Church's faith. Pope John Paul II stated in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*:

Theology is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology makes its own the content of revelation as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church's living Magisterium. With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative inquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought. (no. 65)

Theologians must, therefore, first lay hold of the content of God's revelation, the *auditus fidei*, as proclaimed in Scripture and taught within the Church, through an act

of personal faith.¹ Only then are they properly equipped to enquire into the content of that faith, the *intellectus fidei*, seeking a greater understanding and clearer expression of it. By means of the theologians' reaffirmation of the Church's corporate confession of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, their service is conformed to the mystery of their Baptism and their incorporation into Trinitarian communion through Jesus Christ.

Sr. Johnson, however, begins with a critique of the Church's faith, or, rather of what she terms "traditional theology" or "classical Christian theology." In response to the distortions she claims are there and to the challenges posed to faith in the contemporary cultural situation, she offers a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the doctrine of God. She makes this move plausible by presenting the unappealing portrayal of God to be found in what she labels "modern theism." According to Sr. Johnson, modern theism models God as "a monarch" who is at the "peak of the pyramid of being." The best theology can do is portray him "as benevolent." "He, for it is always the ruling male who stands for this idea, is essentially remote" (14). While loving he is "uncontaminated" by the world. "And always this distant lordly lawgiver stands at the summit of hierarchical power, reinforcing structures of authority in society, church, and family" (14). According to Sr. Johnson, this portrayal follows from the conviction that God is immutable, incorporeal, impassible, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent (see 15). This is modern theism.

In contrast to such an unappealing notion of God, Sr. Johnson offers an alternative based on new and thoroughgoing reinterpretations of the traditional conception of God: "[t]heologies traced out in this book, in contrast to modern theism, are deeply concerned with God's relationship to the world" (16). She claims that "we are witnessing nothing less than a 'revolution' in the theology of God" (1, see also 13–14), a revolution that is necessary because "modern theism" has thrown the Christian faith "into crisis." "Thinking people questioned what it all meant, this old, rather creaky tradition of luxuriant doctrines and rituals and hierarchy and pious customs, and whether any of it was true" (27).

What Sr. Johnson calls "modern theism" is actually an Enlightenment deist notion of God that contains some elements, though now misrepresented, of a traditional Catholic understanding of God. She acknowledges that modern theism is the result of the distortion of the Christian tradition by Enlightenment ideas and that it does not represent "classical Christian theology" (15). At some points, then, she claims to be retrieving the authentic tradition of "early Christian and medieval theology" (17). At other points, however, she seems to regard "modern theism" as interchangeable with "traditional Christian doctrine" and "traditional preaching and theology," for she reproaches the latter for the same faults as the former (73, 80). While some ideas that she

identifies as distortions due to the Enlightenment are in fact distortions of the Christian theological tradition, other ideas that she identifies as characteristics of modern theism, such as God's immutability, incorporeality, impassibility, omnipotence, etc. (15, 52, 54), are not distortions at all but integral and essential elements of that tradition. In any event, by associating traditional Christian theology with modern theism, she seeks to justify the need for her own proposals.

Sr. Johnson states correctly that God can, at times, be misrepresented as an arrogant monarch who acts in a tyrannical and dictatorial fashion. However, traditional Catholic teaching does not do this. Rather, it understands that God the Father is all-loving, and as such, he providentially cares for his creation. Jesus is indeed the Lord of lords and King of kings, not in the sense of pompously lording it over his subjects, but rather as the servant who lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus' name is above every other name and every knee must bend before him and every tongue proclaim him "Lord" because he humbled himself "accepting death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-11). The Holy Spirit empowers Christians to act after the manner of Jesus and so bear the fruit of charity, joy, peace, patience, and endurance (Gal 5:22-23). This traditional Catholic understanding of God bears no resemblance to Sr. Johnson's monarchical deity of "modern theism."

Moreover, God is not at "the peak of a pyramid" as if he had no concern for those whose manner of existence is lower than his own. Likewise, God is not at "the peak of a pyramid," as if God existed in manner similar to all else that is, the only difference being that he is on the top. Within traditional Christian theology, God is indeed the supreme being, but that means that he actually exists in a manner that is uniquely his own and so his manner of existence radically differs in kind from all else that exists. Existing in such a manner does not make God remote. Rather, it allows him lovingly to employ his almighty power to bring into existence other beings and, in so doing, he is intimately related to them, especially to human beings, as the good Creator. Sr. Johnson recognizes that God's radical transcendence and radical immanence go together (16, cf. 43). As will be shown later, however, her panentheism (p. 188), as well as her rejection of divine omnipotence and impassibility, does not preserve transcendence. Furthermore, for God to be immutable, incorporeal, impassible, etc. does not mean that God is static, inert, distant, and uncaring. Rather, such attributes assure that he is supremely loving, good, and perfect. God, then, is actively involved in the world of sin, evil, and suffering. In the history of salvation he has demonstrated that he is involved, the Incarnation being the supreme culminating instance. While God is active in this world contaminated by sin, evil, and suffering, he himself is not contaminated, nor complicit, for this would deprive him of his perfect goodness and love and hinder his salvific activity within time and history.

Sr. Johnson is correct that some notions of God do wrongly portray him as a "distant lordly lawgiver" who

"stands at the summit of hierarchical power, reinforcing structures of authority in society, church, and family." This may be the view of "modern theism," but it is not the view of traditional Church teaching. God is indeed the supreme giver of law, such as the Ten Commandments, but such laws are not arbitrary and capricious. Rather, they are laws that instruct human beings on how they are to live truly authentic human lives, godly lives of love, justice, and righteousness. While the exercise of authority in society, the Church, and the family may be flawed at times, yet the lack of structures of authority within society, the Church, and the family would cause untold injustice and suffering. The exercise of authority that flows from the traditional Christian notion of God fosters truth, justice, equity, peace, and right order.

From the above, it is evident that *Quest for the Living God* contaminates the traditional Catholic understanding of God, which arises from both revelation and reason and which has been articulated by the Fathers and the Scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas, and taught and professed by the Church, with Enlightenment deism. Such a notion of God may conform to what is termed "modern theism," and so be in need of reform as the book suggests. However, to give the impression that "modern theism," is virtually identical with the traditional Catholic notion of God is seriously to misrepresent the tradition and so to distort it beyond recognition. Nonetheless, as seen in the above analysis, this is what *Quest for the Living God* has done at its very onset. It is this misrepresentation that Sr. Johnson takes as a warrant for articulating her many models of God, models that she proposes as more attractive than "modern theism."

Quest for the Living God speaks of a crisis within the Church, a crisis reflected in the disjuncture between "modern theism" and a more contemporary understanding of God based upon secular experience. The real crisis, however, the one that this book illustrates, is reflected in the disjuncture between a proper and authentic understanding of the traditional notion of the Christian God and an understanding of God that no longer comports with Christian revelation and the Church's profession of faith.

A False Presupposition: All Names for God are Metaphors

Sr. Johnson also justifies her radical revision of the traditional Christian understanding of God by asserting that the Church's names for God are metaphors that arise from religious experience and that consequently can be replaced by human ingenuity if that experience undergoes a change. For Sr. Johnson, theology begins with an acknowledgment that God is a mystery beyond all human understanding and that human language about God reflects human understanding and not the divine reality. "The first and most basic prescript is this: the reality

of the living God is an ineffable mystery beyond all telling” (17). It is the “beyond all telling” that is key to Sr. Johnson’s understanding of God. This is her first “ground rule.”

The second ground rule is that no expression for God can be taken literally. She explains as follows:

Our language is like a finger pointing to the moon, not the moon itself. To equate the finger with the moon or to look at the finger and not perceive the moon is to fall into error. Never to be taken literally, human words about God proceed by way of indirectness. They set off from the spare, original, strange perfections of this world and turn our face toward the source and future of all without capturing that essence of the mystery. (18)

Sr. Johnson is entirely correct on this: the Catholic theological tradition affirms that no human language is adequate to express the reality of God. Catholic teaching maintains that human concepts apply to God only in an analogous fashion. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out, “We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking” (no. 40). All creatures in some way resemble God, who is the source of any perfection found in them. Creatures possess only some perfections, and these only in a limited way. God possesses all perfections infinitely. From our knowledge of creatures we can come to understand a perfection such as goodness, but when we would attribute the perfection of goodness to God we must remember that God is good in a way far surpassing the way that creatures are good. Our language does apply to God, but only by analogy. “Admittedly, in speaking about God like this, our language is using human modes of expression; nevertheless it really does attain to God himself, though unable to express him in his infinite simplicity” (no. 43).

While Sr. Johnson is well within the Catholic theological tradition when she maintains that human language is never adequate to express the reality of God, she departs from that tradition when she makes the more radical claim that human language does not attain to the reality of God. For her, the meaning of the concept “good” derived from our knowledge of creatures is “lost” when it is applied to God. “We literally do not understand what we are saying. Human comprehension of the meaning of ‘good’ is lost, for we have no direct earthly experience of anything that is the Source of all goodness” (19).

While God is a mystery that cannot be fully comprehended and thus fully articulated, nonetheless, according to the Catholic theological tradition it is possible to make statements about God that are true even if they do not express the fullness of the mystery. That tradition acknowledges that there is a difference between God’s being incomprehensible and God’s being unknowable. To say that God is not comprehensible is to say that he cannot be completely known and understood.² On the other hand, God is

knowable in the sense that human concepts do reflect some real if limited knowledge of God. For Sr. Johnson, if God is incomprehensible he is also unknowable. This is incorrect.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch. “The believer’s act [of faith] does not terminate in propositions, but in the realities [which they express].”³ All the same, we do approach these realities with the help of formulations of the faith which permit us to express the faith and to hand it on, to celebrate it in community, to assimilate and live on it more and more. (no. 170)

The doctrines of the Trinity or the Incarnation, for example, state truly what the mystery of God is even if they do not and cannot express fully the mystery. The mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation are known even if they are not completely comprehended. These doctrines are not merely fingers pointing one in the direction of an unknowable mystery. They actually allow one to know the truth of what the mystery is.

By defining “mystery” in this way, Sr. Johnson defends her freedom to offer all sorts of statements about God that may point in the direction of the mystery; she simultaneously admits that they do not say anything literal about God. This is her third ground rule. Quoting Aquinas, she argues that there are many names for God employed throughout history within many different cultures and religions (see 21–22). Aquinas did say that there are many names for God, but for him these names are derived either from the use of reason or from divine revelation, and all express some truth about the reality of God; they are not mere pointers to a mystery that can never be known in itself.

Despite Sr. Johnson’s critique of Enlightenment theism, her understanding of the unknowability of God has more in common with Enlightenment skepticism about the possibility of knowing metaphysical realities than with the apophaticism of the Church Fathers. The Church Fathers, most prominently the Cappadocians, were well aware that God is incomprehensible, but they founded this judgment on what God had truly revealed about himself as found in Scripture and Tradition. This revelation provides true knowledge of God as a trinity of persons, who create and redeem in love, a revelation that manifests not the unknowability of God, but his incomprehensibility. The theology of the Cappadocians, like all authentic Catholic theology, is governed by the truth of biblical revelation and its linguistic expression. Sr. Johnson’s notion of the unknowability of God bears a strong resemblance to that of the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, who argued that human knowledge and concepts do not attain to the reality of things in themselves, but only express how things appear to our minds. Sr. Johnson faces a problem similar to that of Kant: since all names for God are merely metaphors that we use to point

to the divine reality but that never actually lay hold of it, there appears to be no objective means for judging among metaphors for God as to which are closer to the truth. Indeed, as we shall see below, for Sr. Johnson, metaphors for God are to be evaluated not on the basis of their accuracy with regard to the nature of God, but primarily in terms of how they function in human society.

The false presupposition on which this book is founded, then, is the conviction that all names for God are metaphors. It is important to evaluate how this false presupposition influences the various notions of God discussed in the book.

A God Who Suffers

In the light of the Holocaust and other horrendous evils, modern theism found itself unable to defend belief in its “omnipotent, omniscient Supreme Being” (52). Sr. Johnson acknowledges that Metz and Schillebeeckx believe that God stands in solidarity with those who suffer (see 56 and 65), but do not suggest that suffering affects the divine nature. Moltmann and Soelle, however, propose that God does indeed suffer as God. “They developed the powerful symbol of the suffering God who endures and is defeated with those who suffer. This symbol opens up the idea that God takes the pain of the world into the divine being in order there to redeem it” (56). This stands in stark contrast to the modern theism which was influenced by Greek philosophy. “Possessing all perfections in an unimaginable way, the divine nature has no possibility for change, cannot be affected by the world, and, of course cannot suffer. Divine dignity depends on this” (57).

In her antipathy for this latter position, Sr. Johnson gives the impression that she finds nothing wrong with Moltmann’s understanding of the cross, namely, that on the cross the Son suffers not only in his human nature but also in his divine nature (see 60–62). She looks very favorably, moreover, on Soelle’s rejection of divine omnipotence: “Soelle makes a major contribution to the question of suffering with her work on divine power” (63). Sr. Johnson might say in her defense that she is only presenting the thought of Moltmann, Soelle, and other theologians, and not actually subscribing to it herself. She has selected the ideas of these particular theologians, however, as well as those of the other theologians that she presents in the book, as representing what she considers to be the most important and most praiseworthy developments in recent theology, those that she considers provide the basis for the future of Christian theology. Certainly, the reader is given the impression that a God who suffers as God is far better than one who does not.

It is her understanding of “mystery” and “symbol,” moreover, that allows Sr. Johnson to present this understanding of God as a viable alternative to traditional Catholic teaching. In her view, all statements about God, whether hers or those of the theological tradition, are metaphorical

and do not express any literal truth about the “mystery” of God. With the metaphor of the suffering God, however, she believes that she and other theologians are saying something that is important for contemporary human beings.

Later in her book, Sr. Johnson advocates an understanding of God that implies that the finite order is ontologically constitutive of God’s being. It is this view of God, which she identifies as “panentheism,” that allows her to predicate suffering to God as such. It is only because God partakes of the finite order that the suffering within the finite order redounds to him. However, such an understanding undermines God’s transcendence in that God’s manner of existence, as Creator, would no longer differ in kind, but only in degree, from that of all else that exists.

New Names for the Unknown God

Sr. Johnson argues that women “have experienced strong discomfort with the dominant images of God as father, lord, and king” (96) and that female language for God is not only permissible but necessary. For Sr. Johnson, language for God should be analyzed not primarily in terms of its adequacy for expressing the reality of God—all human language fails to attain the reality of God—but in terms of its socio-political effects. She sees God-language as a human construction that is created in a particular socio-political context and reflects socio-political power relations. In her view, the traditional Christian language for God arises from a patriarchal social structure in which men possess the preponderance of power. The male imagery of God is a device used by the patriarchal power structure to perpetuate itself. “As hallowed by tradition and currently used, all-male images of God are hierarchical images rooted in the unequal relation between women and men, and they function to maintain this arrangement” (96). Now that society has begun to change, the traditional images of God have become “religiously inadequate” (96). “Instead of evoking the reality of God, they block it” (96).

As part of the effort to complete the overthrow of unequal and unjust power relations, she argues that it is necessary to replace the traditional language and concepts of God with new language and new concepts of God that will serve the purpose of promoting the socio-political status of women both in society and in the Church. Instead of as the “patriarchal lord who required their obedience,” women have begun to envision God in “non-authoritarian ways” (96–97). Moreover, this replacement of the patriarchal system requires the use of female imagery for God.

Holy mystery who is source, sustaining power, and goal of the world cannot be confined to any one set of images, but transcends them all. Should femaleness be an obstacle to naming the divine? Or can women’s reality function as a sacramental sign of God’s presence and action? If God created women in the divine image and

likeness, theologians reasoned, then can we not return the favor and employ metaphors taken from women's lives to point to the living God? Can the living God not be spoken of in female terms? (97)

Sr. Johnson discusses feminine images of God found in the Bible—"mother" and "Holy Wisdom (Sophia)." "A veritable symphony of images in addition to mother and Wisdom enables women and girls to recognize themselves in language about God. The Spirit of God, named with the feminine noun *ruah* in Hebrew, is often depicted in Christian art as a dove, the ancient symbol of the goddess of love" (106). Sr. Johnson seeks to avoid a dualism where male images denote "reasonableness, power, justice-making, and headship" and female images denote feminine traits.

In other words, women reflect God not only as mothering, nurturing, and compassionate, although certainly that, but also as powerful, taking initiative, creating-redeeming-saving, wrathful against injustice, in solidarity with the poor, struggling against and sometimes victorious over the powers of this world. Reorienting the imagination at a basic level, these female images open up insight into the maternal passion, fierce protectiveness, zeal for justice, healing power, inclusive hospitality, liberating will, and nonhierarchical, all-pervading relationality that characterize divine love. In the process, they carry back to women the stamp of the divine likeness. (109)

What is lacking in the whole of this discussion is any sense of the essential centrality of divine revelation as the basis of Christian theology. The names of God found in the Scriptures are not mere human creations that can be replaced by others that we may find more suitable according to our own human judgment. The standard by which all theological assertions must be judged is that provided by divine revelation, not by unaided human understanding. God does use human, and thus limited, means in revealing himself to the world. The only way, however, that one can reliably discern what is fallible and thus revisable is by first adopting and appropriating the standard of divine truth which has been received by revelation. Unfortunately, the point of departure for *Quest for the Living God* is not the divine revelation, accepted in faith by the Church, but non-theological norms, which are used to critique the Catholic theological tradition. In fact, it is Sr. Johnson's radical position on the unknowability of God that has prepared the way for this. By reducing all theological language and concepts to mere metaphors, Sr. Johnson has effectively eliminated as a criterion both divine revelation, to which Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition bear witness, and the Church's teaching which interprets them; she thus opens the way for other criteria that would evaluate theological affirmations as social and political phenomena.

The Presence of God in All the Religions

While Sr. Johnson states on a number of occasions that Jesus provides a unique encounter with God (see 155), yet she also wants to argue that there is more to God than that which is revealed through Jesus. Again, this is in keeping with her understanding of "mystery." No metaphor or symbol embodies the whole truth of who God is.

Sr. Johnson argues that the Church has grown in its understanding and appreciation of other religions. The Church went from a negative evaluation of other religions to a more positive assessment at Vatican II, although the Council was working with a "fulfillment model." "According to the fulfillment model that shaped the council's thinking, all religions are meant to reach their true fulfillment in the one church of Jesus Christ" (157). However, John Paul II did speak in *Redemptoris Missio* of the Spirit being present in other religions. The conclusion could then be drawn ("not definitive," though "heading in the direction of yes") that "thanks to the presence of God's own Spirit, people are saved through the practice of their religion, not despite it" (158). What Sr. Johnson is doing here is setting the stage to argue that the Spirit of God is at work in other religions in the same manner that the Spirit is working within Christianity and thus other religions are equally salvific.

Sr. Johnson is critical of *Dominus Iesus*. "This declaration met with a decidedly mixed reception" (160). Some applauded the document for upholding the centrality of Jesus. "But the torrent of criticism from religious leaders and scholars across a broad spectrum shows that something essential was seriously missing" (160). If the Spirit of God can be found in the sacred texts of other religions, then these "cannot be mere human inventions, as the declaration also asserts" and thus to declare that such religions are "'gravely deficient' redounds to insult the divine manner of acting in the world" (161). The conclusion to be drawn from this is simple.

As the argument over *Dominus Iesus* shows, there is no consensus on the vital issue of what God intends by the existence of multiple religious paths. *Dominus Iesus* is one way to interpret the religions in the light of faith in Jesus Christ, but people in dialogue who themselves confess Christ as the Way have experienced a reverence for other religions that points to a broader, deeper, wider play of God's merciful ways. (161)

It appears that, for Sr. Johnson, the Spirit has inspired the sacred texts of other religions in a way that is similar to that of the Bible, and thus is working in a similar manner within those religions as well. In developing this argument, Sr. Johnson undermines the uniqueness of Biblical revelation and even denies the uniqueness of Jesus as the Incarnate

Word. Moreover, she places the teaching of the magisterium on a par with the opinions of “other” theologians.

The heart of the issue here comes down once more to Sr. Johnson’s understanding of “mystery” and “metaphor/symbol.” In her view, because God is the primordial mystery “there is no end to the being and fullness of God” (161).

At the outset it opens the possibility that others might have distinct encounters with the divine that can be new resources for Christian exploration into the overabundance of God. To put it simply, the living God is not a Christian. Rather, the incalculable mystery, which the Christian scripture dares to call love (1 John 4:8 and 16) is not constrained in loving but freely pours out affection to all and each one. (162)

While “in Jesus Christ, God’s saving activity reaches its greatest intensity in history in the concrete” (162, see 174); while “the crucified and risen Word of God and the church that proclaims God’s mercy in him are normative and constitutive for the salvation of all”; still, “the manifestation of God’s presence and activity in the religions cannot be limited to what has been revealed in Jesus Christ and proclaimed by the church” (162–3). The Spirit of God does not simply repeat what “she” has revealed in Jesus, otherwise these religions would not be different from Christianity (see 163). Because the mystery of God is so full it is not exhausted by any one religious tradition.

Sr. Johnson’s position on that matter is not in keeping with the Christian understanding of Jesus as the fullness of truth. For the fullness of “truth,” according to Sr. Johnson’s argument, one needs Jesus + Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc. (see 174–79). Sr. Johnson’s conclusion is contrary to Church teaching. “Disputes about how to reconcile core Christian affirmations about the salvific role of Jesus Christ with the validity of other religions are numerous. There is as yet no theological consensus” (175).

Creator Spirit in the Evolving World

There are two problematic concerns in Sr. Johnson’s chapter on evolution. First, how does one conceive of a transcendent God who is equally immanent within the world and history?

The mental model that allows for the most intelligible interpretation of this presence is pantheism (all-in-God). In recent centuries theology worked mainly with the model of theism. This construal infers God to be the highest member of the order of being. It insists on God’s difference and distance from the world while paying little attention to divine nearness. Its opposite model is pantheism (all is God), which erases the difference between created and uncreated,

thereby collapsing God and the world into each other. Unlike either of these patterns, pantheism envisions a relationship whereby everything abides in God, who in turn encompasses everything, being “above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). What results is a mutual abiding for which the pregnant female body provides a good metaphor. (188)

The pantheism presented in *Quest for the Living God*, however, lacks any characteristic that would constitute a real difference between it and pantheism. “Mutual abiding” is not an adequate description of the Biblical conception of Creator and creation, according to which God as Creator exists in a different ontological order than that which he creates.

In fact, it is only because God is self-existent, and thus radically distinct from creation, that he is able to bring into existence, out of nothing, other beings. It is precisely the act of creation that establishes both the transcendent otherness of God as well as his intimate relationship to creation, for creation only exists by being related to God as its Creator. “[B]ecause he is the free and sovereign Creator, the first cause of all that exists, God is present to his creatures’ inmost being: ‘In him we live and move and have our being.’ In the words of St. Augustine, God is ‘higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self’” (*Catechism*, no. 300). The pantheism espoused by Sr. Johnson, however, fails to respect not only the transcendent integrity of God, but also the integrity of the created order, for in this view the finite created order finds its value not in its own created being, possessing its own inherent created value, but in being ontologically constitutive of God’s own being.

The second concern is over the evolution of human beings.

Modern forms of theism assume that God intervenes in the world at will to accomplish divine purpose apart from natural processes. But the scientific picture of the universe indicates that this is not necessary. Nature is actively organizing itself into new forms at all levels. Even the emergence of life and then mind can be accounted for without special supernatural intervention. (192)

For Sr. Johnson, material forces and their self-organizing processes can account for the human spirit with both intelligence and free will. She writes: “Human thought and love are not something injected into the universe from without, but are the flowering in us of deeply cosmic energies, arising out of the very physical dynamism of the cosmos, which is already self-organizing and creative” (185). Even on a purely philosophical level, however, such claims are subject to refutation. The physical cannot

account for the non-physical, and the self-organization of created realities does not explain itself. Moreover, “[t]he Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not ‘produced’ by the parents—and also that it is immortal” (*Catechism*, no. 366; see also Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, no. 36). It is the spiritual nature of the human soul that allows human beings, through their bodily senses, intellectually to know the truth and freely to will the good and so act upon it.

Trinity: The Living God of Love

Sr. Johnson wishes to limit our understanding of God to the economy of salvation. In her view, we can grasp the economic expression of God within the finite order of time and history, but we do not know God as he immanently exists as a Trinity of persons.

At the outset and all through this chapter [chapter 10] it is crucial to keep this point in mind: the point of trinitarian language is to acclaim the living God as the mystery of salvation. Whether found in scripture, creed, liturgy, doctrine, or theology, it is Christian code tapping out the belief that the living God made known through Jesus and the Spirit is dynamic Love encompassing the universe who acts to save. At the most basic it is saying, very simply, “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16). (202–3)

Sr. Johnson’s presentation of the teaching of the Council of Nicaea is ambiguous. According to her, by its teaching the Council aimed to protect “the church’s faith that Jesus is God’s self-revelation, the true Wisdom of God sent to save and set free” (205). This minimalist interpretation of the Council, however, conceals the fact that it is one thing to say that “Jesus is God’s self-revelation,” which could simply mean that through Jesus God provides us a human image of who he is, and quite another to say that Jesus is ontologically the eternal Son of the Father. Only the second understanding affirms a true metaphysical Incarnation.

Sr. Johnson also faults the later theological development of the Nicene Creed for separating the God for us (*pro nobis*) from God in himself (*in se*). “Theologians started to make a real distinction between God revealed in the history of salvation, otherwise known as the economy of salvation, and God who exists apart from the world in an eternal, divine realm” (206). In Sr. Johnson’s view, such a distinction has spawned trinitarian speculation that borders on the bizarre and the completely irrelevant.

Today this school of thought’s laborious explanation of various fine points in the trinitarian construct elicits a host of criticisms. The fundamental problem lies in the fact that reflection lost touch with the historical story of redemption, where all trinitarian meaning has its roots, ending up with a description of God

that had little or no contact with Christian life. It presented its thinking in highly obtuse prose; scholars today take issue with its “abstruse analysis,” “irrelevant abstractions,” “philosophical mazes,” “elaborate theological maneuverings,” “complex celestial mathematics,” and “obscure language,” along with its “sheer long-windedness.” For all its abstraction, furthermore, this theology presented its findings as if they were a literal description of a self-contained Trinity of three divine persons knowing and loving each other. This, of course, is not the case, no such literal description being possible. (207–8)

According to Sr. Johnson, “the biblical story of encounter with God—the story of the personal God of Israel encountered in the concrete life and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth and present through the Spirit in the life of the church and the world—was transposed into an abstract, complex, literal, and oppressive trinitarian theology” (209). Theology lost sight of the fact that the “intent of this trinitarian symbol is not to give literal information but to acclaim the God who saves and to lead us into this mystery” (209).

Once again, it is evident that, according to Sr. Johnson, language about God, even Trinitarian language, does not actually provide knowledge of and truth concerning God and the manner of his existence. For her, God remains mysteriously unknowable. This position, however, completely undermines the Gospel and the faith of those who believe in that Gospel, for it supposes that the Church does not proclaim what is actually true, but only the symbolic expression of what ultimately cannot be known, and the faithful do not believe what is actually true, but only some symbolic expression of that which can never be identified. In contrast the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says. (no. 150; see also no. 144)

Conclusion

In some ways, *Quest for the Living God* presents itself as a retrieval of the authentic Christian theological tradition. Against the contamination of Christian theology after the Enlightenment by modern theism, Sr. Johnson claims to be retrieving fundamental insights from patristic and medieval theology. As we have seen, however, this is misleading, since under the guise of criticizing modern theism she criticizes crucial aspects of patristic and medieval theology,

aspects that have become central elements of the Catholic theological tradition confirmed by magisterial teaching. Similarly, she claims to be retrieving the classical understanding of the incomprehensibility of God. Again, as we have seen, her understanding of this is not that of the Catholic theological tradition, for it effectively precludes the possibility of human knowledge of God through divine revelation and reduces all names and concepts of God to human constructions that are to be judged not on their accuracy (all are deemed inaccurate) but on their social and political utility.

The basic problem with *Quest for the Living God* as a work of Catholic theology is that the book does not take the faith of the Church as its starting point. Instead, the author employs standards from outside the faith to criticize and to revise in a radical fashion the conception of God revealed in Scripture and taught by the Magisterium. While the book at times displays an engagement with the Catholic theological tradition and remains in continuity with it, it also departs from that tradition at a number of crucial junctures. For these reasons, combined with the fact that the book is directed primarily to an audience of non-specialist readers and is being used as a textbook for study of the doctrine of God, the Committee on Doctrine finds itself obligated to state publicly that the doctrine of God presented in *Quest for the Living God* does not accord with authentic Catholic teaching on essential points.

ENDNOTES

- 1 St. Thomas Aquinas points out that just as other sciences accept as a given the first principles of their particular science, Christian theology

“does not argue in proof of its principles, which are the articles of faith” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8).

2 See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 7.

3 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 1, a. 2, *ad* 2.

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IN MEMORIAM

In Memory of Father John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S.

By William May

I first met Father Harvey during Christmas week of 1971 at a meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. The issue discussed was *in vitro* fertilization, and featured speakers were Paul Ramsey, the great Methodist Christian Ethicist from Princeton University who gave a splendid argument against IVF and other “new reproductive techniques,” and Patrick Steptoe, M.D., the British doctor who with Robert Edwards was the leading scientist seeking to generate life in the laboratory. Father Harvey, at that time already a well-known and respected moral theologian was there, eager to learn more about

this subject. I had just begun teaching moral theology at The Catholic University of America. Father Harvey and I shared the same vehement opposition to IVF and soon became fast friends. He in fact became one of my very best friends and a friend to all my family.

Father Harvey and Dumbarton College of the Holy Cross

I learned that John had done his STD in moral theology at CUA with a 1950 study, *The Moral Theology of the Confessions of Saint Augustine* (reprinted in 2009 by Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon), a work that remains very valuable. For many years from the late 1940s through the 50s

John taught at the now defunct Dunbarton College operated by the Holy Cross Sisters. I have met many of the women, now in their late 70s and early 80s, whom Father taught at that college; they all remember him fondly as the best teacher they ever had and a true friend; he maintained contact with them until the end, and whenever he was in the Washington area he would visit several of them.

Our personal friendship

Father John, as I said, became a close friend of my entire family. He usually visited us on December 26, and we would exchange gifts. He was co-celebrant at the weddings of two of my children and very friendly to others. He was an ardent fan of the Philadelphia Phillies and Eagles (Philly was his home town), and whenever we could we took him to see a baseball game in Baltimore before Washington finally acquired the Nationals to replace the Senators. John became one of my closest friends and we collaborated on many projects together. For example, we co-authored a pamphlet "On Understanding 'Human Sexuality'" (first published in *Communio* 4 [1977]: 195-225, and the republished as an expanded booklet in the "Synthesis Series" of Franciscan Herald Press, 1977). This was a critique of the infamous *Human Sexuality in Our Day: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, by Anthony Kosnik and others, a report to the Catholic Theological Society of America.

His great work with persons who had homosexual inclinations but wanted to live chaste lives

Father Harvey had studied psychology as well as theology at CUA and, as an apostolic priest, had been working one on one with persons who had homosexual inclinations but wanted for decades to live chaste lives. In the 1970s he realized that group therapy, modeled in many ways on the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, would be more helpful than one-on-one counseling. He thus founded COURAGE, and several ordinaries allowed him to establish COURAGE groups in their dioceses, among them Archbishop (later Cardinal) Hickey of Washington and John Cardinal O'Connor of New York. There are now COURAGE chapters in many dioceses. While Father Harvey was still in the Washington area I attended several COURAGE meetings and had the privilege of giving short talks on theology to the group.

After moving to De Sales University in Pennsylvania, Father Harvey had quite a schedule. He taught one or two classes at the University during the week and on Fridays would drive (even in his late 80s) to New York City to meet the COURAGE group there on Saturdays; he would spend Friday and Saturday nights in the rectory of St. Vincent de Paul Church, whose pastor, Father Jerry Miller, was most helpful. He would then drive back to De Sales to begin another week. He was constantly on the

go until, near the end of 2009 he suffered a serious fall in New York while there for a COURAGE meeting, and he spent the rest of his life at a nursing home operated by the Oblates in Childs, Maryland, except for a trip, to be noted later, to attend the September 2010 meeting of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars in Baltimore.

Father Harvey's theological career

For years after ordination he taught at the Oblate House of Studies in Washington, until it had so few seminarians that the large house they used was sold to the Archdiocese, and the Oblates moved to small house of studies very near CUA and joined the Washington Theological Consortium with the OMI's and the Dominicans. In the 1980s Father Harvey moved to De Sales University (formerly known as Allentown College), operated by the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales in Center Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Harvey was a great scholar and was constantly studying new developments in the understanding of, and help for, persons with homosexual inclinations. His many books on this subject are well known and widely used: *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Thought* (1987); *The Truth About Homosexuality: The Cry of the Faithful* (1996); *Same-Sex Attraction: A Guide for Parents*, ed. John F. Harvey and Gerard V. Bradley (who both contributed essays of great importance). Father Harvey also contributed scores of articles in scholarly journals on homosexuality, Catholic sexual morality, and marriage. One of his finest scholarly writings was an early 1950 essay in which he defended St. Thomas Aquinas's teaching that there are two sets of the moral virtues, the naturally acquired and the divinely infused along with charity. This essay appeared in the proceedings of the newly founded Catholic Theological Society of America.

Father Harvey, with me, was a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America during the turbulent 1970s and 1980s (I still retain my membership), and I was at several meetings of the CTSA in which there were panel discussions on homosexuality; there would usually be three who argued that homosexual acts can frequently be justified, and John was the token opposition. But he always stood his ground, firmly supported magisterial teaching, and was fully in command of the relevant literature.

John was one of the early members of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, and he received the Cardinal Wright Award for his outstanding contributions to theology many years ago. At the September 2010 meeting of the Fellowship in Baltimore, the president of the Fellowship drove Father Harvey and a companion from his nursing home in Childs, Maryland, so that the Fellowship could honor him by giving him the Founder's Award. This award was given to him because of his magnificent contributions to the Fellowship. It is so good that we were able to do this. ✠

Two Friends of the Fellowship Elevated to the Cardinalate

by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.
President of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars

The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars is delighted that two of its great episcopal friends were recently elevated by Pope Benedict XVI to the rank of cardinal on November 20, 2010. Both of these men have long served the Church as courageous bishops and as insightful scholars, and the Fellowship is proud to salute the recognition that has been given to them in this way.

Cardinal Donald William Wuerl is a life-time member of the Fellowship and has made presentations at a number of our annual meetings. He currently serves as the sixth Archbishop of Washington, D.C., and previously served as the Bishop of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from 1988 to 2006, and as Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, Washington from 1986 to 1988. As Cardinal-Priest, Cardinal Wuerl was named titular of S. Pietro in Vincoli in Rome, following the ancient tradition that the cardinals take possession of the churches of Rome.

In addition to many published homilies and articles, Cardinal Wuerl is a tireless catechist and the author or co-author of the following books: *The Forty Martyrs: New Saints of England and Wales* (1971), *Fathers of the Church* (1975), *The Catholic Priesthood Today* (1976), *The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults* (1976), *A Visit to the Vatican: For Young People* (1981), *The Gift of Faith: A Question and Answer Version of The Teaching of Christ* (2001), and *The Catholic Way: Faith for Living Today* (2001)

Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke is one of the world's foremost authorities on Roman Catholic canon law. A native of Wisconsin, Cardinal Burke was ordained to the priesthood by Pope Paul VI on June 29, 1975 in Rome. He studied canon law at the Pontifical Gregorian University and was the first American to hold the position of Defender of the Bond of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, the church's highest court. Consecrated a bishop in 1994, he governed the diocese of LaCrosse, Wisconsin from 1994 to 2003, and

was then appointed Archbishop of St. Louis, Missouri. He now serves as a member of the College of Judges of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, of the Congregation for the Clergy, and of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts. In 2008 he was appointed Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

Among Cardinal Burke's many publications are the following articles: "Defectus discretionis iudicii propter schizopreniam: Doctrina et recens iurisprudentia," *Periodica* (1984): 555-70; "Lack of Discretion of Judgment: Canonical Doctrine and Legislation," *The Jurist* (1985): 171-209; "Canon 1095, 1° and 2°," in *Incapacity for Marriage: Jurisprudence and Interpretation* (1987); "La procedura amministrativa per la dichiarazione di nullità del matrimonio," and "Il processo di dispensa dal matrimonio rato e non consummato: la grazia pontificia e la sua natura," both in *I procedimenti speciali nel diritto canonico* (1992); "The Application of Canon 1095 and sacramental-pastoral activity concerning marriage," in *Ius in vita et in missione Ecclesiae* (1994); "The Distinction of Personnel in Hierarchically Related Tribunals," in *Studia canonica* (1994): 85-98; "Canon 1421: The Nullity of a Decision by a Single Lay Judge" and "Canons 1421-1422 and 1435-1436: The Exercise of the Office of Judge or Defender of the Bond by a Priest on Leave of Absence from Priestly Ministry," both in *CLSA Advisory Opinions 1994-2000* (2002); "La "confessio iudicialis" e le dichiarazioni giudiziali delle parti," in *I mezzi di prova nelle cause matrimoniali secondo la giurisprudenza rotale*, (1995); "Commentary on the July 12, 1993, Decree of the Apostolic Signatura relating to the qualifications of advocates," *Canadian Canon Law Society Newsletter* (1996); "On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good" (2004); and "Canon 915: The Discipline Regarding the Denial of Holy Communion to Those Obstinate Persevering in Manifest Grave Sin" in *Periodica* (2007): 3-58.

It is with great joy that the Church received these two scholarly bishops and courageous leaders, and the Fellowship is happy and proud to congratulate them on their creation as cardinals. ✠

William James on Religions

By D. Q. McInerney,
Professor of Philosophy,
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William James, both as a psychologist and as a philosopher, nurtured a life-long interest in religion and all things associated with it, although he was not himself what we would be inclined to call a religious person, at least not as the term is conventionally understood. This interest in religion on the part of James is all the more remarkable, I think, because it resided in a man who was in many ways very much a child of his times, the turbulent nineteenth century, a century in which a goodly portion of its leading intellectuals, both in Europe and America, were wedded to a positivistic mode of thinking, which often accompanied a commitment to materialistic monism. Many prominent and influential thinkers of the day were totally enamored of science, which they saw as the wave of the future, one of tidal proportions, which would in due course sweep away all that did not measure up to its exacting and definitive standards, thus preparing the way, at long last, for the full maturation of the human race. And one of the more onerous relics of humanity's childish past to be happily submerged in the wake of a triumphant science, so they reasoned, was religion. This was a view with which James had no sympathy. He did not look upon religion as inferior to science, much less as having been rendered obsolete by it. Though deserving to be counted among the century's most prominent intellectuals, and though his own devotion to science was as ardent as any man's—in his capacity as a psychologist he considered himself to be a full-fledged member of the scientific community—James was among the first to call attention to, and severely indict, the attitude toward science which came to be known as scientism—an exaggerated regard for science which, at least in its most extreme form, served to turn it into something very much like a religion.

In attempting to find explanations for James's abiding interest in and sympathy for religion, it would not be amiss to take note of the influence of the family in which he was raised, a family headed by the formidable Henry James, Sr., an earnestly religious man whose interests were wide-ranging and eclectic—

Swedenborgianism eventually became one of his chief preoccupations—and who wrote several books on the subject of religion, one of which bore the arresting title, *Society the Redeemed Form of Man*, and the *Earnest of God's Omnipotence in Human Nature*, published in 1879. But a more immediate explanation for James's interest in religion is to be found in his total dedication to a philosophical position or point of view which he identified as radical empiricism, which was to become the governing factor for all of his thought.

What does it mean to be a radical empiricist? As for the "empiricist" part of the term, James explains, it means to be one who believes that all verification, the determination of what is and what is not true, must ultimately be ascertained by the personal experience of the subject. A radical empiricist is one who rejects all forms of monism, be it materialistic monism, as exemplified in a philosophy like Marxism, or idealistic monism, as exemplified in philosophies like those propounded by thinkers such as Hegel, F. H. Bradley, and James's Harvard colleague and friend, Josiah Royce. An advocate of monism, in James's mind, is one who looks upon the universe, the sum total of reality, as a unified, complete whole, whereas James saw it as marked by diversity, and incomplete. As for the practical application of radical empiricism, as directed specifically toward the subject of religion, this would involve the acceptance of religious experience as reliable a means for arriving at the truth, in its own and albeit different way, as the experience of the empirical scientist. And the fact that a scientific observer has never himself had what would qualify as religious experiences, which was the case with James, is no argument against the genuineness of those experiences. James wrote, in reference to religious experience, that "nothing can be more stupid than to bar out phenomena from our notice, merely because we are incapable of taking part in anything like them ourselves."¹

Much to the embarrassment, and sometimes the irritation, of his professional colleagues in psychology, James would at times come to the public defense of doings such as the mind-cure movement, which enjoyed considerable currency in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, especially in New England; and the movement was prominently exemplified in the form of Mary Baker Eddy's Church of Christ, Scientist. On occasion James himself, who suffered from severe bouts

of depression throughout his life, was a patient of mind-cure therapy. He was one of the organizers of The Psychological Research Society, “which investigated the claims of mediums, fortune tellers, telepathists, or anyone who claimed to have experienced power transcending the known laws of physiology and physics.”²

The subject of religion, as treated by James, contains much, and in an attempt to do justice to his thought, I decided it would be best to deal with it in piecemeal fashion, focusing attention on seven distinct topic areas. So, in what follows I will be treating of the thought of William James: on religion in general; on faith; on religious experience; on saintliness; on mysticism; on asceticism; on God. This list covers, I believe, all the aspects of religion that most interested him. The discussion of these topics will occupy the first five sections of the paper, and in these my chief intention will be simply the explication of James’s thought, although I may lapse into brief editorial commentary here and there. The last section of the paper will be reserved for a critique of his thought.

The primary and richest source of James’s thought on religion is *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which began as the series of Gifford Lectures he delivered at the University of Glasgow in 1901 and 1902, and which was published in book form in 1902. Next to that work, serious attention must be paid to *A Pluralistic Universe*, published in 1909, a year before his death, and which can be considered as a sequel to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Beyond those two key sources, references to religion are to be found throughout his works, but there are four of his essays which deserve special attention: “Is Life Worth Living?,” “Reflex Action and Theism,” “Pragmatism and Religion,” and the widely known “The Will to Believe.”

What was William James’s understanding of religion, taken in the most general sense? He gives us no little assistance in answering that question by offering the following definition: “Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean *the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider divine*”³ (emphasis in the text). There are three key elements in this definition. First, religion is essentially a matter of feelings, not of rational thought. A direct result of the emphatic importance he attaches to feelings in religious experience is his preemptory dismissal of theology as inconsequential to his investigative concerns. The reason for this is not because of his “lack of theological learning,”⁴ to which he candidly

admits, but because theology focuses on the intellectual rather than on the affective, which is to say, it focuses on the peripheral rather than on the essential. All forms of theology may be regarded, therefore, as quite irrelevant as a means through which one can arrive at a right understanding of religion. And there is no theology quite as irrelevant as natural theology or theodicy (to James it is “quite grotesque”), that branch of theology which expends its energies in the futile attempt to prove, through a process of reasoning, the existence of God. And James sees theology as not only irrelevant but even dangerous, sufficiently so to justify his taking up arms against it; it represents, he tells us, the “intellectualism in religion which I wish to discredit.”⁵

The second key element of James’s definition of religion, closely associated with his notion that genuine religion is essentially a matter of feeling, is the fact that religious experience revolves around the individual, is defined in terms of the individual, and the individual, be it noted, “in his solitude.” Religion is intensely, almost exclusively, subjective; it is very much a private matter, and the experiences of the religious person are enjoyed, or suffered as the case might be, in a kind of splendid isolation. What is implied by all this—and here we have one of the more striking features of James’s understanding of the nature of religion—is his conscious dismissal of its whole communal or ecclesial dimension. As is the case with theology, he regards the idea of church as of only peripheral importance, and thus he can make passing, dismissive references to “ecclesiastical Christianity,”⁶ as if there were in fact any other kind. Of course, for James, there would indeed be another kind of Christianity, which presumably he would dub “true Christianity,” and that would be a Christianity limited to the confines of individual experience.

How then are we to conceive of the essential nature of the experiences of the religious person? Is it a matter of that person being in communion, on a one-to-one basis, with God—alone with the Alone, as it were? It is not, for James, as simple as that, which brings us to the third key element of James’s definition: the object of the religious person’s concern and devotion may be the God who is the object of Christian belief, but need not be. The definition informs us that that toward which the feelings, acts, and experiences of the solitary soul is directed is whatever the solitary soul considers to be divine. The field is thus left wide open. Presumably anyone or anything, real or imagined, would qualify for godly status. James is even prepared to acknowledge, “from a purely experimental point of view,” that

“godless or quasi-godless creeds can be called religions.”⁷

Another facet of James’s notion of religion is that it is a product of the individual’s own making. Religion, considered from the point of view of the individual, is not so much a matter of responding to something which enjoys clear, unambiguous objective status, external to and other than the individual, as it is a response to something which emerges out of the self, as an epiphenomenon in relation to the phenomenon that is the individual. This state of affairs gives individuals a decided measure of control over the object of their religious concern, and we can thus “build out our religion in the way most congruous to our personal susceptibilities.”⁸ The individual creates, in his religion and in the deiform object of that religion, a something other than himself. But is that something real? Yes, for “that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself.”⁹ The supposition of reality is sufficient for the establishment of reality. Given the fact that faith is seated in the individual, and is, indeed, a product of the individual’s affective self, it would then seem to follow that it is at base a thoroughly natural phenomenon. And this is precisely James’s view of the matter. “Every religious phenomenon,” he tells us, “has its history and its derivation from natural antecedents.”¹⁰ He is clearly taking, then, a purely naturalistic approach to the subject of religion, and believes that any religious experience can ultimately be explained in entirely natural terms. This is shown by his penchant for “psychologizing” religious experiences, as when he describes some of those experiences as pathological. For all that, however, he does not definitively rule out the existence of a supernatural realm; to do so would violate his commitment to radical empiricism. He takes the position that there may very well be a clear distinction between the natural and the supernatural, but all he is able to say, as an empiricist, is that he is not able to verify that distinction.

With all these considerations in mind, a pressing question naturally suggests itself: Is religion true? James considers that to be a quite legitimate question, and his response to it is in the affirmative. If we bear in mind that according to pragmatic principles what is true is that which proves to be useful, for the benefits it brings to us, then religion is certainly true because it is unquestionably useful. It has “cash-value.” Religion is true because it works; it makes a difference for the better in our lives.

Religion is commonly recognized as necessarily involving faith. As understood within the Christian tradition, faith is seen to have an objective and a subjective

aspect. Objectively considered, faith is that which one believes, the contents of one’s belief, such as the revealed word of God. From the subjective point of view, faith is, first, a habit, a fixed disposition, by which one is identified as a believer; second, it is any particular expression of that habit, as when one consciously assents to a specific doctrine. According to James’s understanding of faith, there is no strict distinction to be drawn between the objective and the subjective elements of faith. This is not to say that he denies that there is not something that could be referred to as the objective contents of one’s faith, but we should not regard these as coming to the believer from a source outside himself (e.g., having their source in divine revelation), but rather as welling up from within the believer. So, in this case the “objective” is effectively subsumed within the subjective. To put it succinctly, it is the individual who is the source of the belief system to which he subscribes, and who gives sanction to that belief system.

The truth of what one believes—that is to say, the usefulness of one’s beliefs—is determined, can only be determined, by the believer himself, for only he is capable of judging whether or not those beliefs bring practical benefits to his life. “And to trust our religious demands means first of all to live in the light of them,” James writes, “and to act as if the invisible world which they suggest were real.”¹¹ It would not be to the point to ask of the beliefs of a religious person, Are they true, taken in themselves and viewed objectively? The appropriate question to ask is: Are they true for him? Do they “work” for him, in that they provide the emotional support he needs to make it through life with the least amount of difficulty? As with religion in general, so too with faith, it is feelings, “our passionate nature,”¹² which must be recognized as the determining factor.

James cautions us against supposing that we can ever attain, through faith, objective certainty. However, this should be no cause for chagrin or discouragement, because, just as the believer is the origin of the belief system to which he commits himself, so also it is within his power to generate the certainty which would be the appropriate accompaniment to that belief system. What is especially noteworthy about James’s “will to believe” is that it is the will itself which serves as the efficient cause of the belief. Thus he can confidently speak of faiths that verify themselves, meaning that the substance of what is believed finds its guarantor in the believer. Something is true, then, in the final analysis, because I believe that it is true; X is so because I believe X to be so, for “the essence of faith is to believe that the

possibility exists.”¹³ “And the desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth’s existence.”¹⁴

Consonant with the spirit of anti-intellectualism which prompted him to reject theology as inconsequential for gaining an understanding of the true nature of religion, James regards the contents of one’s self-created belief system to be not so much a set of propositions as a congeries of willed feelings. We come to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, not because we have arrived at that point as the result of a laborious process of reasoning, nor because we have been given the gratuitous gift of faith by God, but because we were led there by our passional nature, the most reliable guide we could ever hope to have. Logic and reason are not reliable helps when it comes to leading us to and securing us in a state of religious belief, and indeed there are times when we have to go against their directives. Should it ever come to a stand-off between intellect and will, it is the will which must triumph. “Believe, and you shall be right,”¹⁵ James tells us: in other words, make an act of will and stick to it, and, if all will not necessarily be well, you will at least qualify, according to the criteria spelled out by him, as a genuine person of faith.

The title of James’s principal work on the subject of religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, was, I am sure, very carefully chosen, and accurately reflects what he felt should be the proper focus of our attention in studying the subject of religion. Religious experience takes precedence because it constitutes the essence of religion. Religion is not so much a sociological as it is a psychological phenomenon. The core of religion is the affective allegiance of the isolated individual to a belief system—or, better, to an emotional atmosphere—which is the product of his own volitional exertions. Religion is something having principally to do with the individual, working its therapeutic influence on him within the privacy of his own soul.

As we have seen, religious experience, for James, is founded in and effectively defined by feeling. James is abundantly clear on this critical point: “I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue.”¹⁶ And he leaves little doubt in our minds that he regards those translations to be, in more cases than not, woefully unfaithful to the text. The genuinely religious man is not man thinking, but man feeling. So centrally important a factor does James see feeling to be for authentic religious experience, and, concomitantly, so distorting does

he see the many attempts to intellectualize that experience, that he feels himself duty bound to rectify the situation, and is “bent on rehabilitating the element of feeling in religion and subordinating its intellectual part.”¹⁷ But it is not enough to say that religion has principally to do with feeling; important qualifications have to be made. Not all emotion can appropriately be identified as religious emotion, but only “a higher kind of emotion,”¹⁸ which takes its most exquisite form in “spiritual emotions,” those which are to be found in the saintly character, and which serve as “the habitual center of the personal energy.”¹⁹ In the end, “a man’s religion might thus be identified with the attitude he takes towards *what he felt to be* the primal truth”²⁰ (emphasis mine).

Because religion is centered in the individual, and because nothing could be more obvious than the fact that individual differs from individual, it follows that the varieties of religious experience are ultimately explained by the varieties which are to be found among individual human beings. James saw the human race as divisible into two basic personality types, what he called respectively the healthy-minded and the morbid-minded: the optimistic type and the pessimistic type. Given this distinction, it stands to reason that a religion which would be suitable for one type would not be suitable for the other. While recognizing certain positive qualities in healthy-mindedness, he in the end judges it to be “inadequate as a philosophical doctrine.”²¹ And this leads him to conclude that “the completest religions would therefore seem to be those in which the pessimistic elements are best developed.” To which he adds: “Buddhism, of course, and Christianity are the best known of these.”²² But finally it rests with individuals to shape the religion to which they will give their loyalty, for “the gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use, the gods whose demands on us are reinforcements of our demands on ourselves and on one another.”²³ Man manufactures his own form-fitted deity, designed to reflect his own ideals and aspirations.²⁴ James gives this basic thesis of his an interesting contemporary application in the following terms: “What with science, ‘idealism,’ and democracy, our own imagination has grown to need a God of an entirely different temperament from that Being interested exclusively in dealing out personal favors, with whom our ancestors were so contented.”²⁵ Changing times demand a changed god.

Careful scientist that he was, William James went about his preparations for the Gifford Lectures of 1901–02 in a very methodical manner, indeed, in what could be called, according to his own specifications, a bona

fide scientific manner. And I think it was very much part of his intentions to offer to his audience something along the lines of a science of religion. James certainly did not share the prejudice against religion which was characteristic of so many of his fellow scientists. More than that, James saw a positive compatibility between science and religion, as he understood the latter, and he maintained that “science and religion are both of them genuine keys for unlocking the world’s treasure-house to him who can use either practically.”²⁶ But take careful note of the condition he lays down: the worth of both religion and science is to be found chiefly in their practical usefulness. James’s pragmatism colors everything that comes under his purview.

There are, as he explains it, two aspects to his methodological approach to religious phenomena, one having to do with the attitude assumed by the observer, the other relating to the phenomena being observed. If the observer is to be objective in his observations, he is so in a rather odd sort of way, for our judgments of religious phenomena, James claims, should be “based on our own immediate feelings primarily.”²⁷ The logic here seems to be that if we are studying something founded on feeling, we should approach it feelingly. In more specific terms, and admitting that in this enterprise we cannot help but be “theological partisans,” James felt it natural that he should choose “prejudices, instincts, and common sense” as his guides.²⁸ If this is science, it is of a rather unusual kind.

As for the phenomena themselves, the object of the observer’s study, they would consist of the personal experiences of individuals. And this explains why, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, religious autobiography and biography constitute the principal sources for the material he investigates. James’s conviction that the essence of religion lies in individual experience was not, it is important to note, the outcome of disinterested and open-minded inductive research on his part. Rather, it was the a priori presupposition with which he entered into his research. He had made up his mind beforehand that genuine religion is reducible to individual affective experience, and that is why he saw fit to disregard both the communal dimension of religion and theology as not being relevant to his study.

The Varieties of Religious Experience is replete with quoted passages from a number of autobiographies and biographies of people whom James deemed fit to qualify as authentic religious types. One is struck, in reading these passages, by the fact that they describe behavior which is invariably far from what we would

call ordinary or normal. This is especially the case when the behavior in question is that of Catholic saints. It is as if James deliberately chose to focus on very unusual, highly eccentric, even bizarre behavior. And this is precisely what he did. He fostered the interesting belief that, in studying religious behavior, it was important to concentrate on that behavior as it displays itself in what he called “its acutest possible form,”²⁹ for by doing so we will be providing ourselves with data which will be “by far the more instructive for our study”³⁰ in that it will provide “the profounder information.”³¹ In order to find the answers we are looking for we must look “among these violenter examples rather than among those of a more moderate hue,”³² and “repulsive as they are to our ordinary worldly way of judging.”³³

Saintliness, mysticism, and asceticism were three subjects to which James gave a great deal of attention in his study of religion, and we can gain valuable insights into the general tenor of his thought by examining the attitude he took toward each of them. The saints, the mystics, the ascetics upon whom he chose to concentrate his attention were clearly worthy of that attention because they represented the “violenter examples” of religious behavior, which, according to James’s way of calculating, would prove to be the most instructive for the student of religion. There was, for James, a “universal saintliness” which was the same for all religions, and which was characterized by four “inner” conditions. The saint: (1) lives in a wider world than do the rest of us; (2) is in amicable communion with his “ideal power”; (3) feels immense elation and freedom; (4) is a yea-sayer rather than a nay-sayer. These four inner conditions of sanctity have in turn four practical consequences which are reflected in the life of the saint. They are: asceticism, strength of soul, purity, charity.

Though some of these attributes are rather vague, all of them carry positive connotations, and one would therefore think that when James comes to the discussion of individual saints he would tend to look upon them with benign eyes. But, with very few exceptions, this is not the case, and one has the impression that what good things he has to say of the saints are said begrudgingly, while his negative judgments of them are at times pointedly harsh. For example, he will admit to the genius of St. Teresa of Avila, and yet see in that genius “a curious flavor of superficiality.”³⁴ The condescension in the following remark is fairly dripping: “I confess that my only feeling in reading her has been pity that so much vitality of soul should have found such poor employment.”³⁵ He finally dismisses this great woman

and Doctor of the Church with the startling remark: “there is absolutely no human use in her, or sign of any general human interest.”³⁶ Turning to St. John of the Cross, one of the first of the friars to join the Teresian Carmelite reform, he describes him as “a Spanish mystic who flourished—or rather existed, for there was little that suggested flourishing about him—in the sixteenth century.”³⁷ St. Peter Alcantara, the Franciscan reformer and another of St. Teresa’s confessors, appears to James “rather in the light of tragic mountebanks than of sane men inspiring us with respect.”³⁸ In responding to the Revelations of St. Gertrude, he remarks that “saintliness of character may yield almost absolutely worthless fruits if it be associated with such inferior intellectual sympathies.”³⁹ In all, though James takes a generally positive attitude toward sanctity when considered in the abstract, he has serious difficulties warming to it when it assumes concrete form in flesh and blood individuals.

James on the subject of mysticism is enough to give pause to any serious student of religion. The problems which are to be found in his treatment of this subject—and they are not few in number—have mainly to do with his working definitions of mysticism, which are altogether too broad. Consistent with his view that religious experience in general has essentially to do with feeling, he contends that “mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect.”⁴⁰ He tells us that “whatever mystical experiences we may have” find their source in “all our non-rational operations.”⁴¹ Here we see again his anti-intellectualism at work, coloring his analysis of the subject under review. James claims that mysticism manifests itself in Hinduism, Neoplatonism, Sufism, Christianity, and Whitmanism—the last a reference to the world view evinced in the works of the poet Walt Whitman. At one point he makes an attempt at a more precise characterization of mysticism with this assertion: “Consciousness of illumination is for us the essential mark of ‘mystical’ states,”⁴² which, upon brief reflection, turns out to be not very helpful. What exactly is entailed in this “consciousness of illumination” that we would want to know, James does not explain.

Though he sees mystical experience, like religious experience in general, to be principally a matter of feeling, he does assign a certain noetic quality to it: “mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge.”⁴³ But if mysticism has to do with knowledge, one would suppose that the knowledge is communicable, so that whatever the mystic might learn from his mystical experiences could then be passed on

to others, and supposedly for their benefit. This would grace mysticism with a distinctly “useful” character. However, for James, whatever knowledge might be gained by the mystic through his experiences is meant for the mystic alone. In expanding upon this point, he explains that mystical knowledge should not be equated with intellectual knowledge. “Mystical truth,” he writes, “exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else. In this, as I have said, it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptual thought.”⁴⁴ Because mystical knowledge is meant for the mystic alone, we need not take seriously whatever mystics might want to say about what they learn from their experiences.

Knowing James’s unseemly general estimate of St. Teresa, the tone of his “medical” assessment of her mystical experiences should not particularly surprise us. “To the medical mind these ecstasies signify nothing but suggested and initiated hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis of superstition and hysteria.”⁴⁵ Note the reductive tenor of the reasoning being employed there. Nevertheless, for all his condemnatory remarks he makes about St. Teresa and other saints, he insists that we should not judge something on the basis of the source from which it emanates. In light of this principle, he asserts that the “pathological conditions” in the experiences of a mystic tell “us nothing about the value for knowledge of the consciousness which they induce.”⁴⁶ The general idea here is that it is the usefulness of the results, and not the conditions of the source of those results, which should command our attention. While it is true that “to the medical mind these ecstasies signify nothing but suggested and hypnoid states,” even so: “To pass a spiritual judgment upon these states, we must not content ourselves with superficial medical talk, but inquire into their fruits for life.”⁴⁷ This could pass for a magnanimous concession on his part, were it not for the fact that he gives no indication that he is prepared to admit that St. Teresa’s experiences offer anything by way of “fruits for life.”

James gives us a summary account of his thought on mysticism in the following description, reflecting what he takes to be “the general traits of the mystic range of consciousness”: “*It is on the whole pantheistic and optimistic, or at least the opposite of pessimistic. It is anti-naturalistic, and harmonizes best with twice-borners and so-called other worldly states of mind*”⁴⁸ (emphasis in the text). His underscoring all the words of the statement is apparently intended to suggest to the reader that it is weightily informative, which it is not. How much is contributed to our understanding of mysticism by being told that

it is optimistic, or that it harmonizes best with twice-borners? And “anti-naturalistic” is a term which begs for explanation, which James does not provide.

St. Peter Alcantara was known for the severely ascetic life he lived, and what with James having compared him to a tragic mountebank, we would not expect him to be very sympathetic toward the kind of behavior which was characteristic of the saint. But here James surprises us, by displaying an ambivalent attitude toward asceticism. The subject doubtless captured his attention in the first place because it so nicely exemplified religious behavior in “its acutest possible form.” On the one hand, he informs us, not surprisingly, that “unless some special utility can be shown in some individual’s discipline, we should be disposed to treat the general tendency to asceticism as pathological.”⁴⁹ But then he immediately goes on to say: “Yet I believe that a more careful consideration of the whole matter . . . ought to rehabilitate it in our esteem.”⁵⁰ James sees asceticism as a preferable alternative to what he calls naturalistic optimism. Why? Because it is a vigorous response to the “element of real wrongness in the world,”⁵¹ and reveals the heroic resources of the souls who practice it. In the final analysis, “asceticism must, I believe, be acknowledged to go with the profounder way of handling the gift of existence.”⁵² What saves asceticism from total condemnation is the fact that it meets the key criterion laid down by the pragmatic philosophy: it can be seen to be objectively useful.

For someone who wrote as much on the subject of religion as did William James, we would naturally expect that he gave a considerable amount of thought to the subject of God. And such was the case. We have already seen how, in his general analysis of religious experience, which he sees as rigorously individualistic, the principal object of the religious person’s attention cannot be given precise determination, and that is because it varies from individual to individual. It is thus vaguely described as “whatever the religious person may consider divine,” “what he feels to be the primal truth,” “whatever god he feels himself most in need of.”⁵³ Yet, whatever may be the particulars of the god that becomes the object of the religious person’s attention, it is one which has been brought into being by his own volition. Now, are we to take these speculations as only the results of James’s “scientific” analysis of the phenomena of religion, or do they also represent notions which, in one degree or another, he himself had adopted? What were James’s personal views regarding the existence and nature of God?

As far as I know, James did not belong formally to any Christian denomination, and he freely admits to his “inability to accept either popular Christianity or scholastic theism,”⁵⁴ but every indication has it that he would have considered himself as what may be described as a cultural Christian, in that he would readily accede to those broad ethical principles that are born out of the Christian religion, and would admit that they have been major factors in the shaping of Western civilization. More particularly, James is very much identifiable as what I would call a cultural Protestant Christian. Though he was not committed to it as an active churchgoer, and though he could find fault with it, Protestantism was for him, taking it all in all, the modern, up-to-date version of Christianity. And in this respect it compared most favorably with Catholicism, which was old-worldly, unliberal, undemocratic, and because of the last, decidedly un-American. He confidently addresses his Scottish audience as kindred spirits, “with our Protestant and modern education,”⁵⁵ and with good reason does not expect them to take umbrage at his systematic denigration of Catholic saints.

In “The Moral Philosophy and the Moral Life,” which began as an address delivered to the Yale Philosophy Club in 1891, James wrestles with the problem of moral relativism, and rightly sees it as detrimental to the construction of a universal ethics which could have the potential to govern the whole of mankind. For such a universal ethics to be possible, he argues, it must have a stabilizing foundation and sanction in a single, transcendent source, which he identifies as a divine thinker, for “the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-developing demands.”⁵⁶ From this line of reasoning he concludes: “we, as would-be philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause.”⁵⁷ To whom that prayer is to be directed is not at all clear. Is it intended for the ears of the postulated divine thinker? The whole arrangement is not a little puzzling.

In the last of the Gifford Lectures, James makes a concerted effort to give more precise definition to the proper object of religious experience—the divine. He begins by describing this object, with the wonderfully vague term, the “more,” by which he means to suggest something that is seemingly somehow other than the individual. Then, offering more specificity, he describes the “more” as “the subconscious continuation of our conscious life.”⁵⁸ Elaborating further, he explains that

“the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come”⁵⁹ (emphasis in the text). This “wider self,” which may be considered “the further limits of our being,”⁶⁰ is also “a higher part of the universe,” and, James concludes, “I will call this higher part of the universe by the name of God.”⁶¹ And this God is to be understood as endowed with real power. What might be the precise source of this power? “All that the facts require,” James explains, “is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves.”⁶² But just how are we to understand this power to be other than the self? Are we talking about something, or someone, that is quite distinct from the individual? Not necessarily. “It might conceivably even be only a larger and more godlike self.”⁶³ So, then, quite clearly, this entity which James is content to call by the name of God is not a transcendent being which is ontologically distinct and separate from the individual, but something which could be characterized as a projection of the individual’s unconscious self.

Having presented us, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, with what he correctly describes as a “thoroughly ‘pragmatic’ view of religion,”⁶⁴ James is nonetheless not satisfied, by the end of the book, that he has provided a sufficiently complete account of his philosophy of religion. What is lacking and needs to be taken into account is “the pluralistic hypothesis,” to the exploration of which turns up in his final book, *A Pluralistic Universe*. In this book can be found what we can fairly consider to be his finished thoughts on the subject of religion. Like *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *A Pluralistic Universe* began as a series of lectures, delivered in the spring of 1908, this time at Oxford University. The *bête noire* which is the focus of James’s attention in these lectures is what he calls absolute idealism, which is that philosophy promulgated by the likes of Hegel, Bradley, and Royce. Now, James identifies himself as an idealist, but with an important qualification: he is a pluralistic idealist. A pluralistic idealist stands in marked contrast to an absolute idealist because he is not an advocate of monism. An absolute idealist is monistic in his thinking in that he regards the universe as a unified whole, and for him the God of that universe is an infinite being. James, for his part, sees the universe as pluralistic, which means that it exists “in distributive form, in the shape not of all but of a set of eaches”⁶⁵ (emphasis in the text). It is important to note that James does not state this as a categorical truth. It is a hypothesis, but one to which he nonetheless firmly adheres. He goes on to explain that there is no “all,” or “all-form”; there are only “eaches.”

Just as James has no hesitancy in identifying himself as an idealist, neither does he balk in informing us that he is a pantheist as well, but again with a qualification: he is a pluralistic pantheist. What, we ask of James, does “God” mean for a pluralistic idealist and a pluralistic pantheist? First of all, he reminds us that he rejects what can be called, variously, classical theism, philosophic theism, or scholasticism. He wants nothing at all to do with “the hollow unreal god of scholastic theology.”⁶⁶ His principal complaint against scholasticism is that it creates a dualism which makes us outsiders with respect to God. The superiority of pantheistic pluralism, by way of contrast, is to be found in the fact that it makes “us entitatively one with God.”⁶⁷ James’s commitment to a pluralistic view of the world prompts him to excoriate absolutism in whatever form it may take. Thus, while the absolute idealists hold to an absolute God, “I hold to the finite God.”⁶⁸ And James’s God “is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once.”⁶⁹ We can take this understanding of the nature of divinity as perfectly consonant with what he calls his “pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe.”⁷⁰ It is only the absolute idealist who believes in an absolute God, he contends, and: “The God of our popular Christianity is but one member of a pluralistic system.”⁷¹

We witness a shift of emphasis in James’s thinking about God as we move from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to *A Pluralistic Universe*. In the first work the emphasis is on the subjective, the individual, and God, or whatever is considered to be supreme in the mind of the religious person, is really no more than an extension of the unconscious or subliminal self. According to this point of view, it would not be an exaggeration to say that religious worship is tantamount to an adulation of the self. By way of contrast, the emphasis in the second work is more on the objective. Here it would seem that we are considering a deity as something “out there,” and perhaps quite distinct from the individual. Although there are any number of things that James says could lead us to believe otherwise, that is really not the case. The subjective wins out. In the end we have to conclude that what we have in James is a standard variety pantheist, who in that bears some similarity to Spinoza, the man who gave us the dictum *Deus sive Natura*, “God or Nature.” Call it nature, call it, as does James, the universe; or call it God—it amounts to same thing.

William James is rightly recognized as one of the major figures in American philosophy, and he is commonly given honorific recognition as the father of American psychology. And whether he was writing

philosophy or psychology, he wrote with admirable clarity and uncommon verve. James is always a pleasure to read. He was in many respects a brilliant man, and there was scarcely a subject he took an interest in to which he did not bring some pointed and provocative insights, and this includes the subject of religion. However, it must be candidly stated that, with respect to this subject, James, for all his brilliance, was very much out of his element, and the preponderance of the views which he expressed on every important issue, invariably with bold straightforwardness, are, to put it mildly, eminently contestable. Though James may be regarded as a reliable guide on other subjects, this is not the case with religion. Here the reader must be prepared to read with an alertly critical eye.

If James managed to get so many things so radically wrong about religion, perhaps at least a partial explanation for this can be found in the specific approach he chose to take to the subject, an approach which can be accurately described, according to the usage of his own vocabulary, as “scientific.” This was an approach which he naturally fell into, in that it was entirely consistent with his own and his century’s commitment to the notion that empiricism was the single road to truth. In the first of his Gifford Lectures James makes much of the point that his study of religion will be solidly founded on empirical principles, and that he has it in mind to construct a science of religion. But is success possible for such a project, if by science we mean exclusively empirical science? Doubtless empirical science can inform us about certain aspects of religion, but this information would have to do with matters of only peripheral importance. Empirical science cannot, in fact, discover for us the essence of religion, which is precisely what James was attempting to do; and, when applied to religion, it seems unfailingly to end up engaging in the crudest kind of reductionism.

Recall this definitive statement by James, which I quoted earlier: “Every religious phenomenon has its history and its derivation from natural antecedents.” A naturalistic approach to religion of the kind indicated here is self-defeating, for, implicitly if not explicitly, it precludes at the very outset any consideration of the supernatural, as the supernatural. To look at religion from a purely naturalistic point of view is not to see it at all. James, instead of acknowledging the severe limits of empirical science, which situates the supernatural beyond its scope, puts all his store in its methodology, a methodology which effectively forces him to reduce the supernatural to the level of the natural. But of

course a naturalized supernatural is simply not the supernatural. The statement cited above is false. There are any number of “religious phenomena,” indeed the most important of them, that do not derive from natural antecedents. We need only mention something as critically important as grace, the neglect of which renders religion incomprehensible, and to which, to the best of my knowledge, James makes no reference in his many works in which he treats of religion. Of course, this is not surprising, for grace does not lend itself to empirical verification, but this state of affairs serves only to underscore the poverty of the methodology to which he had limited himself. For James, religious experience is, for all practical purposes, coterminous with psychological experience, and therefore explicable in psychological terms. But it is beyond the competence of psychology to speak of grace; that is the proper province of theology, a science which James chooses to dismiss as inconsequential.

One of the most notable features of James’s understanding of religious experience is his failure to see how importantly it is a shared experience. For him, religion is at bottom an intensely individualistic phenomenon, and he rejects what he calls ecclesiastical Christianity, or the communal aspect of any religion, as not having to do with the heart of the matter. But to omit the communal dimension of religion—or, more specifically, the Church, in any effort to understand Christianity—is to omit altogether too much. James’s position here is all the more odd for the fact that it is taken by a psychologist. He surely would not contend that one could arrive at a reliable understanding of any individual person, in terms of the person’s general psychological make-up, simply by studying the person as an isolated entity, disregarding the network of relations that connect that person to others. And yet he is dedicated to the notion that we can somehow understand religion by focusing exclusively on the personal experiences of the individual. This ignores the fact that an integral part of the religious experiences of a believing Christian, for example, is an acute consciousness of belonging to a church, to a community of persons the essence of whose communion is a shared belief. The individual Christian, if his faith is vibrant, never feels alone or isolated, for he knows himself to be part of a whole, a member of the mystical body of Christ.

The pronouncedly individualistic emphasis that James gives to religious experience is in good part explained, I think, by his Protestant background, as would be his conviction that feeling is central to religious

experience. Because he believed the emotional element to be paramount, he quite understandably dismisses theology on account of its “intellectualism.” Even so, it is not a little baffling to see how any serious investigator of religion, as James unquestionably took himself to be, could so cavalierly put aside theology as not worthy of his scholarly concern. How could one claim to possess anything like a reputable understanding of Christianity, say, without having seriously engaged with its immensely rich and variegated theological literature, the result of the thought and labors of hundreds of men of genius over the course of two millennia? As mentioned earlier, this monumental act of neglect is in good part explained by James’s paradoxical anti-intellectualism, his persistent penchant for denigrating intellect and promoting feeling. “The more we live by our intellect,” he wrote, “the less we understand the meaning of life.”⁷² But in this matter, as in a few others, James can be confusingly inconsistent. Whereas he is emphatic in citing feelings as constituting the very essence of genuine religious experience, at the same time downplaying the role of intellect, nonetheless when he indulges in his sharp-tongued criticism of the behavior of the saints, he will score that behavior precisely because it lacks intellectual respectability. So, as we noted earlier, he sees the actions of St. Gertrude as yielding “almost worthless fruits,” and that is because they are associated “with inferior intellectual sympathies.”⁷³ While normally deprecating the importance of intellect, then, he does not hesitate to make use of it at times as a measure by which to justify a negative reading of religious experiences which he does not find acceptable.

Any earnestly believing and reasonably knowledgeable Christian would find James’s understanding of the nature of faith to be quite incomprehensible. It certainly has no resemblance to what the Catholic Church has to say about the matter, through the mouths of her great theologians like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. The idea that faith is essentially a gift of God, a singular grace extended to man, by the illumination of which he can come to see the truth of what God has revealed about Himself—this is something which is seemingly quite lost on James. I say seemingly, for it is hard to imagine, given his background, that he would not have been aware of the elements of Christian doctrine as pertaining to the matter of faith. But such doctrine would be inconsonant with his commitment to the naturalistic project, therefore unacceptable. Faith, rather than being a supernatural gift from above, is generated by the individual himself, so that the believer

becomes the author of what he believes. James’s “will to believe” is little more than an invitation to the would-be believer to pull himself up by his own bootstraps. He was doubtless completely sincere in supposing that by defending the “right” to believe, he was engaged in a just war against the ultra-positivists of his day who were branding all types of belief, but most especially religious belief, as irrational. James offers some telling counterarguments to the positivist position, showing that, despite its claims upon ultra-rationality, it was itself guilty of irrationality. But when he reduces belief—and this is particularly applicable to religious belief—to what is tantamount to a raw act of the will, and makes of the object of belief a matter of almost incidental concern, then what we end up with is a caricature of faith, be it natural or supernatural, emphatically so in the case of the latter. For the Christian believer, nothing is more certain than the certainty that is provided by faith. The faith which James enjoins us to bring into being by sheer act of will can also, he assures us, be accompanied by certainty, but a certainty which is as much a product of the will as is the faith which it accompanies. Both have their source in the solitary individual believer. For James, there is no objective certainty; there is, however, subjective certainty, and the individual is responsible for it. Faith “creates its own verification”; the object of faith, which is posited by the believer himself, is true because the believer makes it true, as a concomitant of his very act of faith. The vapid notion that “believing makes it so” stands as almost a perfect description of James’s understanding of the nature of faith. And in a qualified sense it is reflective of the absurd dictum *Credo quia absurdum*, “I believe because it is irrational.” Any self-generated object of faith will do, so long as it “works” for the generating individual, which amounts to saying that the belief is totally compatible with the believer’s affective self. And were one to judge the belief to be irrational, this could be blithely brushed aside by the believer as quite irrelevant. For him, what authenticates belief is not intellect, but will.

Earlier I offered the considered opinion that James, in taking on the subject of religion, was very much out of his element. This is true a fortiori regarding the subject of mysticism. As with religion in general, so too with mysticism—he defines it too broadly. If, as he maintains, godless or quasi-godless creeds are religions, “from the experimental point of view,”⁷⁴ then just about anything would pass muster as a religion. But common sense logic tells us that if too much counts as X, then X loses its force as a meaningful descriptive.

The whole purpose of definition is to limit the boundaries of meaning, not erase them. James, by allowing altogether too much to count as religion, undermines his whole research project. And he does precisely the same thing with mysticism.

His contention that mysticism is pantheistic and optimistic is not very illuminating, as I have already noted, for pantheism and optimism—especially the latter—admit of very wide interpretations. New Age thought tends to be pantheistic, but I would be reluctant to call it mystical. Nor is a vague descriptive such as “other-worldly states of mind” very helpful, for it is as easily applicable to a dedicated reader of science fiction as to a mystic. James sees no appreciable difference among Hinduism, Neoplatonism, and Christianity when it comes to the matter of mysticism, a judgment that could only be made by someone who has but a superficial knowledge of the field he is investigating. His adding “Whitmanism” to the above list underscores the fact that for him mysticism, as is the case with religion itself, is at root a matter of emotion. The mystic is supposedly a systematic seeker after ecstatic states, emotional “highs,” which lift him out of the dreary run of mundane affairs and make him blissfully at one with the pluralistic universe. For St. John of the Cross—the man who failed to flourish, according to James—this is exactly what a mystic (a term, by the way, which St. John never uses) does not seek. On just about every salient point, what James has to say about mysticism is contradicted by St. John of the Cross. One has no hesitancy in deciding whose is the voice of authority in this matter. The Carmelite friar, not the Harvard professor, is the proper occupant of the Chair of Mystical Studies.

James’s treatment of St. Teresa of Avila is high-handed to the extreme, and in this he displays what is for him uncharacteristic intellectual irresponsibility. There is something positively embarrassing in the reckless way he deals with this extraordinary woman, dismissing her “mystical experiences” with a wave of the hand and a barrage of psychological jargon. James’s excessive response to those experiences is particularly puzzling in that there is nothing at all untoward in the account the saint herself gives of them. It was only under obedience that she wrote about her spiritual experiences in the first place, and she did so in a plain-speaking, often understated manner. Most of her writings, a premiere example of which would be *The Interior Castle*, are concerned with delineating what might be called the practical theology of the spiritual life. It is difficult for me to believe that James consulted that book, or, for that

matter, that he even had a reputable working familiarity with the full range of her writings. It would be a cause for no little amazement that anyone who had read St. Teresa’s *The Book of Her Foundations* could say of its author that “there is absolutely no human use in her.” It is my impression that James, in preparing for the Gifford Lectures, gave himself a crash course in mysticism, and we have warrant for concluding that its educational value was not great.

It was apparently in the seven-year period between his delivering the Gifford Lectures at Glasgow and the Hibbert Lectures at Oxford that James discovered, and quickly became enamored of, the thought of Henri Bergson. He devoted an entire enthusiastic chapter to the French philosopher in *A Pluralistic Universe*. It is obvious that James saw in Bergson a kindred spirit, someone who was as adamant an enemy of “intellectualism” as himself. But it would seem that he was not sufficiently sensitive to the subtle drift of Bergson’s thought, and one can only speculate what would have been James’s reaction to Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, published in 1932, twenty-two years after the American philosopher’s death. Bergson, like James, took an active interest in mysticism, but, unlike James, he devoted serious scholarly study to it. The conclusions he drew from his research do not at all agree with those arrived at by James on several different points, only one of which I will cite here. Whereas for James all mysticism was the same, whatever its source, Bergson saw pronounced differences. For one thing, he believed true mysticism to be rare, and not the pervasive phenomenon that James imagined it to be. Furthermore, after a thorough examination of the mysticism associated with ancient Greece, of that related to Neoplatonism, of the mysticism of India, specifically that coming out of Hinduism and Buddhism, and then comparing all these forms with Christian mysticism, he concluded that “the complete mysticism is that of the great Christian mystics.”⁷⁵ And among those great Christian mystics he numbers St. Teresa of Avila.

The “God” of William James surely qualifies as what Blaise Pascal denominated “the God of the philosophers,” that is, not the living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. James’s deity is really no more than an invention of a human individual, an invention born out of psychological need, to help the inventor deal effectively with life’s incessant slings and arrows, and, more comprehensively, to lend coherence and meaningful structure to all of one’s experiences. Pascal was responding to the philosophy of René Descartes

in which, as Pascal reckoned, God figured as little more than a practical expedient, a convenient *deus ex machina* brought in to prop up a sagging system. Pascal would doubtless respond to James's deity in pretty much the same way he had responded to Descartes's, judging it to be no more than a useful tool. At which judgment we would not expect James to take offense, for, after all, in his pragmatic way of regarding reality, the ultimate touchstone of legitimacy regarding religion and the gods of religion, was usefulness. Does the designated deity carry with it the requisite cash-value? Does it work in favor of the devotee's general benefit and felicity? If the answers to those questions are in the affirmative, the god is a true god. In this respect we should keep in mind that James was an idealist as much as he was a pragmatist, and this means that he saw the human mind, not as that which is measured, but that which measures. What this comes down to, regarding the issue at hand, is that God does not create man; man creates God.

We learn from *A Pluralistic Universe* that "God" may be considered to be simply the universe itself, the pluralistic universe, or—as James strangely suggests—at least a part of it. And here we have James subscribing to a pantheism similar to that propounded by Spinoza.⁷⁶ The deified "higher self," as we have seen, is at the same time "a higher part of the universe," and, he tells us, "I will call this higher part of the universe by the name of God." But whether it is a higher self or a higher part of the universe which may be regarded as God, in either case it is a postulated God, a deity which owes whatever existential status it is permitted to enjoy to the human individual. In effect, then, the universe becomes deified because the individual makes it so.

James unambiguously avows that the God in which he believes is a finite God. This of course is completely incoherent. A "finite God" is a term without a referent, and his employment of it has to stand as the most glaring evidence of his self-confessed "lack of theological learning." But besides that not insignificant lack, James shows himself to be lacking in a knowledge of metaphysics as well, egregiously so, and that goes a long way toward explaining the gnarled difficulties he got himself into as he attempted to spell out for us his "science" of religion. He who ignores metaphysics, or, as was the case with James, dismisses it as a vacuous discipline, especially when he chooses to wrestle with a subject as weighty as religion, is like a man who launches into the deep in a boat made of tissue paper.⁷⁷ ❧

ENDNOTES

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004 [1902]), 104. Because I will be citing this work often in what follows, henceforth, for brevity's sake, I will refer to it simply as *VRE*.
2. Gay Wilson Allen, *William James: A Biography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), viii.
3. *VRE*, 39.
4. *VRE*, 16–17.
5. *VRE*, 374. He goes on to explain why he wishes to discredit theology: "It assumes to create religious objects out of resources of logical reason alone, or of logical reason drawing rigorous inference from non-subjective facts" (*ibid.*). For James, the only facts that count, with respect to religion, are subjective facts, and it is precisely because theology ignores or attempts to circumvent those facts that it is not only not informative with respect to religion but positively distortive of it. What we see in James's adamant anti-theological stance reflects a more comprehensive feature of his thought, his anti-intellectualism, which finds expression throughout his works. As for theology, he is willing to concede that it might, emotionally, be "worth something to minds of the type of Newman's" (*VRE*, 382). What with the emphasis he himself gives to emotion, one might suppose that he would then think that that could be worth a great deal, but his logic does not lead him to acknowledge as much.
6. *VRE*, 257. James writes: "now in these lectures I propose to ignore the institutional branch [of religion] entirely, to say nothing of the ecclesiastical organization" (*VRE*, 37).
7. *VRE*, 41.
8. *VRE*, 440.
9. *VRE*, 442.
10. *VRE*, 17. He later makes this point more emphatically when he writes that "there is not a single one of our states of mind, high or low, healthy or morbid, that has not some organic process as its conditions" (*ibid.*, 25). Still later in the book he asserts that "the original factor in fixing the figures of the gods must always have been psychological" (*VRE*, 280).
11. "Is Life Worth Living?" in *Essays on Faith and Morals* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1965), 25.
12. "The Will to Believe," in *Essays on Faith and Morals*, 42.
13. "Is Life Worth Living?" 31. Faith, like everything else pertaining to religion, is to be explained in purely naturalistic terms: "Like love, or fear, the faith-state is a natural psychic complex" (*VRE*, 246).
14. "The Will to Believe," 55.
15. "The Sentiment of Rationality," in *Essays on Faith and Morals*, 97.
16. *VRE*, 372–73.
17. *VRE*, 431.
18. *VRE*, 51.
19. *VRE*, 239.
20. *VRE*, 42.
21. *VRE*, 148.
22. *VRE*, 150. As an example of healthy-mindedness, he cites "liberal Protestant circles today" (*ibid.*, 315).
23. *VRE*, 290–91.
24. Though to the best of my knowledge James does not expatiate on the thought of August Comte in any of his writings, the attitude he expresses here is highly suggestive of Comte's *Religion of Humanity*.
25. *VRE*, 302–3.
26. *VRE*, 115. He goes on to say: "On this view science and religion, each verified in its own way . . . would be co-eternal" (*VRE*, 115).
27. *VRE*, 28.
28. *VRE*, 288.
29. *VRE*, 54.
30. *VRE*, 125.

31. *VRE*, 419.
32. *VRE*, 54.
33. *Ibid.* “To learn the secrets of any science we must go to expert specialists, even though they may be eccentric persons, and not commonplace pupils. . . . Even so with religion. We who have pursued such radical expressions of it may now be sure that we know its secrets as authentically as any one can know them who learns them from another” (*VRE*, 419). That quotation represents the closest James comes to offering us a rationale for his decision to focus his attention on “radical expressions” of religious experience in order to discover its essence. His reasoning here is considerably less than convincing. That studied concentration upon the extreme, the eccentric, the radical (he uses all three terms) will yield “profounder information” of any subject, disclosing its “secrets,” is far from obvious. If anything, it could give one a highly distorted picture of the subject. The expert specialist James cites, to whom we go to learn the secrets of his science, may be eccentric in his personal habits, but we would not want him to be eccentric in his science.
34. *VRE*, 303. St. Teresa and her contemporaries are not the only ones whose saintly behavior does not meet with James’s approval: “even the best professional sainthood of former centuries” has a marked tendency to fall short, and “seems to us curiously shallow and unedifying” (*ibid.*, 303). One wonders if, in making this sweeping judgment, James had in mind the likes of St. Augustine, St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *VRE*, 304. When he makes statements as wild and irresponsible as this, James scarcely contributes to his credibility as a serious student of religion.
37. *VRE*, 268. Later he is willing to admit that St. John of the Cross is “one of the best” of the mystical teachers. Apparently, then, he did flourish, at least in one respect.
38. *VRE*, 314.
39. *VRE*, 302.
40. *VRE*, 329. For St. John of the Cross, someone who is seriously endeavoring to achieve as perfect a union with God as is possible in this life would have little interest in “mystical states,” or in mysticism in general as it is understood by James.
41. *VRE*, 417.
42. *VRE*, 353 n. In one of his several attempts to give precise definition to mysticism, James assigns to it four key characteristics: Mysticism is ineffable; it has a noetic quality; mystical states are transient; and the mystical experience is passive.
43. *VRE*, 329.
44. *VRE*, 351.
45. *VRE*, 357.
46. *Ibid.* “In other words, not its origin, but *the way it works on the whole* is Dr. Maudsley’s final test of a belief. This is our own empirical criterion” (*VRE*, 29, emphasis in text).
47. *Ibid.*
48. *VRE*, 365.
49. *VRE*, 315.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. *VRE*, 317.
53. James quotes a Professor Leuba, it would seem approvingly, as follows: “so long as men can use their God, they care very little who he is, or whether he is at all” (*VRE*, 434, emphasis in text).
54. *VRE*, 446.
55. *VRE*, 302. James gives hints that he was not unaffected by nineteenth century American anti-Catholic bigotry in his use of phrases like “the Romish faith.”
56. *Essays on Faith and Morals*, 213–14.
57. *Ibid.*, 214.
58. *VRE*, 439.
59. *VRE*, 441.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *VRE*, 442. In “Pragmatism and Religion” James writes: “On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true” (*Essays on Faith and Morals*, 133).
62. *VRE*, 449.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *VRE*, 444.
65. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996 [1909]), 129. James’s pluralistic universe, he explains, is not an “all” but rather is composed of “eaches” (in other terms he describes it as being in “distributive form” and “incomplete”), and counted among those “eaches” is God (*ibid.*, 44). James’s pluralistic universe, as he describes it, is in fact not a universe, albeit that he retains the name.
66. *Ibid.*, 316.
67. *Ibid.*, 25. For pantheistic idealists such as himself, he goes on to explain, “God came to know himself, partly through us” (*ibid.*, 28).
68. *Ibid.*, 111.
69. *Ibid.*, 311.
70. *Ibid.*, 313.
71. *Ibid.*, 110.
72. *Essays on Faith and Morals*, 295. Paradoxical though it may seem, it is not a complete oddity to find intellectuals, even those of the stature of William James, who harbor attitudes which smack strongly of anti-intellectualism. One thinks, for example, of Kierkegaard and Bergson.
73. *VRE*, 302.
74. *VRE* 41.
75. Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977). In light of the ease with which James labeled mystical experience as pathological, the following observation of Bergson’s is worthy of special note: “When we grasp that such is the culminating point of the inner evolution of the great mystics [the fact that, as a result of their mystical experiences, they displayed “increased vitality,” and radiated “an extraordinary energy, daring, power of conception and realization”], we can but wonder how they could ever have been classed with the mentally diseased” (*ibid.*, 227–28). Did he have William James in mind when he wrote this?
76. James does not, as did Spinoza, contend that there is but a single substance. Very much under the influence of Hume as he was, he discarded the notion of substance altogether.
77. It was only after my recent rereading of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that it struck me that William James clearly qualifies as a modernist, as that term was understood by Pope St. Pius X. The pontiff tellingly laid out the particulars of the modernist mindset in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. With James’s ideas of religion and of deity in mind, as delineated in this paper, consider the following passage from the encyclical, section 10: “It is thus that the *religious sense*, which through the agency of *vital immanence* emerges from the lurking-places of the *subconscious*, is the germ of all religion, an explanation of everything that has been or ever will be in any religion” (emphasis in the text).
- Apropos of James’s notion of deity: “For the Modernist believer, on the contrary, it is an established and certain fact that the reality of the divine does really exist in itself and quite independently of the person who believes in it. If you ask on what foundation this assertion of the believer rests, he answers: In the personal *experience* of the individual” (section 14, emphasis in the text).
- And apropos of James’s anti-intellectualism: “They [the Modernists] assert, therefore, the existence of a real experience, and of such a kind that *surpasses the rational experience*” (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

J. Ratzinger “On the Meaning of Sacrament”

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Translated by Rev. Kenneth Baker, S.J.

The concept of “sacrament” is still very familiar to the contemporary Christian. In his daily life he encounters it continually. But it is very far removed from the mental disposition and consciousness of the modern man. Sacrament seems somewhat strange to him—something he is inclined to downgrade to a magical or mythical age of mankind. It does not seem to fit well into a rational and technical world. Therefore we have a dilemma: that this reality is central for a Christian consciousness but marginal for the normal awareness of everyday life today. Here we have an example of the rupture in Christian consciousness that is quite noticeable today. If we want to attempt, under these conditions, to recover the concept of sacrament, it is necessary first of all to inquire about what common human presuppositions and ideas it contains within itself so that, based on them, we can arrive at what is specifically Christian about it.

If we do this, we run into two problems. On the one hand, we encounter a basic form of human understanding and communication that in the sacrament found its Christian expression in “symbols.” In order to understand the essence of the sacrament—its lasting validity and the way in which it reveals reality—one must therefore ask what a symbol is and how it can be the foundation for communion among individuals and communion in the common understanding of reality. One must also ask to what extent it is even possible to gain access to reality.² If one does this, the second step is obvious. Whoever studies the essence and “functioning” of symbols, necessarily encounters their natural surroundings, where these primordial human phenomena are at home. For symbols do not simply stand by themselves, available, so to speak, for any use whatever. They take place and they are effective only in an event supported by the authority of the community, which the individual cannot simply bring about by himself. This common event is the feast. The feast is, as an extraordinary event, the place that shapes the symbol and makes it come alive. Both together [feast and symbol]

form the human horizon in which the sacrament is to be understood. Essentially the Christian sacrament is also a symbol-event. In this sense each sacrament, in different ways, is connected with a feast. The common proceeding of the feast is the reference point on which it is built.

With this look at the human roots of sacrament we are presented with the possibility of gaining a better understanding of this apparently purely Christian phenomenon, which is very foreign to modern thinking, and forming a concept of sacrament that allows us to understand what is specifically Christian as the acceptance and development of what is human and universal. Accordingly, if the methodological course of our considerations at first seems clearly defined, we now certainly face an objection that might close this path as a fatal blind alley. Karl Barth saw the essence of what he called the Catholic apostasy in the insertion of what is Christian into the common analogy of the human—an apostasy that reduces to the merely human what in God’s new activity in Jesus is unique, with no point of reference and incapable of being deduced. Thus the divine is now deduced from what belongs to us, from the human, and so misses precisely what is uniquely Christian.³ This objection today does not strike us so dramatically as it did thirty years ago, for in contrast to that time we are living today in an anthropological phase of theology as well and have long since become tired of Barth’s purism. But because the consideration of what is not obvious, what is unpleasant and strange in our culture belongs to the search for truth, it may be useful to remember this objection and to spend some time reflecting on it.

Actually, this objection has perhaps found a new form, one that is also immediately troubling to us, in two short lectures by the Protestant systematic theologian at the University of Tübingen, Eberhard Jüngel.⁴ To his mind Barth’s idea seems to be no longer merely a protest of strict theology against the purely human, but the necessary criticism by exegesis of dogmatics, which for him is at the same time the criticism by the Reformation, whose thought was based on Scripture, of the Catholic Church, which appropriates Scripture as part of tradition. Without doubt today we are very aware of such an objection of historical reason such as that of the Reformation against tradition and the

Church of tradition. In his investigation, Jüngel begins from the indisputable fact that the word *sacramentum* in the Church Fathers is the translation of the Greek word *mysterion*. He concludes from that fact very sensibly that one can verify the legitimacy of the concept of sacrament by examining the meaning of the word *mysterion* as it is used in the New Testament. This undertaking leads him to an alarming conclusion. In the New Testament, so he maintains (and historically it is absolutely incontestable), first of all, the word *mysterion* does not often appear, and secondly—what is more important—where it does appear, it expresses a Christological and eschatological perspective. Nowhere, however, does it show any relationship to cult or liturgy or even to the mystery cults, the sacramental actions of the non-Christian world. It might be interesting here as an aside to add that Odo Casel, the great theologian of the liturgical movement in the period between the two World Wars, thought that the pagan mystery cults were the vessels provided by providence for the Christian concept of sacrament, which had no precedent in the Old Testament.⁵ Now apparently Jüngel would not contest this connection for the early Church, but he would see precisely in that her apostasy from the New Testament and from the whole Bible—the Hellenization of what is Christian. For, his conclusion that the word *mysterion* in the New Testament has nothing to do with the mystery cults, nothing to do with sacramental liturgies, is strengthened by the further assertion that the word is, conversely, absent in those places in the New Testament which deal with liturgical actions, such as Baptism and Eucharist. Jüngel accordingly writes: “Where such connections are discernible (for example, in the sacramental texts), the concept of *mysterion* is not found; but where the concept does appear, they (liturgical references) are absent”.⁶ When he says further that the early Church established this connection—one not created by the New Testament—and developed the sacraments in competition with and in imitation of the pagan mysteries, the purpose of his thesis is clear (and, since up to this point everything is historically correct, apparently also indisputable): he does not in fact wish to do away with the concept of sacrament as such. However, he considers the Catholic understanding of sacrament that developed in the early Church to be so dubious that a fundamental reinterpretation (such as he finds in Luther) seems unavoidable.

A thesis of this magnitude needs to be examined. Along with it, the claim of the anthropological reference is at issue, from which we started out earlier with-

out any problem, but with it also there is a question regarding the relationship between the human and the Christian, which means a question about the nature of Christian universalism as such. There we see the difference between the Catholic and the Protestant concepts of sacrament as the fundamental question about tradition and its interpretation of the Scriptures; there also the question arises about Christian worship as such. First of all, it is advisable in this dispute to follow the methodological path of Jüngel and go a bit further in examining the history of the words “mystery” and “sacrament.” But then we will have to see whether it is correct to develop the whole question from an analysis of the meaning of a particular word, or whether it might not also be necessary to present another factual connection as the source of the historical development.

The first thing to consider in any New Testament question is to take a good look at its roots in the Old Testament. If we do that, we see that the word “mystery” does not appear in the early writings of the Old Testament. It makes its first appearance in the later writings—in each of the three groups into which they are divided: in Daniel’s apocalyptic, in the wisdom literature (Wisdom and Sirach), and in the religious-edifying story literature, that is, in Tobias, Judith, and Second Maccabees. It is also correct that there is no cult connection there; the word *mysterion* means simply: something hidden. To be sure, in apocalyptic writings, which are concerned with the revelation of the future, something more appears: there it means something like a revelation veiled beneath symbols, a veiled proclamation of future mysteries determined by God.⁷ These ideas then find a significant modification in the theology of the Rabbis, that is, in the theology that developed in the time of Jesus, even though our witnesses to it came later. Here the “mysteries of the Torah” (the five books of Moses) are spoken of. The Torah appears as the clothing “of God’s mystery of creation that underlies all being and which allows itself to be penetrated in mystical interpretation.”⁸ According to the Rabbis, therefore, the many words of the Law have a hidden center, a hidden meaning which is not obvious but is, rather, truly an unveiling of reality.

This reminds us of a saying of Jesus that we find in Mark 4:11. In the previous verses we learn that Jesus’ disciples do not understand his parables and they ask him what they mean. Jesus answers them: “To you has been given the secret (*mysterion*) of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables”. This sentence is very difficult to explain, but one thing

is surely clear regarding its content: Behind the striking parables which Jesus proclaims to the people there lies a hidden truth that leads down to the heart of reality. What this truth is, is not expressed and obviously this is not even possible in the form of normal human speech. Obviously, normal discourse cannot make this truth as perceptible as the narrated parable can. It can only be given by seeing the speech as *reality*. It means entering into the reality itself; it has to do with the person of the one addressed and of the speaker, namely, Jesus Christ.

Let us set this insight aside for now and direct our attention to the rest of the New Testament. Then it turns out that the word “mystery” has a noteworthy use only in the Pauline letters, where it appears twenty-one times with a concentration on three sets of texts in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. This concentration shows that the word is not at all one of Paul’s own words, but rather adopted because of his dialogues with those to whom he is writing. This means, therefore, that he makes it his own by using the language of others. Accordingly, it is still in an open process of development so that we can only attempt to sense the outlines of the development insofar as they are visible in the New Testament. The result is that Rabbi Paul of Tarsus adopts the rabbinic interpretation. The rabbinic question about the mysteries of the Torah was also his question. Now he knows that it is answered. He has come to know “the *mysterion*”. The *mysterion* of the Torah and of all the parables has become visible for him in the crucified Christ. *He* is the hitherto hidden content that stands behind the manifold words and events recorded in the Scriptures, the mystery of God which is the source of everything that exists. In him the how, why, and what of creation and man become clear. In him is revealed the central point of the parable present in the Scripture. In him God has revealed himself and given the authentic hermeneutic of Scripture—the authentic entrance into it. For this reason, Christ can then simply be named “The Mystery of God” (1 Cor. 2:1; see 2:7 along with 1:23; Col.2:2; see 1:27 and 4:3).

In this respect the concept of mystery belongs—an important finding!—to the question about the correct interpretation of Scripture: it is a hermeneutical concept. But at the same time this makes it possible for Paul to give an answer to the mystery cults in Corinth. He borrows this new word from them in order, of course, to raise it to a completely new level. Against the mysticism of an elitist wisdom, of a Christianity of the initiated for whom normal church life is too lowly and which it therefore wishes to transcend hermeneuti-

cally—against this view one must object that precisely the simple scandal of the crucified Christ is *the* mystery, than which nothing is more profound, more hidden, or more elevated. No initiation can go deeper than that, and no hermeneutic can go higher. This is not an intellectual formula that one can interpret away, but only the banal event itself: it is precisely the Crucified One proclaimed by the simple *kerygma* who is the mystery.

In this connection Paul gets involved in the schematic and language of the mystery religions. Of course secrecy belongs to the *mysterion* of the mystery religions; it is elitist. Not every person can see it; one must go through initiations. To that Paul says: *This mysterion* also has its secrecy and it is that of “Sophia,” that is, of elite wisdom that is hidden from those who always know better without respect to hermeneutics and is made known precisely to those who do not know better, the uninitiated, the naïve: to the “fool,” he says, namely, to one who is considered an “idiot” by the hermeneutically enlightened elite.

The *mysterion* draws its boundaries in a way that is directly opposite to the way men draw boundaries. It sweeps aside all the “mysteries” because it delivers what they promise but do not have: entry into the innermost thinking of God, which at the same time finds the innermost foundation of the world and of man. It opens itself precisely if one abides in simplicity, and in this respect it is ordered in a special way to simple and not to elite spirits. We consider it remarkable that Paul adopts the terminology and ideas of the mystery religions but, from the Christian point of view, virtually turns them into the opposite. The naïve and unanalyzed *kerygma*, the past historical reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is in fact the innermost wisdom, and the analyzer, the one who imagines himself to be the initiate, is precisely the one who sinks into the “psychic” and unspiritual. The one who lives and stays in the simple unity of the universal Church is the one who is initiated. From the fact that the new wise ones are divided into opposing groups shows that, while they suppose themselves to be wholly spiritual, they are actually “fleshly,” devoid of wisdom.

The expansion beyond a narrowly conceived, purely salvation-historical view into what relates to the theology of creation and humanity as a whole has already been presented with the rabbinic component of St. Paul’s theology. For the Torah, whose fulfilling meaning Jesus proves to be, is at the same time and fundamentally a word of creation. This view is quite explicitly developed in Ephesians, whose concept of *mysterion*

can perhaps be briefly paraphrased in this way: The Jewish Bible speaks, while speaking about Jesus, about the salvation of the pagans, and this is its true meaning. Whoever reads the Jewish book correctly finds that it speaks about the salvation of the pagans *and* of the Jews, because it speaks about Jesus, who is the salvation of all, the uniting principle of creation. The meaning of creation, which appears in Jesus as the unveiling of the Scriptures, is unity in which the fullness of God shines forth and illumines.

We must now, however, also give special attention to one text which seems to be rather incidental, but that can give us an opening for a significant step forward. I am referring to the famous passage in Ephesians 5:31. Here the conclusion of the creation account is included where it is said about Adam and Eve: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.” To this Old Testament citation the author of Ephesians adds the comment: “This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church”.

What does this text mean for our inquiry? First of all, it fully agrees with the previous considerations. The author applies the basic idea that Jesus is the mystery of the Torah to a particular text. Since, in the last analysis, Jesus is the meaning of all the words in the Scripture, naturally it can be shown in particular texts. The quoted sentence points to the same center as all sentences: it refers to Christ and the Church, in which no longer Israel alone, but all mankind is drawn into the unity of love that leads to an indissoluble merger into one single existence. So far, that is still simply the application of the general basic idea of the mystery of the Torah. But it goes farther inasmuch as it is here no longer simply a *word* of the Bible interpreted “typologically,” that is, in a Christological sense, but a *reality* of creation: marriage—the union of man and woman in a marital community. This creation event is included in the Scripture and it has, as the Scripture shows, its own mystery and even carries Christological transparency in itself. For this reason, the “mystery” is no longer the literal meaning of a biblical text, as we have come to know up to now; rather, it is the meaning of an event. It dwells in the event, which reaches down to the center of creation and reaches up to the innermost and definitive will of God. Thus we are faced with a twofold circumstance which is very important for the formation of the concept of sacrament.

1. The mystery of the Torah, of the Bible as a whole, in Paul’s view, as we have heard, is Christ. But

that presupposes that the individual words are mysteries, the breaking up of the large into something small so that Christ is visible behind each one. Moreover, this further implies that not only the words, but also the realities described by them are mysteries, emblematic references to Christ. And this can apply to the realities of creation as well as to the realities of the history of Israel. Translated into Latin, this means: Scripture is in the whole a sacrament. Therefore it is in each part full of sacraments, which can be the literal meaning of words or the meaning of events of creation or of salvation history. Accordingly, we can now say in a summary way: In the horizon of Paul’s interpretation of Scripture, three types of sacrament appear, namely, word sacraments, event sacraments, and creation sacraments. With this observation we are in the very center of the early Church’s concept of sacrament, although her basic exegetical principle only becomes clear when we add the second circumstance which is made known to us from an examination of Ephesians.

2. From the conviction that the individual words of the Scripture, as reflections and realizations of it as a whole, are mysteries, the words of the Scripture are interpreted as references beyond themselves and point to Christ. They become, as Paul expresses it, “*typoi tou mellontos*”, types of the One who is to come. They are types. In Latin that means *sacramentum futuri*, sacrament (type) of the One who is coming. The word “type” as used in the New Testament and even more in the writings of the Fathers has virtually the same meaning as mystery and sacrament.

To consider Scripture as mystery, as the Rabbis had already done, in the context of Paul’s thought means to consider it Christologically as a manifold nexus of references to Christ. Now if mystery, sacrament, and type are synonyms, then Christological interpretation and typological interpretation have the same meaning: What is said in Scripture is a type, a sign pointing to the One who is coming.

Accordingly, we can now ascertain that the Christian concept of sacrament, as it took shape from Paul in the early Church, is based on the close contact of the concepts of mystery and type in the New Testament. The word “sacrament” translates the blending together of these two concepts, as it emerged from St. Paul’s Christological understanding of Scripture. In this respect the early Church’s word “sacrament” is the result of New Testament thinking, a new concept that arose out of this early history. Of course this also means that the Catholic concept of sacrament is based on the

“typological” interpretation of Scripture, on an interpretation with correspondences to Christ. Where this interpretation is completely lost, sacrament then loses its footing. And where that happens, the scriptural understanding of the New Testament itself is also lost. For, everything the New Testament says is not an attempt to produce a new Scripture; rather, it wishes only to give guidance on how to understand the Christ-directed content of the Old Testament. Whoever thinks that this way of handling the Bible is illegitimate, may perhaps gain a literal understanding of the Old Testament, but he thereby completely rejects the New Testament and its understanding of the Old.⁹

My main thesis first of all allows the reason for the crisis in Catholicism in modern times to become clear; for, the loss of typological thinking, that is, an interpretation that reads the texts from the future and with an eye to their future, is part and parcel of the intellectual makeup of the crisis, a loss occasioned by literary-historical thinking, that is, an interpretation that reads the texts by looking back in time and wishes to lock them into their earliest original meaning. That is exactly the reversal to which the modern mentality leads in its new understanding of history and historical texts: an interpretation of texts on the basis of what comes from them, from which it rejects any future construed in them and thinks that a text is only properly interpreted if it is put back in its past, if it is fixed in the past, and if it is spelled out in its most primitive form. But with this thesis the twofold knot of Jüngel’s objections from which we began, is in principle loosened. For, the assertion that the early Church’s concept of sacrament is not scriptural fails there, because with the fusion of mystery and type the path of the New Testament is mapped out. The barrier against linking sacrament with what pertains to the whole of mankind and creation ceases to exist because the sacrament of the word is always also a sacrament of creation, of course a creation purified and refashioned in the word.

With that, however, we are only with the early Church and with a result formulated in a very general way. There are still two considerable difficulties standing in the way of a final solution to the dilemma posed at the beginning of this essay. In our final consideration we will now give some thought to both. Here is the first question: How did we get from the early Church’s concept of sacrament, which was broadly diversified and at the same time quite simple, to our specific understanding of sacrament in the sense of the seven sacraments? In other words: How did it come about that

suddenly one day in the twelfth or thirteenth century in the wide and general field of theology, theologians made a distinction between sacraments in the proper sense and what afterwards were called “sacramentals”? Is that not really a rupture?

The second question is: If the concept of sacrament is inseparably connected with an interpretation of Scripture that looks forward, with the Christological or typological interpretation, then has it not lost its foundation in its historical era, in an era of strictly literal interpretation?

Both questions are fundamental and make it possible for us, I think, to recognize the far-reaching importance of the theme. Thus it is also impossible to give them a complete answer, but only a suggestion regarding the direction to take is necessary. Regarding the first question we must take a closer look at a circumstance that up till now has been touched on only incidentally. We said that the words of the Bible are “*sacramenta futuri*”, an emblematic outline pointing forward to the One who will come, an approach to what is coming. Events are sacraments of the One who is coming. This also implies that the liturgical rites of the Old Covenant that point towards the future refer to Christ and therefore are sacraments. This theme is extensively developed in the Letter to the Hebrews, but is in no way foreign to the thought of St. Paul.¹⁰ With that we take another step forward. For, if we establish that, with its words and events, the liturgical actions of the Old Covenant are also references to Christ, that they are sacraments, a fracture emerges in the concept of sacrament that is identical with the difference between promise and fulfillment, between preparation and present reality, between the Old and the New Covenant. The New Testament rites are no longer simply “sacraments of the future”, outlines of what is coming; rather, they are descriptions of the present, expression and fruit of the life, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ that have occurred.

The Old Testament sacraments are without exception a movement into the unexplored—they are an invitation to a way. One celebrates them correctly only by walking, by setting out with them on the path toward what is coming, which they themselves are not yet. But at the moment, since Christ has suffered and has been sent by the Father to be with us forever, something new has happened, the reality is present before which everything else was pending. Therefore sacrament now is the presentation of what has been given, a conveyance to what has already happened.

Later, the theology of the Middle Ages explained that with a comparison—since that time much misunderstood—between *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*. Originally this distinction belonged to the contrast between the Old and the New Testament, between promise and fulfillment. At first the formula was not just *ex opere operato* but *ex opere operantis* Christi.¹¹ That means: the sacraments no longer work by referring and asking; rather, they work from what has already happened, and in that the act of liberation accomplished by Christ is manifested. Man is no longer, on the basis of his own doing and going, referred to something coming that is still hidden; rather, he may surrender himself to the reality that already awaits him and comes to him as something that has already occurred.

Logically and very early the theme of liberation was joined together with the idea that the concept of sacrament is fractured by the difference between promise and fulfillment. Liberation means at the same time simplification, purification, and deepening. The pure simplicity of the Eucharist of the Resurrected One replaces the complicated cultic structure of the Old Covenant. This release from the oppressive multiplicity of what is not yet transparent, to the liberating simplicity of what is Christian, proves to be release also by the fact that the rites, which formerly were performed in front of the closed barrier of what was to come, now become transparent; now they are *rationabilia*, that is, open to reason, as the Fathers say. There is no longer mere duty, whose meaning remains in arrears—amounting to a legality. With the discovery of the previously hidden *mysterion*, comprehension and its freedom have replaced legal obligation. It was obvious to the Fathers that simplicity, freedom, and intelligibility, as what necessarily takes place at the moment of fulfillment, when the curtain is drawn, also imply moral requirement and discipline. They therefore also saw that the necessarily cumulative multiplicity in the time of waiting, in which so-called ever-new attempts were regularly made, stands in contrast to the few sacraments of the New Covenant, the simplicity of the fulfillment. Certainly this did not result in any systematization. With this fundamental insight, however, the circumscription of the Christian concept of sacrament in the Middle Ages was obviously being prepared for. Thus it is clear that the number seven, into which this circumscription was then, in turn, fixed, was the result of typological considerations: it was due to a theological a priori and did not arise from an a posteriori adding together of what was found.¹² But that surely corresponds as well to the structure of the

whole and is objectively in conformity with the basic approach of the whole. With that the first question may be answered: How did the Fathers' broad concept of sacrament become the specific one of the Tridentine dogma? On that point we can now say that already for the Fathers the concept of sacrament was structured in the Old Testament multiplicity and its final goal: the simplicity of the New Testament. In this respect, the medieval circumscription presents itself as a systematization of the starting material from the early Church.

At the same time we have arrived at the second question, namely, the one about the legitimacy and permanent possibility of such a continuous interpretation of the Bible as *sacramentum futuri*. Luther was the first to bring this question into sharp focus. We can clearly recognize in him two dimensions of the problem that are objectively still ours. To begin, there is the circumstance that the Church as institution and the Church as theological, spiritual dimension come apart. But if that is the case, then the divine worship of the Church as such can no longer guarantee the coherence of salvation history; it can no longer sustain the Church as the institution of the origin of everything from Jesus Christ. Then the individual necessarily stands naked before the biblical word. Historical reconstruction and whatever it can find replaces the unity of typological history. Sacrament is no longer inherent in the institution of the Church but refers to history. Secondly, this means that the typological-sacramental interpretation of Scripture now seems to be the Church's appropriation of it; it also means that this alienation of Scripture by the Church into the typological-sacramental is in opposition to the pure text dissociated from the Church, the pure historical meaning as the only original one. Seen historically, this process had the mark of a liberation movement. If the transition from the law to the faith and liturgy of the Church was once a great act of liberation—made possible and mediated by typology—through which one could keep the whole Old Testament without being bound to its letter, so now the return to the letter against the Church becomes an act of liberation from the burden of the Church and her liturgy. That is more or less the historical understanding of what happened.

With that, however, the question inevitably arises of how one can bring the content of the old liberation into the new. For now we have a completely new problem: If the Bible must be read literally, then the Old Testament becomes a problem. With the Fathers it was clear: I can have the whole Old Testament without being tied to the letter because everything is preparation

for Christ, and the preparation is naturally transcended and yet, nevertheless, is my own if I myself am with Christ. But if I am not allowed to think any more in the typological-sacramental way, if only strict historical exegesis is valid, which means considering only the letter without the Church as the unity of the past, present, and future, then this liberation from the domination of the law is no longer effective.

That, incidentally, has had consequences throughout the whole history of exegesis. For example, that the creation texts suddenly became a problem and in their literalness were at odds with the natural sciences is based on the fact that the texts were considered no longer in the dynamic structure of interpretation but in the literalness of that time. Such contradiction could not arise so long as it was clear that everything should be read beyond the letter and as pointing to Christ. That is the source of freedom from the letter.

That was only in passing; our question is this: After the abolition of the ecclesial-sacramental, that is, “typological” exegesis, what about the Old Testament? There are really only two possibilities: either to continue to recognize the Old Testament as the Bible and then to observe it again literally, or to drop it from the canon of Scripture. Concerning this question the early Church battled with Marcion and other strands of gnosticism who did not accept typology, did not want to be bound by the law, and then saw only the possibility of looking at the Old Testament as the Bible of a counter-god.¹³ Luther had a very deep sense of this problem and sought to give it an answer by saying that he saw at work in Scripture the dialectic of law and gospel. In place of the analogy of faith he substitutes the dialectic of law and gospel, the gospel as the power of salvation, the law as accusation and condemnation.¹⁴

To discuss this in detail would far exceed our theme. But also we do not need to do that because the crux of the matter is already fundamentally in sight. For, we can now say that even Luther could not adhere to the pure literalness of the historical as the last word. Even he needed a center of understanding that goes beyond that, just like anyone who wishes to find the present in this text, a current potential for life, and more than statements about the past. The faith cannot be reconstructed out of mere history, as important as the historical method is. But whoever wishes to receive the present, which means faith, from Scripture, cannot remain stuck in mere history which observes only the past. Faith is an understanding, and understanding always transcends pure facticity.

The historical method, therefore, does not exclude a hermeneutical center but actually requires it. In this sense a “*sola scriptura*,” which would be a mere historical self-givenness, would be a contradiction in itself. By its own inner structure the word refers to sacrament. It points to the vibrant community of those who live it. It is so structured that it reaches beyond itself and carries the dimension of sacrament within itself. Word and sacrament are not opposites; rather, they presuppose and complete each other. Neither are they in opposition to creation and to mankind; rather, they are their union, purification, and fulfillment.

What are the results to which our considerations have led us? I will now try to summarize them in four points.

1. The understanding of the sacraments presupposes a definite attitude toward Scripture. It presupposes that we learn how to read Scripture again not only by looking to the past in order, in each case, to determine its earliest state—which is of course an important process—but that we learn at the same time how to read it by looking forward, from the dimension of the future in its totality and unity, in the difference and unity of promise and fulfillment. I believe that here ultimately the decision is reached on whether a Catholic theology based on the idea of the unity of Scripture is possible.

2. The understanding of the sacraments therefore presupposes the historical continuity of God’s activity and, as its concrete locus, the living community of the Church, which is the sacrament of sacraments. That means: the biblical word can only then sustain and enhance the present time, if it is not just a word but has a living subject, when it belongs to a life context that it determines and it, in turn, carries.

3. Sacraments are liturgical acts of the Church, in which the Church as Church takes part, that is, in which she not only functions as a society, but is active on the basis of that which she herself has not made and in which she gives more than she herself can give: namely, the inclusion of man in the gift that she herself receives. This means that the entire continuum of history is present in the sacrament—past, present, and future. As memory it must reach down into the roots of all human history and so meet man in his present moment and give him a present tense, a present moment of salvation whose essence is that it opens the future beyond death.

4. Thus the sacraments are at the same time the Christian newness and what is immemorially human.

The newness of what is Christian and the unity of what is human do not contradict each other. In Jesus Christ creation is taken up and purified, and precisely so he reveals himself as the One who gives an answer to man and is his salvation. The symbols of creation are signs pointing to Christ, and Christ is the fulfillment not only of history, but also of creation: in him who is God's "mystery" everything attains its unity. ✠

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The original German version of this essay, *Zum Begriff Des Sakramentes*, was delivered as a lecture in January of 1978 and published in 1979.
- 2 On this point the discussion of Jean Daniélou with René Guénon is important. It is to their credit that they have worked out, in its uniqueness, symbolic as compared to scientific knowledge and made it respectable. See Jean Daniélou, *Vom Geheimnis der Geschichte* (Stuttgart, 1955), 144-70. Important for the development of the concept of Christian symbol and sacrament are the 1936 and 1937 writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar on Origen's concept of mystery, which are found in a revised form in his book *Parole et Mystère chez Origène* (Paris, 1957). From more recent literature, we will mention only: Horst Jürgen Helle, "Symbol und Gottesdienst", in *Zum Gottesdienst morgen*, ed. Heinz G. Schmidt (Wuppertal, 1969) 24-32; Schmidt, *Soziologie und Symbol: Ein Beitrag zur Handlungstheorie und zur Theorie des sozialen Wandels* (Cologne and Opladen, 1969). Ingrid Jorissen and Hans Bernhard Meyer, *Zeichen und Symbole im Gottesdienst* (Innsbruck, 1977).
- 3 On this, see esp. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, Trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, Communio Books, 1992), 3-161; Gottlieb Söhngen, *Die Einheit in der Theologie* (Munich, 1952), 235-64.
- 4 Eberhard Jüngel and Karl Rahner, *Was ist ein Sakrament?* (Freiburg, 1971).
- 5 See Theodor Filthaut, *Die Kontroverse über die Mysterienlehre* (Warendorf, 1947), 73-80; Odo Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium*, 2nd ed. (Regensburg, 1948), 60ff.
- 6 Jüngel, *Was ist ein Sakrament?* 30.
- 7 Günther Bornkamm, article $\mu\sigma\tau\eta\iota\omicron\upsilon\nu$ in ThWNT 4: 809-34, here 821.
- 8 *Ibid.* 823.
- 9 See Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); de Lubac, *Der geistige Sinn der Schrift*, Christ heute, 5/2 (Einsiedeln, 1952); Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (Paris, 1950); Maximino Arias-Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget: die Prinzipien seiner Schriftdeutung und seiner Lehre von den Schriftsinnen*, Sammlung Horizonte, s. 3 (Einsiedeln, 1971).
- 10 See Rom. 3:25f.; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 15:16; Phil. 2:17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:14, etc. In this regard we should refer to the most liturgically shaped book of the New Testament, Revelation. Concerning the question of the interpretation of Jesus' death from the point of view of cultist "typoi" see: Gerhard Delling, *Der Kreuzestod Jesu in der urchristlichen Verkündigung* (Göttingen, 1972); Karl Kertelge, *Der Tod Jesus: Deutungen im Neuen Testament*, QD 74 (Freiburg, 1976); Heinz Schürmann, *Jesu ureigener Tod: Exegetische Bestimmungen und Ausblick*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg, 1976)
- 11 See Venicio Marcolino, *Das Alte Testament in der Heilsgeschichte: Untersuchungen zum dogmatischen Verständnis des Alten Testaments als heilsgeschichtliche Periode nach Alexander von Hales*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, s. 2 (Munster, 1970), 201-8.
- 12 See the enlightening investigation by Michael Seybold, "Die Siebenzahl der Sakramente", *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift für das Gesamtgebiet der katholischen Theologie* 27 (1976) 113-38; Josef Finkenzeller, *Die Zählung und die Zahl der Sakramente*, in *Wahrheit und Verkündigung*, Festschrift Michael Schmaus, II. ed. Leo Scheffczyk, Werner Dettloff and Richard Heinzmann (Munich, 1976) 1005-33.
- 13 See Réal Tremblay, *La manifestation et la vision de Dieu selon St. Irénée de Lyon*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 41 (Münster, 1978), 49-65; Kurt Rudolph, ed., *Gnosis and Gnostizismus*, Wdf 262 (Darmstadt, 1975).
- 14 See Wilfried Joest, *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* (Göttingen, 1967); Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Martin Luthers*, (Leipzig, 1974).

Condom Use Versus Church Teaching: The On-Going Saga

By Kenneth D. Whitehead

I.

On the basis of what has to be considered consistent and abundant evidence, it would seem that the world is waiting quite impatiently for the Catholic Church to drop her teaching against birth control. Indeed, what the world seems to be unable to understand

at all is how and why the Church has not long since dropped this teaching. It is a teaching that is almost universally now thought to be retrograde, irrational, and even superstitious. Practically everybody in the world has come to recognize that there is not only "nothing wrong" with birth control, but that modern methods of practicing it count among the great benefits of the technological revolution of modern times. In this perspective, the Church's teaching cannot pretend to stand; most people agree that it has simply got to go.

This attitude provides one of the principal explanations for the media frenzy that in late November 2010, followed widely quoted remarks on condom use by Pope Benedict XVI. The remarks in question were taken from a new book entitled *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*. This book consisted of a long interview with the pope on a wide variety of subjects, and was not even primarily about condoms or birth control at all. Rather, it covered a whole range of subjects, condoms being no more than a minor one of them. But it was nevertheless the pope's words about condoms that got excerpted and widely quoted and thus triggered the media frenzy.

In retrospect, it was probably inevitable that the press and media would seize upon anything at all that the pope might say on this subject. Since practically everyone in the world does believe that the Church needs to change her teaching against birth control, and soon, practically any mention at all by the Church's supreme teacher of anything related to birth control—such as condom use—was almost bound to create the impression that, if the pope was not actually repudiating and reversing the teaching out of hand, then surely he had at the very least to be starting a conversation or dialogue about it that could presumably at some point lead to its modification or reversal with perhaps less of a loss of face for the Church. Why else would the pope talk about the subject of condoms at all? What else is there to be said about them except to confirm the desirability and indeed the necessity of their use?

This, at any rate, was exactly how the media treated Pope Benedict's reference to condom use. His reference to it actually concerned a possible positive understanding of such use in order to prevent the transmission of AIDS in what was itself a very special case. What happened, however, was that the pope's words almost immediately got taken as somehow constituting papal approval of, or papal permission to employ, a condom for disease prevention. For some this inevitably meant lifting the Church's ban on any condom use at all, and if that were the case, it was quickly realized, then how could the Church possibly go on maintaining her ban on condom use for contraceptive purposes as well?

The whole way the media dealt with Pope Benedict XVI's very limited and specific words about condom use resembled the familiar child's "telephone game," where a message is whispered into the ear of a child, who in turn passes it on to another child, and so on down the line. What emerges at the end is a significant exaggeration and distortion of the original mes-

sage, in part because participants are prone to repeat not necessarily what they hear in the course of the transmission of the message, but what they want to hear or what they think they should hear.

And so it was with the way the pope's words were treated in the various successive media stories. Since the subject of condoms had been broached at all, the pope surely had to be in the process of doing what was so patently necessary, that is, changing the Church's teaching about them. Some reports even jumped to the conclusion that he *had* changed the teaching. Headlines appeared reporting, e.g., "After Condom Remarks, Vatican Confirms Shift" (*The New York Times*); and "Pope Confirms His Approval of Condom Use Against Disease" (*Boston Globe*). *The Telegraph* in Britain even went so far as to write that "after decades of fierce opposition to the use of all contraception, the pontiff will end the Catholic Church's absolute ban on the use of contraception." Not just condom use, mind you, but contraception generally.

Similarly, the *Slate* website on the Internet headlined the story by reporting that the pope's comments "represent a break from the 42-year-old Catholic ban on artificial contraception." The 42-year-old ban mentioned here obviously had reference to the issuance in 1968 of Pope Paul VI's much controverted encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, which confirmed the Church's long-time teaching that any use of marriage must remain open to the possible transmission of life. The Church's teaching against contraception, of course, in no way dated only from the issuance of that particular papal encyclical, but rather went back to the very beginnings of Christianity itself. For centuries it was the common teaching of all Christian Churches, not just the Catholic Church—until the Church of England broke ranks in 1930, to be followed not long afterwards by practically all of the other Christian churches except the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI, in issuing *Humanae Vitae*, was reaffirming the long-traditional teaching of the Church, not instituting a "ban" that would be relaxed after 42 years.

An Associated Press story that appeared at the height of the media frenzy perhaps accurately summarized what was generally taken to be the upshot of the pope's words. This AP story reported that the pope was now teaching that using a condom amounted to a "lesser evil" than transmitting HIV to a sexual partner, and that this remained the case even though such condom use could also have the contraceptive effect in preventing a possible pregnancy. According to the AP story, this

represented a "seismic shift" in papal teaching.

The same AP story continued: "The Vatican has long been criticized for its patent opposition to condom use, particularly in Africa where AIDS is rampant. But the latest interpretation of Benedict's comments about condoms and HIV essentially means the Roman Catholic Church is acknowledging that its long-held, anti-birth-control stance against condoms doesn't justify putting someone's life at risk."

How could all this be anything but plain common sense, after all? And if the reports about what the pope had said were accurate, how could it be anything but a "seismic shift"? The phrase recurred in a number of other media reports. Nor was the drastic shift that was supposed to have taken place in the Church's teaching mentioned only by reporters with perhaps a less than complete knowledge or expertise concerning Catholic Church teaching. On the contrary, a popular Jesuit author and culture editor of *America* magazine, Father James Martin, was quoted in the above AP press story as saying: "This is a game-changer. By acknowledging that condoms help prevent the spread of HIV between people in sexual relations, the pope has completely changed the Catholic discussion on condoms."

The Rev. James Bretzke, a moral theologian at Boston College, was similarly quoted in a press story as saying that "our current pope doesn't shoot from the hip very often. I think he's quite aware of what he's doing. If I was reading the Roman tea leaves, I'd say maybe we're about to get a comment on whether an HIV-positive discordant couple can use condoms."

Both Fathers Martin and Bretzke should have known better than to speak in this fashion, but as we shall see, they are not the only Catholics supposedly knowledgeable about Church teaching who in fact failed to understand what the pope had said and what it meant. It is a sad fact, verified by various polls and in other ways, that many Catholics today neither understand nor accept the Church's teaching that contraception is morally wrong, however they may justify in their own minds a personal position so clearly at variance with what the Church teaches—and what the Church is virtually universally known to teach, as these press stories confirm. Whether these minimalist Catholics simply dismiss the teaching as a "non-essential," or otherwise just tune it out, many of these same Catholics often appear to be acutely uncomfortable with and perhaps even *ashamed* of the fact that the Catholic Church currently seems to be the principal if not the only contemporary institution that still clings to a position

now generally believed to be outmoded and badly, even absurdly mistaken. Who ever wanted to be countercultural about any of this, after all?

Even some churchmen—even some members of the pope's own Vatican entourage, as we shall see—seem to have failed to grasp the real meaning and import of the pope's words about condom use. Perhaps some of them tacitly share today's common assumption that the Catholic Church's teaching really does have to be changed. However that may be, the Church was not very well served by some of the pope's own people in the great condom imbroglio of November 2010.

II.

What, then, did Pope Benedict XVI actually say about condom use that provoked such widespread media babble about a supposed "seismic shift" in the Church's teaching?

As already indicated, the pope's words were taken from a book-length interview with him conducted by the German journalist Peter Seewald. Entitled *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, this book records the pontiff's views on a wide variety of subjects, including papal authority, liturgy, traditionalism, clerical sexual abuse, clerical celibacy, homosexuals in the priesthood, the priesthood generally, the "dictatorship of relativism," Islam, apparitions, the last things, the daily life and trials of a pope, and even the question of whether a pope should ever resign. Long before his elevation to the chair of Peter, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was already well known for expressing his lucid and usually very pertinent views on many such subjects. Many people will remember the very influential interview with him when he was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published as *The Ratzinger Report* in 1985. Peter Seewald had compiled two previous published volumes of interviews with him prior to the present one.

It should go without saying, however, that opinions and reflections expressed in interviews of this type—even interviews with a pope—could never in any way constitute or be equivalent to—*Church teaching!* Whatever a pope might say in such an interview might well be interesting and indicative of the thinking of the very important Church and public figure that the pope is; but it could never be considered anything but *obiter dicta* of his, sayings in passing without any teaching or magisterial force. In this book-length

interview with Peter Seewald he was *not* engaged in exercising his official teaching office; he was simply giving expression to some of his own current thinking. Earlier in the book, he had expressly *said* that none of his remarks should be taken as “authoritative.” In his exact words, what Benedict said in this interview was: “It goes without saying that the Pope can have private opinions that are wrong.”

Church teaching belongs in a different category. The ways in which the Catholic Church formulates and promulgates her official teachings through her sacred magisterium, or teaching authority, of pope and bishops, has been known and fixed for *centuries*, and it does *not* include the reflections and opinions even of a supreme pontiff, as recorded in an informal interview.

Thus, whatever the pope might have said on the subject of condom use could not have constituted the “seismic shift” in Church teaching that so many observers spoke about. It could not have constituted that for the simple reason that it was not, nor could it have been, any kind of “shift” in Church teaching at all. As a practical matter, of course, everyone knows and understands that anything a pope says is going to attract attention—and perhaps it also does sometimes give some kind of hint or inkling of how a pope might or will officially teach at some point, although it does not necessarily constitute even that, for a pope may well teach officially quite differently from any personal opinion he might have held. What he says informally is *not* itself Church teaching, then, although, as in the present case, it may well be construed or interpreted as such. In fact, it may well be all too likely that it *will* be understood according to the current state of information (or misinformation), and certainly quite often in accord with reigning prejudices. Both Pope Benedict and his advisors should have been more aware of this possibility, especially where such volatile subjects as condoms or birth control were at issue.

On the other hand, it should be recalled that the pope’s words were not uttered in a context where it was expected, or even imagined, that they would be instantly taken up by the media and would provoke screaming headlines around the world. The pope was engaged in a bookish, academic type of background interview, the contents of which it was probably thought would just be quietly taken in and reflected upon by readers of the book. Condoms, again, were just one of many subjects the pope was commenting upon. Anyone who reads the whole book in the wake of the controversy will probably be surprised at how

little is said about either birth control or condoms.

In the event, though, this was not what happened, and in retrospect it seems plain that Benedict should have been more clear and circumspect about whatever he might ever have had to say about condoms of all things. Even so, what the pope did say about condom use on this occasion *did not diverge from what he had publicly said before*. Many will recall how Pope Benedict XVI was hectored and excoriated back in 2009 when he said in the course of a trip to Africa that condoms were not part of the solution to the AIDS epidemic there, but were part of the problem. The pontiff’s observations on that occasion were based on empirical data showing that programs which stress abstinence and fidelity to a single partner were more effective in preventing AIDS than those which also included the distribution of condoms. This is the case not only because condoms are less than one hundred percent effective, but also because recourse to them creates the illusion of so-called safe sex, and can thus lead to greater risk taking. These are well attested facts.

In the *Light of the World* interview, when Peter Seewald again briefly broached the subject of condom use, Pope Benedict, first reminded his interviewer that the Church, though regularly berated and even harshly condemned for not approving of condom use, nevertheless does more for AIDS victims than any other institution. But the pope then went on to point out, quite correctly, that “people can get condoms when they want them anyway. But this just goes to show that condoms alone do not resolve the question itself . . . the sheer fixation on condoms implies a banalization of sexuality which, after all, is precisely the dangerous source of the attitude of no longer seeing sexuality as the expression of love, but only as a sort of drug that people administer to themselves.”

What was really needed in what the pope characterized as “the fight against the banalization of sexuality,” he said, was treating sexuality as the Church endeavors to treat it, namely, “as a positive value . . . to enable it to have a positive effect on the whole of man’s being.”

It was this insistence of the need to look positively at “the whole of man’s being” that led to the particular statement of Benedict’s that set off the media frenzy reacting to the supposed “seismic shift” in the Church’s teaching. What the pope actually said, though, was as follows: “There may be a basis in the case of some individuals, as perhaps when a male prostitute uses a condom, where this can be a first step in the direction of a

moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants. But *it is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection*. That can really lie only in the humanization of sexuality” (emphasis added).

In replying to the next Peter Seewald question that immediately followed, which concerned whether the Church opposed the use of condoms on principle, Pope Benedict XVI plainly and quite unmistakably then said that the Church “does *not* regard it as a real or moral solution” (emphasis added again). So much for the “seismic shift” henceforth allowing condom use! Yet since the pontiff was talking about the need to put the whole subject of sexuality in a more human context, he went on to add that adopting the use of a condom “in the intention of reducing infection” could be “a first step in a different way, a more human way, of living sexually.”

Undoubtedly it was this last statement lauding the good intention of “reducing the risk of infection” which created the impression that then led to the instant conclusion nearly everywhere that the Church’s well-known ban on condom use was now being rescinded, at least where the intention was to reduce the risk of infection. However, the pope was not even talking about the Church’s teaching at that point. Rather, he was talking about the psychological and moral state of a condom user deciding to take into account another consideration besides the raw desire to carry out a sexual act. The pope precisely *did not say* that condom use, if done with the good intention of preventing disease, had suddenly thereby become permissible and moral and licit. In fact, he was talking all the while about the actions of a prostitute, which indubitably remained quite *immoral*, according to any possible understanding of Church teaching.

In any case, in Catholic moral theology, a good intention alone is *never* by itself sufficient to establish the morality of an act. Catholic moral theology insists that the nature of the act itself, along with the circumstances in which it is carried out, must always be considered along with the intention in judging whether an act is moral or immoral. Hence in the nature of the case, condom use could never be justified merely by the good intention of the user. In his discussion, the pope was focusing on what he regarded as a positive development in the thinking or moral state of a condom user otherwise engaged, however, in what was undeniably a sinful and immoral act. He was *not* justi-

fying condom use because of good intentions.

Indeed, the idea reported in the first sentence of the AP story quoted above that “using a condom is a lesser evil than transmitting HIV” badly misunderstands what the Church teaches about “the lesser evil.” One may only *suffer* the lesser evil; one may never *do* it—for the simple reason that one may never do evil at all that good may come of it, period. See Romans 3:8.

For the same reason, there is not likely to be any new permission granted for the use of condoms by married couples where one partner is HIV-positive in order to avoid the transmission of the disease. This would be a clear case of trying to make the end of disease prevention justify the means of condom use. Boston College moral theologian Father James Bretzke needs to re-read those Roman tea leaves on this, first of all, because the HIV/AIDS situation does not constitute the only case where even married couples might be obliged to abstain permanently from sexual relations. One need think only of certain heart or other disabling conditions.

More than that, as the Church has long said, and as Pope Benedict continues to insist, condom use does *not* effectively prevent the transmission of disease in any case. Depending upon how properly they are used, condoms fail in some 10 to 20 percent of the cases. How many of those badgering the Church to allow condom use, whether by homosexuals or by “discordant” married couples, would board an airplane if the rate of airplane crashes was verifiably 10 to 20 percent of all the flights taking off? Trying to claim that condom use is somehow a necessary moral position does not even square with the empirical facts.

Thus, in view of all of these factors, and considering both what the pope actually said in his interview and the context in which he said it, it is more than a little surprising that his words should have been so quickly transported so far afield and should have become so radioactive in the process, setting off all the media fall-out that ensued. This remains true even granting today’s obsessive public avidity on the subjects of condoms and birth control. Considerable responsibility for what occurred and how far it traveled, however, can unfortunately be laid at the door of some of the members of the pope’s own Vatican entourage. It was the action of the editor of the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Gian Maria Vian, who virtually invited media attention by excerpting precisely the couple of paragraphs about condoms in *Light of the World* and publishing them in *L’Osservatore Romano*, out of context and without any

particular commentary or explanation. This was done in advance of the appearance of the book itself, which was still embargoed at that point.

It was thus surely no wonder that the media avidly snapped up these snippets and ran with them. It was equally no wonder that the focus on condoms instantly eclipsed whatever other interest there may have been in *Light of the World* interview. This is a pity because it is a wonderful book which deserves to be read by everybody. The whole condom business, though, was a public relations blunder of the first magnitude. One is hard pressed to try to imagine what possible motive the editor of *L'Osservatore Romano* could possibly have had for proceeding in the way that he did. In the absence of any definite information about why he did, it is easy to imagine that he too was among those who thought the pope's comments about condoms in the book really were "game-changers" of some kind that needed to be brought to the attention of the whole world.

And this initial editor's blunder was compounded when the director of the Vatican press office, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, supposedly engaged in clarifying the pope's words, obtusely told reporters that the pope's reference to condom use by a "male prostitute" did not apply exclusively to males. "I personally asked the pope if there was a serious, important problem in the choice of the masculine over the feminine," Father Lombardi said, apparently oblivious to or at least unconcerned by the way the Holy Father's words were already being so grossly misinterpreted and distorted by the very reporters he was speaking to. Father Lombardi could well at the very least have pointed out that the pope's words were most distinctly *not* "Church teaching." Instead he went on to relate how the pope had told him that the main problem here involved "the first step of taking . . . into consideration the risk of the life of another with whom you have a relationship."

This "clarification" of Father Lombardi's was one of the direct sources of the erroneous press reports such as in the AP story quoted above. It is true that Father Lombardi also issued a lengthy statement pointing out that the teaching of the Church had not been changed—in the words of this statement, "the pope does not reform or change the Church's teaching but reaffirms it." But the damage was already done by then. Some of the pope's own people were thus responsible for how the whole affair ballooned out of control and made both the pope and the Church appear inconsistent if not actually foolish.

As a result of all the misinformation both about

what the Church's teaching was, and about what the pope had actually said, almost nothing else anybody could possibly do or say could any longer stop or roll back the tide bearing the news that the Catholic Church had finally at long last apparently bowed to the inevitable, and had yielded on condom use. Could the relaxing of the Church's ban on contraception be far behind?

III.

By and large the people taking part in the media frenzy that followed the publication of two paragraphs from the book-interview with Pope Benedict XVI were confident that the pope was indeed engaged in modifying the Church's teaching on condom use. They were confident about this at least in part precisely because they had been so thoroughly convinced beforehand that the Church simply *had* to change this teaching. In this climate, not much anybody could say was going to change anybody's opinion very much or hold back the tide of misinformation. Anything anybody connected with the Church did try to say was usually taken to be merely defensive Church PR or an attempt at damage control.

Nevertheless, a number of Catholic writers, journalists, and scholars quickly did try to correct the record with what were usually quite accurate and even admirable accounts of the true positions of the pope and the Church. Among these corrective efforts that were "spot on" were those of Philip Lawler of Catholic World News, Father Joseph Fessio, S.J., publisher of Ignatius Press, Professor Janet Smith of Detroit's Sacred Heart Major Seminary, John Paul II biographer George Weigel, and Dr. John M. Haas, president of the National Catholic Bioethics Center. On the whole, however, these corrective efforts tended to get lost among the larger and predominant media story line insisting that the pope had indeed changed the Church's teaching.

Perhaps even more importantly, though, a number of Catholic bishops entered the fray. Newly minted Cardinal Raymond Burke, the prefect of the Apostolic Signatura in Rome and himself a noted canon lawyer, in an interview with the *National Catholic Register*, stated flatly that there was no change in the Church's teaching. According to Cardinal Burke, the pope was "simply making the comment that if a person who is given to prostitution at least considers using a condom to prevent giving the disease to another person—even though the effectiveness of this is very questionable—

this could be sign of someone who is having a moral awakening. But in no way does it mean that prostitution is morally acceptable, nor does it mean that the use of condoms is morally acceptable.”

In the same vein, Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, in reply to yet another question simply assuming that the Church’s teaching was now changed, said that the pope’s comments were misunderstood and noted that “if a person uses condoms to prevent the spread of disease, at least there is some kind of humanity there, some kind of decency, that the pope referred to as the first step toward moralization.” But, Bishop Tobin said, “It’s still wrong. It’s still evil.”

More briefly and even bluntly, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, newly elected president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), told *The New York Times* that not only did Pope Benedict XVI not change the Church’s teaching; he *could not* change it; it is not within the power of the pope to change authentic and settled Church teachings in the way that Congress, for example, might change a law it had enacted. Archbishop Dolan himself employed the example of Congress, and he was absolutely correct in pointing out that Church teaching is not something that the pope or the hierarchy just make up or decide as they go along. Authentic Church teaching is organically related to the revelation of Jesus Christ handed down in the Church over two millennia from the time of the apostles of Jesus. Once a teaching has been formulated and settled by a definitive action of the Church’s magisterium—the pope and the bishops teaching in union with him—it *cannot* be changed. Moreover, in Catholic belief it has the guarantee of the Holy Spirit. The Church’s teaching against birth control falls into this category. Archbishop Dolan was quite on the mark in his characterization of it.

Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver, writing in the “On the Square” website of *First Things* magazine, pointed out further that “the Church holds that condom use is morally flawed by nature, and, equally important, condom use does not prevent AIDS and can actually enable it to spread by creating a false sense of security.”

These efforts by churchmen to defend and vindicate the pope’s position, however necessary and laudable they truly were—the Church’s teachings *ought* to be promptly defended in the public square!—nevertheless did not seem, at least for the moment, to have had

much impact on the broad public mind, convinced as it was by the media’s exploitation of the pope’s words that, yes, the Catholic Church had finally been forced to bow to reality and to drop the irresponsible and even absurd ban on condom use that she had so futilely and vainly tried to maintain for so long. Meanwhile, the world appears to be waiting impatiently still for the other shoe to drop, when the Church will finally be obliged to abandon as well her ban on birth control, believed to be equally irresponsible and absurd.

But what if what the Church teaches is *true*? What if the Church is in the right about birth control? And against condom use? The contemporary era of near universal recourse to birth control, whether by condom use or by other means, has hardly ushered in the benign utopia once predicted for it, as current statistics testify relating to such phenomena as promiscuity, marriage break-up, co-habitation, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, IVF and other artificial reproductive techniques involving the destruction of countless live embryos, and, indeed, the current worldwide plague of legalized abortion. Contraception was once supposed to be the *remedy* for some or all of these phenomena. Instead, the incidence of all of them has been compounded and then some since contraception became the new civilizational norm.

With his remarks about condom use, Pope Benedict XVI may have provoked a furious media frenzy in November 2010, but once it had spent itself, and the media had gone on to other things, all these problems stemming from the supposed liberation of sex from procreation remained still very much in place, with little or no chance of abatement or improvement to be expected anytime soon. ✠

Kenneth D. Whitehead’s recent books include *Mass Misunderstandings: The Mixed Legacy of the Vatican II Liturgical Reforms* (St. Augustine’s Press, 2009); *The New Ecumenism: How the Catholic Church after Vatican II Took Over the Leadership of the World Ecumenical Movement* (St. Paul’s/Alba House, 2009); *The Renewed Church: The Second Vatican Council’s Enduring Teaching about the Church* (Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2009); and *Affirming Religious Freedom: How Vatican Council II Developed the Church’s Teaching to Meet Today’s Needs* (St. Paul’s/Alba House, 2010).

Newman: Facets of the Catholic Whole

By Deacon Daniel P. Sheridan, Ph.D.

Let us begin with John Henry Newman's sermon, "Watching," from the Sunday evening of December 3, 1837.

*Take ye heed, watch and pray;
for ye know not when the time is.* Mark xiii. 33.

Our Savior gave this warning, when he was leaving this world,—leaving it, that is, as far as His visible presence is concerned. He looked forward to the many hundred years which were to pass before He came again. He knew His own purpose and His Father's purpose gradually to leave the world to itself, gradually to withdraw from it the tokens of His gracious presence. He contemplated, as contemplating all things, the neglect of Him which would spread even among his professed followers; the daring disobedience, and the loud words, which would be ventured against Him and His Father by many whom He had regenerated: and the coldness, cowardice, and tolerance of error which would be displayed by others, who did not go so far as to speak or to act against Him. He foresaw the state of the world and the Church, as we see it this day, when His prolonged absence has made it practically thought, that He will never come back in visible presence: and in the text, He mercifully whispers into our ears, not to trust in what we see, not to share in that general unbelief, not to be carried away by the world, but to 'Take heed, watch, pray,' and look out for His coming.¹

On the occasion of Newman's beatification, we celebrate his presence among the communion of saints and invoke his intercession for our Catholic Church. In his productive genius, Newman kept several diaries and wrote more than 18,000 letters, so many we can almost take any given date of the year and reflect on its significance for Newman's life. Today is October 12th. I have found three references to this date from the first half of his life. On October 12th, 1831, Newman noted in his diary:

Walked to Oxford, through clay fields, streams, and miry roads. [It was in this walk that I devised the mode of writing sermons which is my published mode following the evangelical preacher Simeon].²

On October 12th, 1841, in a letter, he lamented the government's appointment of an Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, jointly with the kingdom of Prussia:

[T]he case is this. Many persons are doubtful whether we have the Notes of the true Church upon us; every act of the Church, such as this of coalescing with heretics, *weakens* the proof. And in some cases may be the last straw that breaks the horse's back. . . . But I think it would be out of place for me to agitate, having been in a way silenced. But the Archbishop is really doing most grave work, of which we cannot see the end.³

On Sunday, October 12th, 1845, three days after being reconciled to the Roman Catholic Church by the Passionist Blessed Dominic Barberi, Newman and two companions publicly participated at a Sunday Mass for the first time as Catholic laymen. These three almost random examples reveal facets of Newman's religious genius: the studied character of his preaching, the sharpness of his critiques of heresy, his personal concern for the notes of the Church, his reverential acceptance of "silencing," the ambiguity of his relationships with bishops (Anglican or Roman Catholic), and the public quality of his holiness.

In this address, I presume the outline of Newman's life, as found in the Vespers Program, is known. We explore facets of his genius as an apologist for the fullness of the Catholic faith. Part I will discuss Newman the Seeker; Part II, Newman the Dissenter; Part III, Newman and the Anti-Christ; Part IV, Newman and Vatican II; and Part V, Conclusion: Newman and Us.

I. Newman the Seeker

Newman was a seeker. Consider the four notes or marks of the Church enumerated in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. For these he searched in the Church of England, and in his disappointment went searching elsewhere. First note, Catholic faith needed to be embodied in an abiding and continuously existing community founded on the Apostles, commissioned by Jesus; thus he sought and found the *apostolic* Church whose bishops were successors of the Apostles. As an Anglican he thought he

lived within such a Church. Instead, in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* we read how and why he found the *apostolic* Church in the Church of Rome. Second note, Catholic faith needed to be embodied within the assembly of the baptized united in, and by, its profession of the faith, that is, within the *one* Church, whether tentatively in the first part of his life in the Church of England as a branch of the *one* Church, or definitively in the Roman Catholic Church after his reconciliation in 1845; thus he sought and found the *one* Church. Third note, the Catholic faith needed to be expressed by apostolic authority in words and propositions, in creeds and dogmas; thus he sought and found the *catholic* Church, that is, the authentic Church which knew, and could express, through the authority of its bishops, what it believed.

For the fourth note, the Catholic faith needed to be embodied in a community or communion of saints, in spite of the presence of sinners; thus Newman sought the *holy* Church. Of these four notes, Newman had a more difficult time finding the *holy* Church than he did the *apostolic*, *one*, and *catholic* Church. Only after a great deal of seeking did he find the *holy* Church which was at the same time *apostolic*, *one*, and *catholic*. He clearly recognized the holiness of many individuals in the Church of England. However, down to 1845, he had not met, and did not know of, any living Roman Catholics who were holy. He was overawed when he finally encountered in 1845 the simple holiness of Dominic Barberi. The astonishing thing for us, 165 years later, is that we see in the evident manner of Newman's own living that he tried to live, and did live, as if these four notes or marks of the Church were true, not just rhetorically convenient in a rote recitation of the Nicene Creed. His holiness, recognized during his life, and now seen with all the more clarity, reflects the holiness of Christ found in his *apostolic*, *one*, *catholic*, and *holy* Church. In being reconciled to the Roman Catholic Church, he joined with assurance the communion of saints. For this demonstration of the possibility of personal holiness and of the holiness of the Roman Catholic Church we owe Blessed John Henry Newman a debt of gratitude.

II. Newman the Dissenter

Newman was not only a seeker, but also a dissenter. Of course, remember that Newman's different use of the term "Dissenter" was for a Protestant who refused communion with the

Church of England. Consider ten of Newman's distinctive dissents. Each dissent implicates the others and are all related. The first four dissents focus on his Anglican period from 1801-1845. First dissent: Newman's acute intelligence profoundly disagreed with those who claimed there was no positive truth in religion, only opinions and sentiments, one as good as another. This dissent from the dictatorship of relativism is his baseline dissent. In the 1830s and 1840s, at Oxford, as an Anglican, Newman vehemently dissented against the prevailing latitudinarian view of the Church of England. Second dissent: the depths of Catholic faith superseded an insufficiently critical rationality which tries to subordinate the faith to modern culture according to the canons of a constricted reliance on demonstration. Newman dissented from the cultural Christianity of the Victorian period. Undoubtedly, he would have dissented on this point from the Catholic Modernists in the early twentieth century and from the many in our contemporary Church who seek an all-too-easy *aggiornamento*. Third dissent: the faith of the Church was not to be individualized either into a personal evangelical religion of enthusiasm or into a privatized liberal religion of cultural accommodation. As a leader of the Oxford Movement from 1833-1845, Newman dissented from Anglican evangelicals and from Anglican liberals. Fourth dissent: the Church's firm and carefully crafted dogmas, grounded in the Councils of the Church, were not to be shattered and scattered by individual judgment. As a priest of the Church of England, Newman dissented from the anti-dogmatic turn which had begun during the religious wars and strife of the seventeenth century and during the enlightenment of the eighteenth.

The second five dissents shift to the Roman Catholic period of Newman's life from 1845-1890. Fifth dissent: in the face of the emergence of science, religious truth was not to be dismissed as mere opinion. Newman dissented from the scientific dogmatism of the nineteenth century. Sixth dissent: science does have a logic and truth in its own order, not to be confused with faith and dogma. Newman was open to Charles Darwin. He dissented from fundamentalism. Seventh dissent: the craft of Catholic theology is well served when it takes its time. Theology was not to be inflated by the pressures of devotional enthusiasts. Theology was not to be deflated by the drag of ecclesiastical intransigents. Both the enthusiasts and the intransigents bypassed the hard work of theological study, historical scholarship, and thoughtful prayer. Newman dissented from casual and hurried theological developments in

the Catholic Church of the second half of the nineteenth century. He certainly would have dissented from the “developments by subtraction” of the second half of the twentieth century. Eighth dissent: Catholic faith and Catholic intelligence are coordinate as they plumb the depths of reality. Newman dissented emphatically from the reactionary anti-intellectualism of Church authorities who protected the faithful from the implications and challenges of their own belief. This obscurantist lack of confidence in the Catholic faith, in Newman’s view, was contrary to the great Catholic intellectual tradition. It avoided genuine problems in believing. Ninth dissent: Newman viewed higher education’s purpose to be cultivation of the intellect, not moral formation. He quietly lamented the failure to found a Catholic university in Ireland or England, one like the University of Louvain in Belgium. Absent such a Catholic university, he discretely dissented from the prohibition of young Catholic men attending Oxford University. In the end he humbly submitted to what he considered a misguided authority. He patiently waited for a better time.

The tenth dissent reflects his relationship to the larger cultural world of Victorian England, and thus to our own time. Newman dissented from the myth of “progress.” The more acute minds of the nineteenth century, like Matthew Arnold, Charles Darwin, W. E. Gladstone, George Eliot, and Lord Acton, recognized the extent of Newman’s dissent from the “progress” of modern culture, but refused to follow him in this dissent. Although in awe of his literary genius, highly educated intellectuals parted company from his larger cultural and religious views. Newman refused to run with the march of progress. “Development” must be distinguished from “progress.” “Development” is change in order to conserve; “progress” is change in order to supersede and replace. Further, in face of the commonplace that Newman anticipated theories of evolution, to the contrary, the development of doctrine and the evolution of species are dissimilar orders of change with continuity. Even as he was a pioneer in the use of historical studies in theology, he dissented from the prevailing Whig view of history of his one-time colleague Lord Acton (1834–1902), and did not apply it to the history of theology. The development of doctrine should not be confused with natural progress in human affairs, whether biological or historical, political or economic. Newman’s celebrated quote about having to change often was not about the progress against which he stood. Instead he was affirming change in order to conserve:

In time it [belief] enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and fall around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles appear in new form. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.⁴

III. Newman and the Anti-Christ

For the depth of this dissent from the cult of progress, based on what he named “liberalism,” Newman can be compared with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), a contemporary and fellow satirist. They both sounded the depths of the despair that comes from the great apostasy. For Newman, “liberalism” was the work of the Anti-Christ. In 1879, when Newman was made cardinal, he said:

For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of Liberalism in religion. . . . Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, as *true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy. Devotion is not necessarily founded on faith. Men may go to Protestant Churches and to Catholic, may get good from both and belong to neither. They may fraternize together in spiritual thoughts and feelings, without having any views at all of doctrines in common, or seeing the need of them. Since, then, religion is so personal a peculiarity and so private a possession, we must of necessity ignore it in the intercourse of man with man. If a man puts on a new religion every morning, what is that to you? It is as impertinent to think about a man’s religion as about his sources of income or his management of his family. Religion is in no sense the bond of society. . . . The general [nature] of this great *apostasia* is one and the same everywhere.⁵

Compare Newman’s view of “liberalism” with Nietzsche’s vivid view of nihilism:

We have killed him—you and I. All of us are murderers. Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither

are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. . . ; I have come too early. . . this tremendous deed is still on its way, still wandering; it has not reached the ears of men.⁶

One book well worth reading in this respect is Louis Bouyer's *Newman's Vision of Faith: A Theology for Times of General Apostasy*. Along with Nietzsche, it was Newman's view that he, and all the more we, lived in a time of general apostasy.

In the nineteenth century, the educated doubted the truth of Christianity, perhaps for the first time in large numbers. God the Creator in the face of a senseless world is an improbability, from a philosophical view a moral and scientific impossibility. The evangelical and liberal variants of Christianity were pit stops on the way to unbelief. This world Newman addressed with empathy. His genius was such that he understood why his contemporaries did not, could not, or would not believe. Newman himself experienced the outer limits of skepticism and atheism.

Starting with the being of a God, (which, as I have said, is as certain to me as the certainty of my existence. . .) I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full; and the effect upon me is, in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence myself. If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator. This is, to me, one of those great difficulties of this absolute primary truth, to which I referred just now. Were it not for this voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked upon the world."⁷

Hence he understood the force of unbelief's appeal. In our time, he would not have accepted arguments for God's existence from intelligent design. Instead, Newman developed an inductive apologetics where the internal witness of our experience of conscience and the external witness of the demonstrable holiness of the saints converged.

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of the facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds influence us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion. A conclusion is but an opinion.⁸

With Pascal, Newman argued that the assent of faith makes more rational sense than non-assent. He judged that assent should not be reduced to demonstration. He particularly dissented from the view that faith can grasp no more than what can be demonstrated rationally with mathematical certainty. This last unwarranted assumption created the cultural conditions for a crisis of faith and for the loss of belief.

Despite his ultimate dismissal of Newman's basic religious insights, the poet Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), as an undergraduate at Oxford, had been in awe of Newman the preacher. Being unconvinced by the reality of a Creator God and by an inspired Scripture, Arnold expressed exquisitely the retreat of faith in "Dover Beach," written in the 1851:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full . . .
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world. . .

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Newman had foreseen the melancholy retreat of faith with its clash of ignorant armies in the night. He used the same images to describe a shift from cosmic to personal struggle.

Controversy, at least in this age, does not lie between the hosts of heaven, Michael and his angels on the one side, and the powers of evil on the other; but it is a sort of night battle, where each fights for himself, and friend and foes stand together.⁹

There was nothing inevitable or irreversible about the procession of culture and the recession of faith. A tide that goes out can come back in. But this is to suggest a prediction. With a Christian view of history, Newman did not predict. He was content to watch for the coming of Christ. Ironically, Newman's desire to meet Arnold matched the poet's wish to meet the hero of his youth. In 1880, they met. Arnold "wanted to have spoken once in my life to Newman. . . . [I] made a deferential bow, and Newman took my hand in both of his and was charming."¹⁰

IV. Newman and Vatican II.

Today Newman is lionized by factions in the Church that have conflicting and contradictory agendas. Another great Englishman, Winston Churchill, from an unexpected angle, of a different degree and in a different order, in a remarkable eulogy for Neville Chamberlain, presented an observation which may be applied to Newman:

It is not given to human beings, happily for them, for otherwise life would be intolerable, to foresee or predict to any large extent the unfolding course of events. In one phase men seem to have been right, in another they seem to have been wrong. Then again a few years later, when the perspective of time has lengthened, all stands in a different setting. There is a new proportion. There is another scale of values. History with its flickering light stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passions of former days.¹¹

Historical judgments about Newman, kindling "with pale gleams the passions of former days," have varied over the twelve decades since his death. From outside the Church, he can be cynically assessed. In A. N. Wilson's words:

If Newman was the father of modern Catholicism, it is a somewhat dubious accolade. Institutional Christianity in any form, whether in the Church of England or the Church of Rome, attracts fewer and fewer adherents, and it doubtful that many Roman Catholics today would share Newman's opinion that salvation outside the Church was an impossibility.¹²

Within the English Church, the party represented by Cardinal Manning predominated well into the twentieth century. Newman thus came under a cloud of suspicion because of the use made of his works by

the English Modernist, George Tyrell (1861–1909). This turn had not been unexpected by the Manning group. Yet in Germany, his positive influence flowed through Romano Guardini and Erich Przywara to Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger. In France it flowed from Henri Bremond to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Henri de Lubac, and Louis Bouyer. In the United States and Canada, the influence of Newman can be seen in the work of Bernard Lonergan.

During the religious euphoria of Vatican II in the 1960s, Newman was judged inaccurately. It was said that the Vatican Council II was Newman's Council or that he was "father" or "doctor" to the Council. Pope Paul VI said that the Council was "Newman's hour." Bishop Christopher Butler commented:

Now after a hundred years we have had another Council, marked like the first by the emergence of two broadly contrasting wings of opinion and aim. But this time, it is those who can be considered the heirs of the neo-Ultramontanes who have constituted the minority, and have been forced back on their defences. . . . The tide has turned, and a first, immensely important, step has been taken towards the vindication of all the main theological, religious, and cultural positions of the former Fellow of Oriel.¹³

Forty-four years later, in the Council's conflicted aftermath, the judgment that Newman's main theological, religious, and cultural positions had been vindicated seems less certain. Perhaps they still need to be vindicated. Newman scholars are in general agreement that there is little direct trace of Newman's influence on the documents of the Council. The development of doctrine is cited as an influence, but the further we get from the time of the Council the less plausible that seems. The Council bishops who referenced Newman in speeches seemed to have mistaken Newman's meaning as if he had proposed the "progress" of doctrine, rather than its "development."

Characteristically, Cardinal Avery Dulles had a nuanced analysis on the relationship of Newman and the Council:

Newman, I submit, would have applauded the return to Christian antiquity, but he would have been cautious about the 'updating' of the Church. He felt a passionate love for the Scripture and the Fathers. The Trinitarian and Christological dogmas of the early councils were foundational to his faith. But with equal passion he excoriated the principles of the French

Revolution and of scientific positivism. The modern world, in his view, was rapidly heading toward simple unbelief. The Church, he believed, ought to combat the spirit of modernity, making use of its infallible teaching authority as needed to throw back what he called “the immense energy of the aggressive, capricious, untrustworthy intellect.”¹⁴

In Dulles’s judgment, Newman was in accord with the Council on universal revelation, the centrality of Christ, the role of Mary, biblical inerrancy, the value of tradition, the authority of bishops, the consensus of the faithful, freedom of conscience. These are now the common teaching of the Church. Newman would be at a distance from the Council on liturgy, sacramental ecclesiology, episcopal collegiality, the threefold office of Christ and of the Church, and ecumenism. Like Joseph Ratzinger, he would have had very serious reservations about *Gaudium et Spes*. In my judgment, he would have affirmed a celibate priesthood and the universal call to holiness. In the Council’s aftermath, he would have been dismayed by the erosion of the dogmatic principle among many theologians, by public disagreement from the Church’s moral teaching, by the questioning of the Church’s infallibility, and by the de-emphasis on the religious life. Newman would have vigorously dissented from the dubious proposals in regard to the ordination of women. He would not at all have been surprised at the roadblocks in ecumenism’s progress, particularly within the Anglican Communion. He would have shaken his head at the decline of religious literacy, the collapse of religious education, and the condition of Catholic higher education. Newman would have advised patience to all sides so that time and study could be brought to bear on the controverted issues. He would have striven to see the whole and to see the richness of the whole in the fragments. In Hans Urs von Balthasar’s words:

According to a well-known position of Newman, the Catholic Church can see herself as the embodiment of wholeness and totality only when she has done all in her power actively to incorporate the riches of all partial points of view.¹⁵

VI. Conclusion: Newman and Us

What is Newman’s lesson for us? At a confirmation of young adults, Bishop Malone recently asked question #6 of the *Baltimore Catechism* #1, “Why did God make you?” Of course, many of a certain age in the congregation spontane-

ously gave the answer, “God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.” The next questions pertain to this commemoration of John Henry Newman. Question #9, “What must we do to save our souls?” “To save our souls, we must worship God by faith, hope, and charity; that is, we must believe in Him, hope in Him, and love Him with all our heart.” Question #10, “How shall we know the things which we are to believe?” “We shall know the things which we are to believe from the Catholic Church, through which God speaks to us.” Question #11, “Where shall we find the chief truths which the Church teaches?” “We shall find the chief truths which the Church teaches in the Apostles’ Creed.”

The *Baltimore Catechism* was composed in 1885 when Newman was 84, and I doubt he knew of it, but the answers are what he stood for. Newman was certain they were true; he lived as if they true. He also understood that many are no longer certain they are true; no longer live as if they were true. The crisis of faith is due to a culture of “liberalism,” “the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion.” This “liberalism” was the work of the Anti-Christ, “an error overspreading, as a snare, the whole earth.” Blessed John Henry Newman’s answer was simple: watch for Christ. Let us conclude with the sermon of December 3, 1837 on “Watching” that we began this address with:

Year passes after year silently; Christ’s coming is ever nearer than it was. O that, as He comes nearer earth, we may approach nearer heaven! O, my brethren, pray Him to give you the heart to seek Him in sincerity. Pray Him to make you in earnest. You have one work only, to bear your cross after Him. Resolve in His strength to do so. Resolve to be no longer beguiled by “shadows of religion,” by words, or by disputing, or by notions, or by high professions, or by excuses, or by the world’s promises or threats. Pray Him to give you what Scripture calls “an honest and good heart,” or “a perfect heart,” and, without waiting, begin at once to obey Him with the best heart you have. . . . May this be the portion of every one of us! It is hard to attain; but it is woeful to fail. Life is short; death is certain; and the world to come is everlasting.¹⁶ ✠

ENDNOTES

- 1 John Henry Newman, “Sermon 22. Watching,” *Plain and Parochial Sermons* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987 [1890]), 930.

- 2 *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman During His Life in the English Church*, ed. Anne Mozley (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1898), 1:219.
- 3 *Letters and Correspondence* 2:316.
- 4 John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903 [1845]), 40.
- 5 Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911), 2:460-461.
- 6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181-82.
- 7 John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1895 [1865]), 241. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. II. Dramatis Personae: Man in God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990 [1976]), 135: "It is well known that, as far as Newman is concerned, the really convincing proof of the existence of God is the creature's inner, personal encounter with the Creator in the phenomenon of conscience. By contrast, the mere sight of the world, with its contradictions, its sufferings and guilt, would have made an atheist of him, as he himself says in the *Apologia*, 241ff."
- 8 John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901 [1870]), 92-93.
- 9 John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London: Longmans, Green, 1890), 148.
- 10 Cited in Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 726.
- 11 Cited in David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 37.
- 12 A. N. Wilson, *Eminent Victorians* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 160.
- 13 B. C. Butler, "Newman and the Second Vatican Council," in *The Rediscovery of Newman: An Oxford Symposium*, ed. J. Coulson and A. M. Allchin (London: Longmans, 1967), 244-45.
- 14 Avery Dulles, *Newman* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 151-52.
- 15 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992 [1951]), 15.
- 16 John Henry Newman, "Sermon 22. Watching," 938.

The Relevance of Leo XIII

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One can find no better summary of the social teaching of the Church than Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*.¹ Published May 15, 1891, forty-three years after Marx and Engels issued their *Communist Manifesto*, the Pope's treatise is at once a response to the *Communist Manifesto* and an invitation to reflection on the indispensable role that the Church plays in society. Leo's study draws heavily on what may be called St. Thomas's philosophy of human nature as articulated in the *Summa Theologiae*. To reread that encyclical is to become aware of its perennial value, as we in our own day confront a militant socialism, anti-Christian to its core, and one destructive of biblical codes of morality.

Rerum Novarum followed a series of encyclicals that Leo issued early in his pontificate, (entitled in their English translations) *On Power*, *On Human Liberty*, and *On the Constitutions of States*, encyclicals in which he addressed major social issues confronting the Church and society in the late nineteenth century. Their very titles suggest their continuing relevance. It is true, the first decade of the twenty-first century is not the last decade of the nineteenth century, but human nature has not changed, nor have major tensions

in the social and political order.

Rerum Novarum focuses primarily on the plight of non-owning workers. Leo defends the rights of workers in the face of exploitation by both owners and by the socialist state. Noting that the worker guilds inherited from the Middle Ages had been destroyed in the eighteenth century, he found that the industrial revolution in its wake created an impoverished urban working class that all too easily was exploited. Modern unions remained on the distant horizon. Acknowledging the manifest disparity between rich and poor and the socialist propensity to close the gap by transferring private wealth to the community at large, Leo found it necessary to defend not only the worker but the right of private property as well.

The fruit of labor, he argued, belongs precisely to those who have performed the labor. The chief reason for engaging in any gainful occupation is ownership and the procurement of property and the security it brings. The socialists propensity to transfer wealth from one class to another not only perverts the rightful function of the state but in doing so makes the lot of all wage earners worse. The egalitarian drive fails to recognize an obvious condition of human existence, namely, that in human society the lowest cannot by fiat be made equal to the highest.

In this context, Leo speaks of a father's duty to

provide for his offspring and of his right to transmit the fruit of his labor to the next generation by inheritance. “It is a most sacred law of nature,” he writes, “that the father of a family see that his offspring are provided in all the necessities of life, and nature even prompts him to desire to provide and to furnish his children, who, in fact reflect and in a sense continue his person, with the means of decently protecting themselves against harsh fortune in the uncertainties of life. He can do this surely in no other way than by owning fruitful goods to transmit by inheritance to his children.”

“Socialist agitation to the contrary, we cannot,” says Leo, “take for granted that one class in society is by nature hostile to another, as if nature has set rich and poor against each other.” Just as in the human body the different members harmonize with one another, so likewise nature has commanded that classes in their need for one another should harmoniously form equally balanced counterparts to each other. “Each needs the other completely: neither capital can do without labor; nor labor without capital.”

While most of the encyclical can be justified on a philosophical basis alone, Leo, now thinking as a pastor, recognizes that both classes stand in need of the moral teaching of the Church and the participation in its sacramental life. Wealth does not give surcease to sorrow or remit moral obligation. He reminds all that just ownership is distinct from just use. Leo then speaks to the duty of the wealthy to give to the poor and reminds the poor that poverty is no disgrace. “Christian morals make men content with a moderate livelihood and make them supplement income by thrift, removing

them from the vices which swallow up both modest sums and high fortunes, and dissipate splendid inheritances.”

The enduring relevance of *Rerum Novarum* has been recognized by the magisterium and by scholars in every generation since its publication. Leo, of course, had no knowledge of what was to come, of the myriad ways in which government would be able to appropriate property through income and other taxes, as well as through monetary policy that undermines a just return on savings and investment. In 1931, Pius XI published the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, relating Leo’s themes to the issues of his day. John Paul II did the same in 1981 with *Laborem Exercens* and yet again in his encyclical *Centesimus Anno*, celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of Leo’s document. These documents magisterially set forth the Church’s social teaching while at the same time they attempt to relate that teaching to current events. Clearly, to read *Rerum Novarum* is to become convinced that one cannot with consistency—that is, with intellectual honesty—be both a Catholic and a socialist. The two intellectual outlooks are incompatible both in theory and in praxis.

Remarkably relevant on both sides of the Atlantic is an observation that Leo makes midway in his encyclical, “In the case of dying societies, if they wish to regenerate they must recall their origins.” ✠

ENDNOTE

- 1 New English translation (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Welfare Conference, 1942).



Teaching Seminary Theology¹

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Those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood are called to a profound personal relationship with God's word; particularly in *lectio divina*. . . . Such attention to the prayerful reading of Scripture must not in any way lead to a dichotomy with regard to the exegetical studies which are part of formation. The Synod recommended that seminarians be concretely helped to see the relationship between biblical studies and prayer. . . . Great care should be taken to ensure that seminarians always cultivate this reciprocity between study and prayer.²

There are few more basic elements to priestly formation than prayer and study. Such basics, however, do not always exist together in peace. Many a seminary faculty has itself been torn apart by the ideological sundering of these two elements. We are so close to our own biases that we normally cannot see them, and therefore we cannot recognize the harm they do when concretized into a seminary's policy or vision. In recent history there have been seminaries whose reputations are reduced to these half truths, "Oh, *Holy Prayer* seminary that is a pious place," or, "Oh *Holy Logos* seminary that is tough academic place." These popular descriptions of seminaries carry with them the very illness that befalls generation after generation, the separation of prayer and study. This separation seems to be a value³ on the pragmatic level even to the point of having discrete seminary buildings and staff where the spiritual side of formation is "taken care of," and other buildings and staff where the academic side of things occur. With such physical separation comes a message promoting the idea that a seminarian's real "work" is to occur over at the academic building and what happens at "home" (the "spiritual\formation house") is less vital, rigorous, important. In self-sustaining seminaries this dichotomy would reflect the opinion that the "classroom" is most vital but spiritual direction is a useful addendum. This separation reflects the perennial battle within priestly formation, mirroring the secular academic world, that exalts academics as "real" and "objective," and spiritual affections and

intimacy with God as "soft" and "subjective."⁴

This separation between intimacy with God and academics has real effects upon the Church in analogous ways to a person who exalts intellect over his own bodily identity ("he lives in his head"), or when a person refuses to undergo the pain of self-examination and settles instead to define himself by his passing moods ("he is an enthusiast"). Persons who live such severed lives carry about a vast amount of psychic and affective pain until such pain either leads them to integration (a conversion, a healing) or to a complete breakdown (a closing of self in upon a portion of the self alone).

To use a domestic analogy about the separation of prayer and theology, one could say that prayer was to remain "at home" and separate from "work" (study). A man is to be affectively intimate with God "on his own time." "After you are done thinking, and suffering the work of discovering truth in a discursive manner, then you can talk to God and receive His love. But right now get to work!" Having prayerful intimate communication with God became something you do after your study and teaching time was complete. Over time it became more difficult to justify an intellectual method for theological learning that actually welcomed prayer when it arose right within it. Today, however, what is keeping seminary theologians from bridging this divide right within their own study and teaching?

The Faculty

Certainly some of the problem that we have in keeping intimacy with Christ connected to our study about Him is simply the fact that we exist in time. Time demands that we take the goods of this world successively. Time prevents me from thinking about Gabriel Marcel's philosophy while playing a football game, or playing football while I am having dinner. So, no matter how valuable one may think the integration of prayer and study is for the proper formation of seminarians the reality of time and finitude plays a role in diminishing such an achievement. Of course there are other reasons why some find it difficult to imagine a seminary that promotes the study of theology flowing from prayer and into prayer: sin, fear of intimacy with God, fear that other professors will reject such

a method as not being intellectually rigorous, ideology, fatigue, laziness, the pull of habit, the lethargy and weight one feels when imagining both a new way of teaching and a new *horarium* to support such change. But we need to note here what Benedict XVI says about study and prayer, clearly promoting their interpenetration as good for *the science* of theology.

The demand for a scientific method is not sacrificed when theological research is carried on *in a religious spirit of listening to the Word of God... Spirituality does not attenuate the work of scholarship, but rather supplies theological study with the correct method so that it can arrive at a coherent interpretation*. Theology can develop only with prayer... This is a road that is worth traveling to the very end.”⁵

If *spirituality provides theology with the correct method*, then any approach to priestly formation has to begin at the gate of the seminary and not within its halls. To begin an age of contemplative seminaries which bear fruit for the new evangelization we need to first look at how *future seminary theologians are trained*.⁶ Do these future doctors learn how to receive the love of God right within their study and within any mentored teaching that they might undergo? The sooner we explore the possibilities of new ways to form seminary professors the sooner seminarians will benefit from intellects that have been purified by an active faith.⁷ The seminary is a community utilizing scholars to form shepherds of souls,⁸ not simply other scholars. To pray unceasingly, even in the midst of research, is not to evade reality; it is to enter it with a clear mind and strengthened will.⁹ Noting what I said above about time, I would argue that discursive reasoning itself can be a prayer especially as it flows from the specific vocation of a theologian. The theologian is called by God to find his or her holiness within the discipline and ascetical ways of *thinking* about faith. In being faithful to this call the theologian is, in a broad sense, praying. To be intimate with Christ, both affectively and intellectually, and simultaneously to think about some foundational point of theology may not be possible because of the limitations of time and the finitude of our minds, but certainly thinking and praying *can be open to one another*. Pope Benedict wants to invite the theologian to consider spirituality as a method of doing theology in this way: let the truth you are pondering bring you to intimacy with the Logos, and let the intimacy of your prayer with the Trinity clarify your discursive thought. Such interpenetration is possible because what the theologian is pondering, the truth apprehended by faith, *is already ordered toward*

communion with Christ

Pope Benedict has been meditating deeply upon the meaning of theology since his pontificate began and, of course, long before.¹⁰ How he understands theology is deeply amenable to healing the rift between spirituality and theology. Note what he has to say about St. Bonaventure.

To respond to the question if theology is a practical or theoretical science, St. Bonaventure makes a threefold distinction—hence he lengthens the alternative between theoretical (primacy of knowledge) and practical (primacy of practice), adding a third attitude, which he calls “sapiential” and affirming that wisdom embraces both aspects. And then he continues: Wisdom seeks contemplation (as the highest form of knowledge) and has as its intention that we become good (cf. *Breviloquium, Prologus, 5*). Then he adds: “Faith is in the intellect, in such a way that it causes affection. For example: to know that Christ died ‘for us’ does not remain knowledge, but becomes necessarily affection, love” (*Proemium in I Sent.*, q. 3). Love... sees what remains inaccessible to reason. Love goes beyond reason, sees more, and enters more profoundly into the mystery of God... All this is not anti-intellectual: it implies the way of reason but transcends it in the love of the crucified Christ.”¹¹

One goal of seminary theology should be to assist seminarians to consider how the truth of faith tutors their affections, to assist them to recognize the affective movements of the heart as theology is studied. Wouldn't such recognition combined with the content of the lecture and reading material promote a deeper, more sustained reception of truth? Pedagogical studies report that learning is internalized more securely when the whole person is involved in study. Since most diocesan priests have not been tutored in an integrated learning process, might this be the reason why so few continue a committed study of theology after ordination? What if their love for Christ was engaged *as they studied*, encouraged by professors to receive Christ as He emerges from the text or the lecture? The intellect is more generous in its receptivity to the fullness of truth than we have been made aware by the reductionist vision of the Enlightenment. If professors can welcome prayer as it emerges from the truth grasped by the affectively imbued intellect, then they can pass this “method” on to seminarians. This more generous intellect does not host the cramped view of learning methods that scientism does. Within a more generous definition of reason the habit of study inheres within a mind *concentrated in the*

heart. As the *Program for Priestly Formation* directs, “the seminary study of theology...must flow from prayer and lead to prayer.”¹²

The Correct Method for Studying Theology: Spirituality

The academic content of what professors are to teach seminarians has been specifically outlined by the Church.¹³ But notice what *more* Benedict XVI is unveiling in the passage above: a call to integrate mind and heart as the result of the professor and student *suffering the beauty of the Crucified Christ*. This suffering results in wisdom. Seminaries ought to hold the *birth of desire for wisdom* as a key academic goal, an intellectual formation process aimed at ordering the entire person anew. To have such a goal is not to undermine the urgency of formation in effective pastoral ministry. In fact, to secure for the Church a contemplative priest seeking wisdom is to secure effective ministry, since *all contemplation of the Paschal Mystery leads to pastoral charity*. To contemplate means to behold the beauty, the radiating truth of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ within the affectively imbued intellect. If a man allows such beauty to affect his identity then he will become free to serve the other as shepherd. Any unhealed affective pain that might turn him in on himself inordinately will be healed in the light of such contemplation and the ascetical features that surround and facilitate it (study, spiritual direction, human formation, sacramental participation, fraternal correction, etc). To encounter Christ’s beauty in the mystery of crucifixion and resurrection is to become both awakened spiritually and sent by Him into ministry. *Interiority is no threat to ministry, but its absence is*. Absent such interiority the seminary formation produces men who serve only out of their own natural gifts and strengths, or worse, who serve themselves.

Contemporary graduate education in universities is aimed not at wisdom or contemplation, but the commerce of effectively passing on to students discrete information in a chosen field of study. In contrast, contemplative formation will involve the ongoing reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit,¹⁴ the love of doctrine as a result of such habitual receptivity, and *the flowering of the contemplative mind*¹⁵ wounded by the Paschal Mystery and summoned by the same to execute the charity of Christ. It is this same Paschal Mystery, consistently beheld in the mind of the theologian,

that will order the way formation is established in any seminary community. In this age of the new evangelization it will not do to simply have academics concerned with critique and elegantly argued debate, still less the reduction of theology to liberal or conservative political ideology. Critique and argument will have its place, of course, but the success of a seminary professor of the new evangelization will be known in his or her oversight of each seminarian’s capacity *to suffer the integration of study with the love of the Crucified*.

This integration of its very nature will not come easy, because it is a taste of eternity in time and needs to be received within and through the grace of intentional prayer. It is crucial that faculty modeling be vigorous and continual since it is inevitable that some will become weary of such “integration” and simply cry out for the seminary to be a “graduate school” or alternately a “retreat house.” The new evangelization demands that these contrasting models, born of psychic and affective exhaustion, ought not to define priestly formation.

The Seminarian

A seminarian sustained in the Holy Spirit, in love with the truths of orthodoxy while all the time welcoming contemplation of the Crucified will become the man whom the Church needs for the new evangelization. Such a formation is what Bonaventure meant when he said that theology is ordered to form a good man, one able to suffer in his mind and body who Christ is in truth. To take on this suffering is to take on the ascetical features of human, spiritual, and academic formation. A man who welcomes such suffering does so with the generous heart of a spouse, making himself a selfless gift to the Bride of Christ. If such contemplative formation becomes normative in seminaries, then priests can lead the laity to a similar kind of formation to prepare them to withstand the suffering needed to evangelize culture.

Some may say that contemplative formation for seminarians is “idealistic.” Charging one with idealism just about guarantees that his ideas will be dismissed. No one wants to be idealistic since it is a contemporary synonym for “unworkable, irrelevant.” In fact, to be idealistic is not to be in the same league with “unworkable” ideas but to be *with and for the Church*. It is the Church herself who carries ideals in Her heart. The Church promotes exemplarism in her very core when

she canonizes saints and bids her members to rise up and live in holiness as well. The idealistic Church does not trade in impracticalities but in *what is most fitting for those who would receive the wound*¹⁶, the character of sharing in the priesthood of Christ. To be idealistic in the ecclesial imagination is to search for that formation which is fitting for each vocation. In promoting the new evangelization we cannot simply *speak of it*, perhaps study its grammar, we are called, instead, to generate men to bear its coming *in their own bodies*. What is the oxygen the Church breathes when it dreams of a fitting formation for such a man, a formation of spiritual and theological integration?

The Oxygen for Priestly Formation: Contemplation, Orthodoxy, and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In the formation of priests there lies a hope that time spent in seminary will gift the Church with a new man, a man who receives his identity from his own deep participation in the love Christ has for his Bride, the Church. Such a hope is not without foundation, as the Church does not so much trust in methods, ideologies, and skilled competencies producing efficient managers of people; rather it trusts in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about a surrender to truth, to beauty, and to holiness within each seminarian.

To speak of such things raises cynicism in some, a painful reminder of their own lost optimism not in the Spirit, but in perfectionism or some self-willed vision of utopia. To those who dwell in the Church, however, such a vision fires the imagination leading one to desire a strong participation in reality. Such a vision flows from the knowledge we have in faith that all things of this earth are summoned to be sublated¹⁷ into the coming of the Kingdom. More specifically, the grace of the Resurrection and its perennial hope carries a call and a capacity for reforming the structures of priestly formation.¹⁸

To order the seminary toward the making of a new man is to take seriously *the kernels of truth* that lay at the heart of what Joseph Ratzinger discovered in his study of St. Bonaventure. Some Franciscans, living in the wake of St. Francis of Assisi looked for a new age to come, one in which the Spirit would guide all things interiorly. St. Bonaventure saw the danger of this be-

ing a subjectivist vision, one disconnected from the sacramental and visible Church, and so he put his mind to work at correcting these ideas. There is indeed a new age coming in the eschaton, but it will not arrive through any rejection of the Church, her teachings, offices, and sacraments. Such an age is the fulfillment of all the Church has been about IN CHRIST. It will, when complete, be the very end the Church is seeking and tasting even now. Hints of this new age are seen in the lives of the saints. In fact to be a saint is to share in the holiness of Christ, a holiness that inaugurates the hope of a future full of truth, beauty, and holiness. The perennial content of this present and coming age encompasses three elemental characteristics, according to Joseph Ratzinger in his commentary upon the thought of St. Bonaventure:

When this age arrives, it will be a time of contemplation, a time of the full understanding of Scripture and, in this respect, a time of the Holy Spirit who leads us into the fullness of the truth of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Here we have the three elements that secure a context in the seminary for the spiritual formation of the new man: contemplation, orthodoxy, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Such elements have been with the Church since her beginning and as such stand as perennial points of orientation and renewal when formation processes lose their way or decline into stagnancy. All of our desires for perfection, once purified of the neurotic and sinful, lay bare a stunning continuity among Catholics, and indeed all men. We are made to receive what is God's deepest desire to give: participation in perfect, divine love.

This current epoch is not heaven, this time is far from perfect. However, what God wants to give to us in the eschaton *must already* be filtering into our minds, hearts, and will, otherwise the new heavens and earth would have no continuity with the human order, and one's hope for heaven would be vain. Hence, the seminarian needs to be tutored in this hope and formed within parameters that are hospitable to his receiving the fullness of divine love. The seminary is a community of hospitality toward God enabling it to receive His healing (the gifts of the Holy Spirit), His formative love (contemplation), and His truth (orthodoxy). The three realities mentioned by Joseph Ratzinger—contemplation, orthodoxy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit—have the gravity to secure and order a formation in theology that has spirituality as its method.²⁰ To see that these

realities are the oxygen of seminary life is to envision a way of assuring that seminarians become contemplative-pastoral priests leading the laity in their evangelical call to transform culture. Without this foundation of deep interiority neither priest nor people could suffer the public resistance to the Gospel and remain faithful to its call.

Holding the Foundation together

No doubt the last 45 years of ecclesial life have been divisive ones, so deeply divided, in fact, that theological language and imagery were superseded by political ones (left, right, conservative, liberal, progressive, etc). The foundational realities of contemplation, orthodoxy, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit were severed from one another and politicized as well. When these are torn apart and made to stand alone or made to relate to ideologies and not the sacramental Church, a certain beauty, unity, and spiritual power vacates the Church. Only if contemplation, orthodoxy, and the gifts stay unified can they truly order priestly formation effectively, and in turn enable priestly ministry to assist the Church to reach her potency in publicly witnessing to the Gospel.

The aberrations that occur when the three are torn apart from one another are easy to see. During the last forty-five years many in Catholic universities shunned orthodoxy and shied away from the “spiritual,” and there developed a sterile academic atmosphere of “scientific objectivity.” The mission of Catholic universities was reduced to bland platitudes about politically correct “service to society.” Orthodoxy was shunned, and contemplation was emptied of its Christological core and related to politically acceptable studies of Eastern religions. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were not applicable because there were few spiritual connections made to academic study on Catholic campuses; there was simply the “availability” of Mass, and service trips to poverty stricken Caribbean nations.

Catholic retreat houses as well began to turn from Western-style contemplation (Church Fathers, monastic, and mendicants) toward the eastern non-Christian religions. Contemplation, in isolation from the other foundational realities, can descend into ersatz self-help methods, subjectivist meditation, syncretistic tolerance of world-consciousness movements, impotent naming of emotions, and more.²¹ With the rise of the “charismatic movement” in the Catholic Church in the 1970s

the gifts of the Holy Spirit were welcomed as well as, for the most part, doctrinal orthodoxy. Not so in the parishes where perhaps the charismatic gifts were given a “place” in parish prayer groups but orthodoxy was anemically embraced from the pulpits and in the confessionals. Likewise, formation in contemplation and orthodoxy in both parishes and lay movements were not richly integrated. Usually contemplation stood alone, and orthodoxy was anemically understood as being sufficient if parishioners held Catholic “sensibilities.” With the pontificate of John Paul II orthodoxy²² came roaring back but since it had been in short supply for a decade or so in the pastoral and priestly formation settings, it was seized upon as *the* answer to all the church’s woes. It was held up *on its own* without the tempering that it needs from contemplation and the active reception of the Gifts.

Orthodoxy disconnected from the other foundational elements can lead to rigidly imposing doctrine without any sense of a person’s capacity to receive it as truth (contemplation) under the movement of the Holy Spirit’s love. The gifts can spin off into introspection, subjectivism, and fantasy if a person is not grounded in the truth of orthodoxy and a love that beholds the mystery of the cross and resurrection in contemplation. Contemplation can simply become escapism and syncretism if it is not guided within truth and enlivened with the real and active presence of the Indwelling Spirit of Christ. *Held together* these three foundational realities keep the human mind and heart tethered to the heart and mind of Christ.

The seminary is not interested in forming men simply to become experts in academic content; rather, it promotes a *charismatic* theology that is *orthodox* and *contemplative*, and thus forms men who can courageously preach the living Gospel.²³

Priestly Formation Settings

We have entered a time of relative peace regarding the faithful teaching of doctrine in diocesan seminaries. Priestly formation in some religious orders still promotes a more progressive theology than that found in their diocesan counterparts.²⁴ The promotion of the love of theology as flowing from orthodoxy in its life-giving truth is the first commitment of any diocesan seminary faculty. The mysteries of Christ’s life and message do not need the idiosyncratic innovation drawn from political, femi-

nist, gay, and other sociological and ideological sources. Doctrine has a *depth of its own* that makes it capable of drawing seminarians into something radically new: the transfiguration of their own lives and of those whom they will serve as shepherds. The grasping of theological truths will be better secured within the mind and heart of each seminarian the more he allows himself to be grasped by the beauty of doctrine, contemplation, and the living movement of the Spirit that “broods” over and within the sacramental life. Seminarian formators are the custodians and facilitators of a radical integration process that needs to be suffered within each seminarian before his ordination day: welcoming the habitual reciprocity between study and prayer.²⁵ Rendering the isolation of these two realities moot is a seminary that breathes in as its atmosphere the gifts, contemplation, and orthodoxy. This atmosphere is sustained only by the formators themselves and their own love of living within such.

Once a formation faculty wearies of the discipline of becoming holy and they reduce the seminary to a “manageable” endeavor, it becomes primarily an academic center, a counseling center, a workshop for worship, a pastoral skills institute, and so on. Strong resistance to forming men in the habitual reciprocity between prayer and study might be present in some faculty members because it calls them to moral and intellectual conversion, an interior life disposed to receive Christ’s own self offering upon the cross as *the matter to be received*. Here the sacrifice which is the priesthood defines the service given by the faculty thus ordering minds and hearts to a truth that transcends scientific method. Such truth can only be glimpsed in the beauty seen within those lives affected by the mystery contemplated. In witnessing such beauty a desire is born to tell others of its source, one wants to evangelize. Breathing the air of contemplation, orthodoxy and the Gifts can be better achieved if we understand that theology *has an order within itself toward spirituality* or communion with Christ, and spirituality, has an order within it toward theology. This, in part, may be what Benedict XVI meant when he said *spirituality provides theology with the correct method*.

Conclusion

Clearly, then, the ‘mind of Christ’ is not some kind of alien rationality that displaces native human reason, but is rather a pattern of

rationality that is constantly held open by faith....[P]articipation in the mind of Christ is fundamentally a relational activity, a noetic event that transpires in the communion of love.²⁶

Here is how spirituality provides theology with a correct method: it allows the Church’s communion with the mystery of Christ to affect the mind’s search for truth. Christ is not trapped in a past culture of ancient Palestine.²⁷ To have one’s reason tutored by the Logos, the mind of Christ, will ultimately show us a new way of thinking, studying, and teaching. When seminary professors live their lives as a sacred exchange between their freedom and God’s own self-offering in Christ, then they will begin to move from the mind they have now to a new mind. Such professors will allow the mind of Christ to possess them, they will *welcome Christ thinking in them*, as Jean-Pierre de Caussade so radically phrased it.²⁸ If such is our vision then the theme with which I began this essay can be joyfully jettisoned: we will no longer separate intimacy with Christ from study. In fact, in the near future the interior structures of such intimacy will “unceasingly”²⁹ guide the external structuring of seminary academics. ✠

My thanks to Father Peter Ryan, S.J., for his comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

ENDNOTES

- 1 An alternative version of this essay appears in *Seminary Journal* (2011)
- 2 Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini* (September 2010) n. 82
- 3 Of course there is a great value in distinguishing between those formation activities that involve internal forum and those that exist in the external forum. But even preserving this value has an unintended effect: spiritual intimacy with the Trinity can appear to be an exclusively “private” reality, whereas academic discourse holds sway in public fora.
- 4 See one source for the rise of the scientific method in universities, Walter Rüegg, (Ed.) *A History of the University in Europe: Volume 3, Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (1800-1945) Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004.
- 5 Pope Benedict XVI *October 6, 2005*; see also Gregory La Nave, “Is Holiness Necessary for Theology?” *The Thomist* 74 (2010): 437-59 for some excellent meditations on the relationship between being a theologian and the call to holiness. This essay is especially helpful in raising questions about the nature of affect and intellect in the study of theology. Do my affections prompt knowledge and will to attend to God, or does affection arise from a cognitive act directed toward God? We have to distinguish between love as part of the intellectual appetite and love as an affection arising from our perception of God as our good.
- 6 See the following for more meditations upon the theme of forming seminary theologians: James Keating, *Resting on the Heart of Christ: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2009); James Keating, ed. *Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2010). On the new evangelization see John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) 3,33. See also Ralph Martin and

- Peter Williamson, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How you Can Bring the Good News to Others* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony's Messenger Press 2006).
- 7 See, Benedict xvi, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) n28
 - 8 See, Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007) 164
 - 9 Benedict XVI, Angelus, March 4, 2007
 - 10 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995)
 - 11 Benedict xvi, General Audience, March 17, 2010
 - 12 USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation* (5th ed. 2006) n163.
 - 13 John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992); and USCCB, *Program of Priestly Formation* (5th ed. 2006) ns.199ff
 - 14 "As for the Holy Spirit, his action in teaching the truth is especially connected to love....It is through the ardor of love that knowledge of the truth is given, for love moves the mind to grasp the truth and give it assent." See pages 105-110 in Gilles Emery, *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Ave Maria, Fla: Sapientia Press, 2007) for an excellent description on the role of the Holy Spirit in facilitating one's reception of truth.
 - 15 For the purposes of this essay, to contemplate means to behold the beauty, the radiating truth of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ within the affectively imbued intellect. The contemplative mind is one that seeks the face of Christ in discursive study, it is a mind that studies truth *because* it is fully embodied only in the person of Christ. To have a contemplative mind, in the Christian sense, is to have a mind that holds intimacy with Christ as the foremost goal of theology and engages all rational power as a vocation of surrender to Him as Truth. The contemplative mind "beholds" as its first love and analyzes and critiques only out of a desire to behold Him even more *securely*.
 - 16 The character received at ordination has been likened to a brand or wound that signifies "ownership." Then Cardinal Ratzinger noted that this wound or brand "calls out to its owner." In this way the cleric stands in relationship to the one who has placed his brand mark upon him. "From now on let no one disturb me as I bear on my body *the brand marks* of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). A further scriptural understanding of character might be summed up in this Pauline teaching: "I no longer live, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Here the scripture underscores the interior self-surrender of the cleric. He is the one who eagerly hosts the mystery of Christ's public service of charity *as his own*, as his new life. See, David Toups, *Reclaiming our Priestly Character* (Omaha, IPF Publications, 2008), 82.
 - 17 "What sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context." (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) p. 241.
 - 18 Benedict XVI reminds us of what is possible in the new dimension we all live in: "Why shouldn't Christ be able to rise from the dead? When I myself determine what is allowed to exist and what isn't I define the boundaries of possibility....It is an act of intellectual arrogance for us to declare that [resurrection] is absurd....*It is not our business to declare how many possibilities are latent in the cosmos....*God wanted to enter this world. God didn't want us to have only a distant inkling of him through physics and mathematics. He wanted to show Himself....so *He created a new dimension of existence* in the resurrection." (Peter Seewald, *Light of the World*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010) 168.
 - 19 As quoted in Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI* (London: Burns and Oates, 2007) 59.
 - 20 See n.5 above.
 - 21 For excellent insights on these tendencies see: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,
 - 22 I would also say that John XXIII, qne Paul VI unleashed and promoted the spread of a "new Pentecost" with Vatican II, and now Benedict XVI is giving us the needed catechesis on authentic contemplation. So, within the ministry of Peter over the last forty-five years the three strands of charismata, contemplation, and orthodoxy have been protected and deepened for appropriation in our current age.
 - 23 Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 46. See, Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n 87.
 - 24 "The Congregation was pleased to note that the faculties of most diocesan seminaries show a remarkable amount of unity and harmony. This unity of vision is almost always due to the sound leadership from the rector and senior management, who are the fulcra of seminary life. A lack of harmony, on the other hand, is almost always due to one or more educators being less than faithful to the Magisterium of the Church. These people, therefore, are out of kilter with the rest of the faculty and with the seminarians themselves. In centers of priestly formation with an atmosphere of more widespread dissent — which is the case particularly in centers run by religious — there can be no possibility of a unity of direction.
Quite often, the Visitation discovered one or more faculty members who, although not speaking openly against Church teaching, let the students understand — through hints, off-the-cuff remarks, etc. — their disapproval of some articles of Magisterial teaching. In a few institutes, one even found the occasional non-Catholic teaching the seminarians." Congregation for Education, *Report on Seminaries*, 2008, n II,2
 - 25 See, Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010) n. 82.
 - 26 Mark McIntosh, "Faith, Reason and the Mind of Christ" in Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hutter, eds.; *Reason and the Reasons of Faith* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 136.
 - 27 See, Benedict XVI, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 61-2.
 - 28 Jean-Pierre de Caussaude, *Treatise on Prayer from the Heart* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1998), 145, n.38.
 - 29 "Spiritual formation...should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to *live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit*. Those who are to take on the likeness of Christ the priest by sacred ordination should form the habit of drawing close to him as friends in *every detail of their lives*." John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), n. 45.

The Kennedy Funeral: Still Trying to Get Its Lessons Right

By Edward Peters, JD, JCD

Senator Edward Kennedy's funeral in August of 2009 was very poorly handled. The frequent abuse of liturgical texts, the blatant politicization of the intercessions, the confusion at Communion time, the appalling eulogies (all broadcast live on national media), are things that Catholics can look back on with little besides embarrassment. But there are, amid the mangled rites of the Kennedy funeral, some lessons to be learned—albeit mostly *via negativa*—and in that respect I think that Fr. Michael Orsi's retrospectives on the Kennedy funeral (*Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, November 2010) have something to offer. Orsi cares about liturgy and he makes some useful remarks on the pastoral consequences of disregarding liturgical directives.

But to reach those helpful remarks, one must first move through Orsi's canonical explanation of the decision to grant Kennedy a Catholic funeral at all. Despite dismissing as “entirely moot” the ecclesiastical debate about granting Kennedy a funeral, Orsi spends two paragraphs analyzing the canonical factors for and against a funeral for Kennedy before moving on to discuss the liturgy itself. But, in my view, the commentary that Orsi attempts there is problematic.

Like Orsi, I think that other bishops will sooner or later be called upon to make funeral decisions concerning prominent Catholic public figures who have spent most of their lives thumbing their noses at Church teaching. But if Orsi's analysis of Cardinal O'Malley's decision goes without response, I fear that other bishops, and the faithful at large, will misunderstand and wrongly apply the canonical criteria for granting or withholding Catholic funeral rites in difficult cases.

First, some small points.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law consists of sequentially numbered canons, 1, 2, 3, and so on, up to 1752. Many of these canons have numbered “paragraphs” or “sections” designated by the symbol “§.” Most canons, if they have

paragraphs or sections at all, have only two or three “§” markers, and no canon sports more than six. Orsi's citation, then, to “canon § 1184” is a misstatement of what he surely intended to be “canon 1184.” A mistake, yes, but not terribly misleading. But his citation to “canons §2284-85” is meaningless. Not only are there no paragraphs (“§”) 2284-85 in the 1983 Code, there are no *canons* 2284-85 in the revised Code. Meanwhile, canons 2284 and 2285 of the 1917 Code (my next surmise as to what Orsi might have meant) have nothing to do with Catholic funerals and/or repentance before death as asserted by Orsi. Only if one eliminates the stray “§” marker, and changes the “2”s to “1”s, and eliminates the “-85” (which seems to refer to a canon dealing with a different, and irrelevant, funeral issue), is one left with a citation to “canon 1184,” a norm that is relevant to Catholic funeral questions. But surely this kind of mistake in a central citation is better left uncommitted.

More substantive problems need to be addressed.

1. Orsi writes: “Cardinal Sean O'Malley, O.F.M., archbishop of Boston, chose to grant the privilege [*sic*: canon law regards funerals as a *right* of the faithful per c. 1176 § 1, not a ‘privilege’] and there is no doubting that it was his right to do so, as canon law presumes that, as chief pastor of the diocese, *the bishop interprets the pertinent canons as tightly or as loosely as he sees best benefits his flock*” (my emphasis). This, I suggest, is a misrepresentation of the norms on canonical interpretation. A bishop may not interpret canon law “as tightly or as loosely as he sees best.”

In several places, the 1983 Code sets out how canonical norms are to be interpreted by those charged with applying law. The primary directive in this regard is Canon 17: “Ecclesiastical laws must be understood in accord with the proper meaning of the words considered in their text and context. If the meaning remains doubtful and obscure, recourse must be made to parallel places, if there are such, to the purpose and circumstances of the law, and to the mind of the legislator.” Consultation with any commentary on Book I of the 1983 Code will show that the methodology

outlined in Canon 17 is of venerable lineage and of proven worth. Canonists know what each of those interpretative steps entails, and bishops who might not know can easily find out.

Furthermore, because, as noted above, funerals are regarded by the Church as a *right* of the faithful, Canon 18 (another provision that informs the interpretational discretion of bishops) requires that any restrictions on rights (such as restrictions on the right to a funeral as found in Canon 1184 § 1) be subjected to a “strict” (i.e., narrow) interpretation. In other words, the burden was not on the Kennedy clan to prove their uncle’s eligibility for a Catholic funeral, the burden was on the cardinal to determine, *in accord with canon law*, whether the “Lion of the Senate” was ineligible for a Catholic funeral. In short, Canons 17, 18, 1176, and 1184 (I could invoke others), individually, but even more so when read, as they should be, in combination, call for very nearly the opposite of canonical interpretations “as tightly or as loosely as a bishop sees fit.”

2. Orsi asserts that opponents of the Kennedy funeral described him as a “manifest sinner to whom a church funeral could not be granted without public scandal to the faithful” (in which claim, I think, they and Orsi were correct), but then adds that “while the letter Kennedy wrote to Pope Benedict at the end of his life admitted he had fallen short of being a good Catholic, there was absolutely no admission of explicit regret for his pro-choice stances.” But, even granting the accuracy of this description of Kennedy’s letter, that letter was irrelevant to the canonical issue then facing Cardinal O’Malley.

The canonical question before the cardinal was *not* whether Kennedy wrote a satisfactory letter to the pope; the question was whether Kennedy “gave some signs of repentance before death” sufficient for him to be accorded a Catholic funeral. That the senator’s letter failed to produce such signs I won’t contest, but there were other ways in which Kennedy could have manifested repentance at least to the minimal degree necessary under canon law. And that is what Kennedy did.

As can be seen from the arguments I set out in a lengthy article dealing with another famous funeral-denial case,¹ the signs that Kennedy is known to have given (such as his asking for a priest near the time of death) indisputably satisfied the admittedly very low canonical criteria for finding signs of repentance in a public sinner sufficient for granting a Catholic funeral even to one whose conduct was, in so many ways and

for so many decades, gravely and publicly at odds with important Church teachings.

This subtle but crucial distinction has been missed by nearly all commentators on the Kennedy funeral at the time, and by most commentators even now: canon law does not expect bishops to read souls, and therefore, contrary to Orsi’s rephrasing of the law, canon law has never required proof of *repentance* before death in order to grant a public sinner an ecclesiastical funeral; rather, canon law, per c. 1184 § 1, demands only *signs* of repentance—and precious few *signs* at that—in order to authorize a Catholic funeral in a case like Kennedy’s. Overlook the distinction between verifying “repentance” and verifying “*signs* of repentance,” and the Kennedy funeral decision can be accounted for only by holding that canon law may be interpreted “as tightly or as loosely as [a bishop] sees best.”

3. Orsi’s characterization of the position argued by (most) supporters of granting Kennedy a Catholic funeral misstates, I think, their argument. Most supporters of Kennedy’s funeral did *not* make the claim that Kennedy was no “notorious apostate or heretic” (he obviously was not), nor did they argue that he had not “ordered the cremation of his body” (he obviously had not), as if, by a process of the elimination of *disqualifications*, Kennedy could be granted a funeral. Rather, they argued that Kennedy inhabited the one canonical category within Canon 1184 § 1 that Orsi did not then quote in their behalf, namely, that Kennedy was not a “manifest sinner” and therefore, he retained the basic right to a Catholic funeral. At any rate, I think those who supported Kennedy’s funeral on these grounds were wrong on the facts, but one should be clear about what the Kennedy-faction was claiming, so that their claim can be rejected (with helpful implications for future cases), while the affirmative decision on the Kennedy funeral can still be defended on different, but sufficient, canonical grounds.

Finally, if my analysis above is correct, Orsi’s admonition to the faithful regarding Cardinal O’Malley’s funeral decision, namely, that “in charity the faithful must grant the cardinal the benefit of the doubt” is unnecessary. The Boston prelate needs no charity on this account (although I am sure he would welcome it!) for he made the canonically correct decision. But even if the cardinal had made the wrong decision, the faithful would have been well within their rights to express their disagreement with him and to call for greater vigilance the next time such a question arose (see can.

212 § 3). Either way, while charity should always suffuse the faithful's attitude toward their prelates, it is not a prerequisite to agreeing or disagreeing with the Kennedy funeral decision.

Conclusion

More than a year after Senator Kennedy's funeral rights were debated and rites were conducted, the memory of that mess is beginning to fade. From these events, though, I think that two lessons bear preserving: (1) The standards for receiving a Catholic funeral are not nonexistent, but they are very, very low. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing, I do not know, but I do know that is how the law reads. (2) When Catholic funerals are granted to persons, especially to famous

persons who, along with their entourages, are used to having their own way, prelates who grant said permissions should know that the funeral rites themselves are liable to be manipulated, and perhaps blatantly, by the deceased's followers. Special care should be taken, therefore, to minimize the risk of liturgical abuse and to guard against the public dissemination of potential debacles. ✠

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ENDNOTE

- 1 See Edward Peters, "Lest amateurs argue canon law: a reply to Patrick Gordon's brief against Bishop Thomas Daily," *Angelicum* 83 (2006): 121-142, available on-line at http://www.canonlaw.info/a_gordon.htm.

Confidential Consultations in the Selection of Bishops: Remarks on Law and Practice

By Edward Peters, JD, JCD

The proper evaluation of priestly candidates for the episcopacy is important for the well-being of the Catholic Church. Although history has seen a variety of procedures used for selecting bishops (including election by presbyterates and nomination by civil officials subject to ecclesiastical confirmation), today most bishops in the Roman Church are freely appointed by the Supreme Pontiff (Canons 377 §1 and 378 §2). Part of that papal appointment process involves making confidential inquiries among selected members of the Christian faithful about specific candidates for episcopal office.

Inquires concerning potential bishops are conducted under what is known as *pontifical* or *papal secrecy*. Second only to the seal of confession, pontifical secrecy is the highest level of confidentiality encountered in the Catholic Church. The exact scope of this confidentiality, however, and the implications of assuming its obli-

gations, are perhaps not widely known outside professional ecclesiastical circles. Most clergy, religious, and lay persons, upon learning that their special assistance in an ecclesiastical matter is being requested, but that such cooperation will be subject to the strictures of pontifical secrecy, do not know where to turn for an explanation of that juridic institute. It is to address their questions that this essay is offered. We begin with a brief overview of the modern episcopal selection process.

Any member of the Christian faithful could, in virtue of the basic right to make known one's opinions on matters impacting the good of the Church (Canon 212 §3), offer suggestions concerning possible bishops, and individual bishops have the right to propose names directly to the Apostolic See regarding priests whom they consider worthy to become bishops (Canon 377 §2). In practice, however, most candidates for the episcopacy in the Roman Church are first identified by the assembled bishops of a given province (Canon 377 §2). Those names are eventually

forwarded to Rome where, generally, the Congregation for Bishops studies the needs of a given archdiocese and the pool of current or potential bishops available to serve those needs, in anticipation of making suggestions for a final selection by the pope.¹

But, however the names of potential bishops are first brought to the attention of the Holy See, and whatever the factors to be weighed by Roman officials in recommending specific candidates, the main process for making inquiries concerning possible bishops and for compiling a dossier of their strengths and weaknesses is carried out by the papal legate for the territory in question (Canons 364, 4^o and 377 §3). For the United States, that inquiry is conducted by the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, D.C., now Archbishop Pietro Sambi. The nuncio's personal opinion (*votum*) regarding episcopal candidates carries considerable weight in the selection process, and it is as part of his investigation that members of the faithful are most likely to be asked to provide, in strictest confidence, information and opinions regarding a given candidate for episcopal orders (Canon 377 §3).

Common sense suggests the wisdom of carrying out inquiries regarding potential bishops discreetly, and current canon law commands that investigations regarding potential bishops be carried out secretly (Canon 377 §3, and 1972 Norms, art. 14). But in an age when anything smacking of secrecy in the Church tends to be viewed with suspicion, some explanation of this requirement might be helpful.

Part of the emphasis on secrecy simply arises, I suggest, from the wider legal culture in which the Holy See works, namely, the civil law tradition, wherein the process used to determine legally significant facts differs from that usually followed in common law nations such as the United States. In contrast to the common law, which glories in concentrated trials before juries as the "finder of facts," the civil law tradition uses extended administrative-judicial inquires to discover and confirm vital information. The protracted investigations of the civil law, however, would be liable to contamination if the persons interviewed during these deliberate investigations were *not* placed under some obligation of confidentiality in regard to their testimony. What might strike some Americans, then, as an excessive emphasis on secrecy (a concept probably better understood as "confidentiality"), is actually a proven way to protect the integrity of fact-finding processes carried out by officials steeped in the civil law tradition. But, I suggest, more than just the civil law tradition supports the application

of canonical norms on papal secrecy to investigations of potential bishops.

The American canonist Monsignor John Renken, commenting on the episcopal selection process, explains the confidentiality requirements set out in Canon 377 thus: "Secrecy has many values: it permits a candid expression of opinions about the candidate, it respects his good name and reputation, it avoids the hurt which can come when expectations of appointment are not fulfilled, it bypasses publicity and lobbying for or against candidates, etc."² To be sure, arguments for a more "open" process to identify and assess potential bishops exist and historical examples of such approaches can be found. But the susceptibility of individual Churches to local pressures are a persistent concern, while the independence of the Holy See from most local pressure is a strong argument in favor of maintaining a Roman-centered, confidential inquiry process in regard to future bishops, especially where the inquiry process, as here, takes into careful consideration the views of qualified local observers.

Of course, when a member of the faithful is first requested to assist with what will turn out to be the process for assessing a potential candidate for episcopal office, these finer points of legal theory or Church history are not likely to be known, and the unlooked-for arrival of materials under "pontifical secrecy" can, at first sight, be rather startling. It is to that moment we now turn.

Typically, a business-sized first class letter addressed to a specific individual will arrive marked "Personal" and/or "Confidential." A return address (3339 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008-3610) will be visible, but a sender's name or office will probably not be apparent. Thus, unless one happens to recognize the address of the pontifical legation, one will not immediately know who sent the letter. Now the fact of having *received* such a letter is not a secret, pontifical or otherwise, and if one's practice is to have, say, an assistant opening one's mail, one need not worry about varying that practice on the off chance that the apostolic nuncio might someday send one a letter under pontifical secrecy!

Upon opening the outer mailing envelope, however, one will find inside a second, slightly smaller, sealed envelope. The subject matter of the inner envelope will not be identified, but it will be immediately obvious that access to the contents of the inner envelope is strictly conditioned. The inner envelope will again identify the intended recipient, but a bold-print designation such as "Strictly Personal and Confidential" will appear near the intended recipient's name. Only the named

recipient of such a letter should open it.

More specifically, a block of text on the face of the inner envelope will declare that the contents of the second envelope have been delivered under “Pontifical Secret.” The text will plainly state that it is “absolutely forbidden” to discuss the contents (of the inner envelope) with “any one at any time,” and that a violation of this confidentiality is “a grave matter and an ecclesiastical crime with a severe penalty that can be removed only by the Holy See.” The inner envelope is designed to, and undoubtedly will, arrest the attention of a faithful Catholic, and it is then that questions about pontifical secrecy are likely to surface.

Now, although prudence might militate against disclosing *that* one has received a letter under pontifical secrecy, it is not, strictly speaking, canonically illegal to communicate this fact. Prior to opening the inner envelope, one is free, say, to seek advice from a canonist as to the scope of pontifical secrecy or to bring to a spiritual director concerns about expressing one’s opinions on what promises to be a weighty ecclesiastical matter. But, precisely because one is not yet bound by the confidentiality obligations of pontifical secrecy, there is no need to frame such questions hypothetically, and probably little point in doing so, since the very uncommonness of such questions will suggest that they are of practical, not merely speculative, concern. In short, one may prudently disclose the fact of having received a communication under pontifical secret, and may ask questions about that juridic institute, without fear of having violated pontifical secrecy itself. But, beyond any doubt, opening the inner envelope triggers the obligations of pontifical secrecy.

(Note: the recipient of a letter marked by pontifical secrecy may decline to open it, in which case it should be returned to the pontifical legate as discussed below. But, lest scrupulosity or humility deter a recipient from responding to such communications, he or she should recall that the very receipt of such a letter strongly suggests that one’s opinion on an important matter is valued and is being sought for the good of the Church. Catholics have, I suggest, a religious obligation to assist the Church when she directly asks for such aid.)

The current canon law on pontifical secrecy is found in the instruction *Secreta continere* issued by the papal Secretariat of State (4 February 1974) and promulgated in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 66 (1974): 89–92.³ The introductory paragraphs of the instruction provide a sound Scriptural and Traditional *précis* on the legitimate place of secrecy in the Church and underscore the impor-

tance of strict confidentiality for, among other things, encouraging trustworthy service to the People of God. While most of the instruction *Secreta* deals with matters conducted by or within the Roman Curia and embassies of the Holy See, a few points therein pertain directly to the investigation of candidates for the episcopal office.

Article I, n. 7, of the instruction *Secreta* notes that pontifical secrecy covers investigations relative to the nomination of bishops. Even though this provision more directly applies to the dicasterial officials investigating potential bishops, it nevertheless reinforces the idea that the assessment of potential bishops is a serious matter in the life of the Church and that it is to be conducted in strict confidence. Moreover, Article I, n. 10 of the instruction authorizes pontifical legates, such as apostolic nuncios, to place matters under the protection of pontifical secrecy, and the communications we are discussing here are from pontifical legates.

Regarding those bound by pontifical secrecy, Article II, n. 3 makes the perhaps obvious point that “all those on whom the observance of papal secrecy is imposed in special cases” are obliged to honor that obligation. It is self-evident that the named recipients of letters tendered under pontifical secrecy are, upon their opening of such letters, bound to observe said secrecy. As for who else might be bound to pontifical secrecy in regard to these letters, see below.

Article III, n. 1 of the instruction *Secreta* explicates what is only briefly, but clearly, stated on the face of the inner envelope, namely, that one under the obligation of pontifical secrecy is *always* under an obligation to keep it. Of its nature, this obligation of strict confidentiality does not vary depending on circumstances, nor does it fade over time. Nothing, not even the death of the cleric in question, frees an individual to disclose to others that he or she had been consulted on the possibility of elevating a given priest to the episcopacy or assigning him to a specific office.

The only way one can be released from the obligation to maintain pontifical secrecy regarding one’s consultation in the assessment of a potential bishop is to seek release from the pope himself or from the Secretariat of State. The circumstances that might prompt such a request are difficult to imagine; those that would justify a release are almost inconceivable. Traditional moral theology regarding the technical scope of official and entrusted secrets would provide some insights into the kinds of factors that could point toward freeing one from the obligation of secrecy, but such analysis would need to be undertaken by well-qualified and objective

persons, and not by the individual in question.

The penalties for violating papal confidentiality intimated on the face of the inner envelope are not specified there or in the instruction *Secreta*, undoubtedly because a “one size fits all” approach to sanctions for violating papal confidentiality would be inappropriate given the range of matters that could be protected by pontifical secrecy and the circumstances under which violations might occur. Instead, Article II, n. 2 simply states that “penalties in keeping with the gravity of the delict or of the harm done” can be visited upon those breaching papal secrecy. Sanctions may include expiatory penalties such as loss of ecclesiastical office and/or censures such as excommunication.⁴

Upon opening the inner envelope, the nature of the inquiry will be explained, the name of the episcopal candidate disclosed, and a schedule of questions likely provided to guide one’s reporting. These materials are self-explanatory, but I would add that canon law itself offers some insights regarding the characteristics that the Church values in bishops:

Canon 378. §1. In regard to the suitability of a candidate for the episcopacy, it is required that he be: 1° outstanding in solid faith, good morals, piety, zeal for souls, wisdom, prudence, and human virtues, and endowed with other qualities which make him suitable to fulfill the office in question; 2° of good reputation; 3° at least thirty-five years old; 4° ordained to the presbyterate for at least five years; 5° in possession of a doctorate or at least a licentiate in sacred scripture, theology, or canon law from an institute of higher studies approved by the Apostolic See, or at least truly expert in the same disciplines.

Between the above canon and any questionnaire or specific questions provided by the nuncio, one will have a good sense of the kinds of information and opinions that are most helpful to those Church authorities charged with evaluating potential bishops. It bears underscoring, however, that this inquiry phase of the selection process, while very important, remains *informational* in nature, and not decision-making (Canon 378 § 2). In other words, one’s praise or endorsement of a priest does not mean that he will be elevated to the episcopate or assigned to a specific office, any more than one’s criticism of a candidate means that he will be rejected. Instead, one is simply being asked to provide, as objectively as possible, the kind of insights about a candidate that the papal nuncio, the Congregation for Bishops, and eventually the Roman Pontiff will need to make an informed decision.

One will be asked to provide responses within a brief but reasonable period of time and to return also the explanatory letter (containing the name of the potential bishop) and the questionnaire used (if one was provided). Keeping paper or electronic copies of any of the above is prohibited and places one in the proximate occasion of violating pontifical secrecy.

To send their reply, respondents should use a dependable means of transport such as a private commercial carrier or public postal services requiring signature for receipt. An individual who elected *not* to open a letter received under pontifical secrecy should also, as a matter of prudence, return the unopened inner envelope to the nuncio (at the address given on the outer envelope) via a secure method. I recommend against simply destroying the unopened envelope, if only because this leaves the recipient without evidence that he or she did not incur the obligation of pontifical secrecy.

If, by accident or design, a third party learns of the contents of a pontifically protected inquiry (especially the name of the episcopal candidate) and/or if he or she learns the opinions of the one consulted, such a person is, according to Article II, n. 4 of the instruction *Secreta*, subject to the same strict obligation of confidentiality. For this reason, recipients of confidential inquiries should take care not to leave these materials where they can be noticed by third parties, and they should not entrust the preparation of their replies to others.

Besides a signature verifying the receipt of one’s replies at the apostolic legation, one should not expect any further acknowledgement of one’s responses. Instead, simply be assured that “your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:18).

The investigation and appointment of future bishops in the Church is one of the heaviest burdens that falls on the Roman Pontiff, and to perform that task well, he needs input from qualified observers. Individuals invited to participate in the episcopal inquiry process should recognize that, by accepting the obligations of papal secrecy and by replying forthrightly to the legate’s questions, they will enable the Roman Pontiff to benefit by the perspectives of those who are in a good position to know the candidate(s) in question.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 See John Paul II's apostolic constitution, *Pastor Bonus* (1988) n. 77, and Council for Public Affairs, "Norms for the Promotion of Candidates to the Episcopal Ministry" (1972), *passim*.
- 2 Renken, *CLSA New Commentary*, 515.

- 3 Available in English in *Canon Law Digest* VIII: 205-210.
- 4 See, e.g., 1999 Regolamento Generale della Curia Romana, Art. 76 §1, and S. Cong. Consistory, "Dubia, ad IV," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 9 (1917), at 232.

Charles Curran Wrongly Criticizes the U.S. Bishops on Abortion

By J. Brian Benestad

On October 28, 2010, Charles Curran spoke on the U.S. Catholic bishops and abortion legislation at Southern Methodist University, where he is the Elizabeth Scurlock University Professor of Human Values (lecture reprinted in the *National Catholic Reporter* on November 29, 2010). Curran takes the U.S. bishops to task for distinguishing their opposition to the intrinsic evil of abortion from their endorsement of specific positions on health care, tax policy, housing, immigration, etc. The bishops characterize their policy proposals on these matters as prudential judgments about which there will inevitably and legitimately be disagreement. Curran rightly interprets the bishops to be saying that no debatable "prudential judgments are involved" in their opposition to the legalization of abortion. They believe that all reasonable Catholics should agree with their judgment that any legal system not protecting the right to life is fundamentally flawed and should be reformed. Curran disagrees. He says "the U.S. bishops claim too great a certitude for their position on abortion law" and fail to recognize that their own position logically entails prudential judgments so that they cannot logically distinguish it from most of the other issues such as the death penalty, health care, nuclear deterrence, housing. Consequently, they are wrong in making abortion the primary social issue for the Catholic Church in the United States." Curran clearly implies that calling for the protection of unborn human life is in the same category as, say, endorsing some proposal to make housing more accessible the poor. Both are prudential judgments and equally debatable.

Curran proposes four reasons why the bishops

"have claimed too much certitude for their position on abortion law." First, "there is doubt about the reality of early embryo." Curran claims that the exact moment when human life begins is uncertain. Doubt exists because the Church doesn't know when the soul is infused or when "the human person comes into existence." Because of these uncertainties, Curran claims, abortion cannot be called murder, presumably at any time during the nine months of pregnancy. Curran doesn't mention anything that the science of embryology says about the beginning of human life.

In *Evangelium vitae* Pope John Paul II calls abortion murder because it is always the killing of an innocent human being who begins to exist from the moment of conception (no. 58). While admitting that the presence of the soul cannot be empirically verified, the pope still affirms that scientific research discerns the presence of a human individual at the moment the zygote is formed from the fusion of the male and female gametes (no. 60). This is the first moment of human existence. Quoting the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, he further argues, "how could human individual not be a human person" (no. 60). Dr. Maureen Condit, a professor of neurobiology and anatomy at the University of Utah School of Medicine, explains: "Based on universally accepted scientific criteria, a new cell, the human zygote, comes into existence at the moment of the sperm-egg fusion, an event that occurs in less than a second."¹ This statement is a strong scientific argument for affirming that life begins at conception.

Curran's second argument against the bishops is their own admission that they made a prudential judgment about abortion in 1981 by testifying in support of the Hatch amendment, a bill that, if passed, would not have undone the effects of *Roe v. Wade*. He further

argues that two Catholic scholars, David Kelly and Douglas Kmiec, made prudential judgments, in the 2004 and the 2008 presidential elections respectively, “that support for the pro-choice position can prevent more abortions in reality than support for the pro-life position.” For Curran these three prudential judgments with respect to abortion prove that episcopal positions on abortion are in the same category as their positions on the so-called social justice issues.

In response to Curran I would argue that no debatable prudential judgment was involved in the bishops’ decision to oppose the legalization of abortion. What strategy to use in working to overturn legalized abortion can involve a prudential judgment in choosing among several alternatives. To embrace a pro-choice position, however, instead of a pro-life position, as a way to reduce abortions is almost patently ridiculous. Embracing a pro-choice position contributes to the staying power of legalized abortion, a situation that should be anathema to all Catholics.

Third, Curran argues that the bishops’ understanding of the relation between civil law and the moral law is wrong because they follow Thomas Aquinas. Instead, all Catholics should embrace the teaching of Vatican II’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty* on religious freedom and the public order. The latter requires respect for justice, the public peace, and public morality. Curran argues that concern for the public order sometimes allows the restriction of freedom, but then says “the religious-freedom approach can be used to accept the present legal situation of abortion in this country or could also justify working to change the existing law.” He, of course, favors accepting the legalization of abortion on the grounds that “there is no consensus on the issue in our society today. As a result, one could give the benefit of the doubt to the freedom of the woman.” Curran leaves unexplained how the *Declaration’s* religious-freedom approach could possibly justify acceptance of *Roe v. Wade*.

Curran’s interpretation of the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* is as bizarre as it is wrongheaded. While Vatican Council II did not go into detail regarding the meaning of justice, the public peace, and public morality, there is no evidence that these concepts could possibly be interpreted to authorize acceptance of the situation created by *Roe v. Wade*. In fact, no document of Vatican II tells Catholics that they can accept the legalization of abortion with a clear conscience! In addition, Curran shows no awareness that one might have to work to change the consensus on an ensconced evil rather than accept it. Would the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ever have been passed if Curran’s recommendation to bow down before the *Zeitgeist* was accepted by Catholics in the early 1960s.

Fourth, Curran objects to the bishops’ opposition to abortion on the grounds that it is intrinsically evil. He says that there are a number of intrinsic evils, such as adultery, for which legal remedies are not sought. Curran concludes, “Thus the very fact that something is an intrinsic evil does not mean there should always be a law against it.” Curran then illogically concludes that it is wrong for the bishops to distinguish their opposition to abortion as an intrinsic evil from their debatable prudential judgments on the social justice issues.

Even in a liberal society intrinsic evils such as abortion should be illegal because every society should protect the life of innocent human life from conception until natural death. Curran, of course, disagrees with this statement since he believes that abortion may be one of those intrinsic evils that should not be prohibited by law because of prudential considerations.²

ENDNOTE

- ¹ *When Does Life Begin? A Scientific Perspective*, p. 5. This white paper is online and available in booklet form from the Westchester Institute for Ethics & the Human Person, P.O. Box 78, 582 Columbus Avenue, Thornwood, NY 10594.

An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy: Basic Concepts. Joseph W. Koterski, Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. viii + 247 pp. Paper, \$29.95

Reviewed by Fr. Anthony Giampietro, University of St. Thomas, Houston

In November 2009, at a memorial service for the thirteen adults and one unborn baby who were killed by U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan, President Barack Obama said, "It may be hard to comprehend the twisted logic that led to this tragedy. But this much we do know—no faith justifies these murderous and craven acts; no just and loving God looks upon them with favor. And for what he has done, we know that the killer will be met with justice—in this world, and the next." In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, then-Senator Obama argued that our society should not base public policy on religious belief. For example, if we were to come upon a modern day Abraham about to slay his son, "we would call the police; we would wrestle him down; even if we saw him lower the knife at the last minute, we would expect the Department of Children and Family Services to take Isaac away and charge Abraham with child abuse. We would do so because God does not reveal Himself or His angels to all of us in a single moment. We do not hear what Abraham hears, do not see what Abraham sees, true as those experiences may be."

It would be wrong, Obama reasoned, to accept Abraham's claim that God had told him to kill his son; it would not be *reasonable* to accept such a claim. Senator Obama applied this principle also to claims made by religious communities, claims that had not been subjected to the scrutiny of reason. "Politics is hardly a science," Obama wrote, "and it too infrequently depends on reason." In light of this statement, should we not closely examine his comments at Fort Hood? Is his conviction that God is displeased with Major Hasan simply his own "private belief"? Perhaps he meant that anyone who would point to God to justify such killings has misunderstood the nature of God. But how would he know this?

President Obama's comments rely on the assumption that "everyone knows" certain acts are evil. They are not evil simply because the state says they are evil; they are evil *period*, for all

people, for all places, for all time. And anything that is evil cannot be looked upon by God "with favor." However, it is becoming more and more clear that not everyone agrees that the actions of Major Hasan were evil, not everyone thinks God did not command them, not everyone thinks God is not pleased with them. So we must ask ourselves, "How can we know what God condemns and what he favors?"

Father Joseph Koterski did not write a book about what President Obama knows about God. However, the book he did write would be of great help to political leaders who want to be reasonable about religion and to religious believers who seek to understand what they believe. Father Koterski's *Introduction to Medieval Philosophy* opens up this philosophical period in such a way that even the novice philosopher can appreciate its potential to shed light upon, and to help resolve, the enormous challenges we face in religion and in reasoning. In a pluralistic society, in which religious freedom is championed, who is to say what God wants or what is true? And by what reasoning would such claims be made? Medieval philosophy comes alive in this text, giving reason for hope that we can make progress in answering such questions. And it comes alive because it is engaged with questions that are both interesting and important, presented by a guide who an expert both in the parts and in the whole of the history of philosophy.

One of the many challenges of writing a text on medieval philosophy is the fact that there are so many topics and so many philosophers. To some, the period comes across as a stage for a cacophony of voices with no coherent themes. To others, the philosophy that occurs in those centuries is so tainted by religious belief that it no longer qualifies as real philosophy. In this text, Father Koterski provides the background, the context, the history, and the philosophizing. It is a book that could be used in a wide variety of philosophy courses because it sheds light on topics that are covered in virtually all such courses. With a tremendous grasp of ancient philosophy and clear explanations of why each philosopher took the position he took, Father Koterski carefully shows the influence of Platonism on Christianity and the influence of Christianity on philosophizing. Christian belief stretches one's reasoning. It provides a conviction that certain

propositions simply cannot be true, and that philosophy will need to come up with a better way to understand, and not only believe, what is true.

The book is not a history of philosophy, but it provides enough information for the reader to understand the progression of an argument; which texts were available to whom and when, for example. Each chapter covers a different topic or concept: faith and reason, God, the divine ideas, universals, the transcendentals, cosmos and nature, and soul. It is by way of these few but important topics that Father Koterski presents discussions that spanned more than a thousand years. Each chapter is divided into four or five sections; sub-themes for the philosophical discussion are centered on the topic at hand. For example, the chapter on the problem of universals includes the following sections: 1. The Range of the Question, 2. Realists and Nominalists, 3. The Source Texts: Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry, Boethius, 4. Late Scholasticism, and 5. Overview.

Those who know Father Koterski will not be surprised that difficult topics are made easier to understand, points of disagreement between philosophers are brought to light with great intellectual charity, and topics that will need more work are highlighted. One is able to see more clearly that what might have seemed esoteric and irrelevant concepts are actually rich and important, and able to be grasped. Philosophers across the centuries are all part of the great conversation. Mistakes are seen and understood in their context (why did Averroes hold that there is one agent intellect? Why does Aristotle's thinking seem to lead to the idea that the soul cannot survive the death of the body? Why did St. Bonaventure seem to hold the view that the body is only accidentally united to the soul?). Father Koterski explains what each thinker is trying to preserve, and how it is that apparent failures in philosophy can serve to advance our understanding because they serve to clarify what is not yet understood.

The book includes a sixteen page glossary, fifteen pages of references, five pages listing historical figures (each with a mini-biography), and a six page index. These resources are very helpful for scholars (to remind them of what they already know). And the glossary and the list of historical figures are especially helpful to beginners, giving them a way of entering into further study. However, the

greatest asset of the book is the evidence on every page that “faith seeking understanding” can succeed; that philosophizing can get us somewhere. The human mind can grasp real truths about reality, in its source and in all its particulars.

I began this review with an example of public reasoning in order to show how great is the need to understand better the topics and arguments found in medieval philosophy. I often direct my students to the Regensburg lecture given by Pope Benedict in the fall of 2006, in order for them to understand the relationship of Greek thought to Christianity, to encounter the project of trying to understand by reason what can also be known by faith. I will now also recommend that they study Father Koterski’s introduction to medieval philosophy. It is accessible and learned, easy to read, yet covering in some depth a good deal of philosophical thinking. A wonderful and important book.

The Renewed Church: The Second Vatican Council’s Enduring Teaching about the Church. Kenneth D. Whitehead. Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009. 260 pages.

Reviewed by Russell Shaw, author of twenty books and former Secretary for Public Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference.

Kenneth Whitehead has written a timely, important, and useful book. Fully to appreciate its timeliness, importance, and usefulness, it is necessary to recall certain facts about the ongoing struggle over the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council.

In his memoiristic *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Orbis), the late Giuseppe Alberigo, leading figure in the so-called Bologna School, derides an interpretation of the Council based on “understanding of and commentary upon the official documents” (p. 117). The significance of Vatican II, he insists, lies in “the abandonment of the Counter-Reformation and the Constantinian age” (p. 129) which it brought about, with the attitudinal and behavioral ruptures that entails. Here is the controlling vision of the massive five-volume *History of Vatican II*, edited by Alberigo with the aim of advancing that ambitious project (also published in the United States by Orbis,

with Father Joseph A. Komonchak as editor of the English version).

A few years ago the argument about the interpretation of Vatican II was sharpened by Pope Benedict XVI. In his Christmas 2005 address to the Curia, Benedict famously spoke of two competing hermeneutics: a “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” and a “hermeneutic of reform . . . renewal in the continuity of the one subject—Church.” Benedict made it clear that he favors the latter and maintained that Vatican II’s meaning can be found in its texts.

But partisans of the hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture were not impressed. A recent, book-length exposition of their position can be found in *The American Catholic Revolution* (Oxford, 2010) by Father Mark Massa, S.J., dean of the school of theology and ministry at Boston College. Citing Bernard Lonergan’s assertion that the “real issue” behind intra-Church arguments of the 1960s and 1970s was “the transition from a classicist worldview to historical-mindedness,” Father Massa says that from this perspective conservatives waste their time stressing the continuity between Vatican II and its predecessors.

No matter what the (essentially conservative) intentions of the person who originally called that council (Good Pope John XXIII), or of the overwhelming majority of Catholic bishops who approved the reforms of the council . . . the unsettling new historical consciousness unleashed by the council’s reforms could not be stopped by anything so simple as an appeal to the intentions of the council’s participants, or to some purported “law of continuity” within the tradition (p. 13).

Later he makes the remarkable claim that Lonergan’s “transition from a classicist world view to historical mindedness” is an accurate account of “the intellectual revolution that mainstream Catholics underwent during the sixties” (p. 160).

There are two things to be said about that.

The first is that it strains credulity to call the experience of mainstream Catholics in the 1960s a transition from a classicist worldview to historical mindedness. Ordinary Catholics in large numbers were undoubtedly bowled over by the cultural revolution of those years—specifically, by the sexual revolution—and they and the Church are still

reeling from the bad effects. But this was simply a case of succumbing to an aberrant Zeitgeist. While some academic intellectuals may choose to call it a transition from one worldview to another, the “mainstream” knows better.

The second is that supporters of open-ended ongoing change are right to situate the Second Vatican Council at a particular point in a historical process which, so faith tells us, will continue to the end of time. But it is at least as important that Catholics for centuries have supposed that the doctrinal pronouncements and disciplinary decisions of ecumenical councils acting in union with the pope have real normative force: the teaching must be assented to, the legislation obeyed, by people who wish to be in communion with the Church. Although Father Massa, like others of his persuasion, quotes Newman’s aphorism that “To live is to change; and to live long is to have changed often,” he significantly ignores Newman’s theory of *development* in which continuity holds a central place. And continuity is important in the end because of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in this teaching, legislating Church.

All this is by way of background to Whitehead’s *The Renewed Church*. The author recognizes change when he sees it, understands the importance of continuity, and grasps the normative aspect of conciliar teaching. These principles are deployed here to produce a highly useful study.

The Renewed Church focuses on three of the Council’s sixteen documents: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, and the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. Whitehead accepts the consensus view that the third of these is a second-tier conciliar text, but he regards both *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* as documents of the first rank. Indeed, of the Constitution on the Church he writes: “If Vatican Council II had issued no other document . . . it would still rank as one of the most important ecumenical councils in the history of the Church on the basis of this document alone” (p. 131).

While the heart of the book is its summary and analysis of texts, Whitehead also examines selected postconciliar events, including mistakes in the interpretation and application of Vatican II.

Thus *Lumen Gentium* and its teaching on the magisterium of the Church (cf. especially *Lumen Gentium*, 25) are an occasion for an extended discussion of the phenomenon of theological dissent in the United States.

Here, Whitehead argues, the American bishops made a serious tactical error in their collective pastoral letter of November 1968, *Human Life in Our Day*, in which they offer their formal response to Pope Paul VI's encyclical on contraception, *Humanae Vitae*, together with a somewhat noncommittal commentary on the Vietnam war. The bishops' letter declares its support for the Pope's condemnation of artificial birth control, but it also adopts a tolerant view of what it styles "licit dissent."

This, Whitehead remarks, assumes a model of dissent as "academic-style doubt or disagreement . . . within the groves of academe"; whereas the actual dissent of that time, as everyone except the American hierarchy understood, was "open revolt against the teaching authority of the Church, consciously designed to persuade the faithful" (pp. 88-89). In effect, the bishops in November 1968 handed dissenting theologians a license to dissent just as they were then doing and have continued to do—at what terrible cost to the Church events have shown.

Whitehead's treatment of the debate on the interpretation of Vatican II is similarly trenchant. Like Benedict XVI, he emphasizes the importance of studying the documents. It is not the case, he writes,

that documents are merely words on paper. Documents represent what an organization such as the Catholic Church is willing to commit to paper and hence be reminded of, be called back to, and be bound by. Documents help save us from the worst effects of our mistakes and the mistakes of our leaders. They constitute as permanent a record of what the Church believes and teaches as anything we are likely to see in this world. . . . Only on the basis of what the Council actually taught and said can we go forward with the true renewal originally envisaged by Blessed Pope John XXIII and provided for by the Council itself (pp. 228-229, 234).

Too bad Giuseppe Alberigo isn't around to hear that.

Understanding Our Being: Introduction to Speculative Philosophy in the Perennial Tradition. John W. Carlson. Washington, D. C. : The Catholic University of America Press, 2008.

Reviewed by D. Q. McNerny, Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, Denton, Nebraska.

In the Introduction to *Understanding Our Being*, John W. Carlson, who is a professor of philosophy and chairman of the department at Creighton University, takes note of the ferment in Catholic thought, both philosophical and theological, that we have borne witness to in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. "The result," he writes, "has been a good deal of diversity and uncertainty (some would say chaos) in Catholic intellectual circles" (12). Indeed. Among the more astonishing things that happened since the Council was the virtual disappearance, almost overnight, of the dominant presence of the perennial philosophy, centered around the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, in Catholic colleges and universities. The renewal of Thomism which was brought about by Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, and which was showing such vigor up to the very eve of the Council, underwent a collapse, or at least a dramatic deflation, which was every bit as remarkable, as a phenomenon, as the powerful movement into which it had developed in not much more than seven decades. It has been almost five decades now since the perennial philosophy and Thomism have been relegated to the sidelines.

But that melancholy state of affairs might very well be now a matter of history, for there is something very promising taking place in the form of a resurgence of serious interest and engagement in Thomistic studies. In recent years we have seen the publication of a number of substantive and provocative works on various aspects of Thomistic thought by scholars such as Jean Porter, Gilles Emery, O.P., John Finnis, Aidan Nichols, O.P., Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, Michael S. Sherwin, O.P., and Martin Rhonheimer. Now Professor Carlson's book can be added to this growing and impressive library.

Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical on the subject of philosophy, *Fides et Ratio*, was clearly written, in part at least, in response to the state of philosophical studies in Catholic institutions

in the latter decades of the twentieth century. He writes, stating the case in rather mild terms: "In the years after the Vatican Council, many Catholic faculties were in some ways impoverished by a diminished sense of the importance of the study of not just Scholastic philosophy but more generally of the study of philosophy itself" (sect. 61). It is a situation which very much calls for a remedy, in the form of a renewal of a Thomistic-centered perennial philosophy—"our presentation, on essential matters, will be 'Thomist'" (21)—and it was the intention of Professor Carlson, in writing his book, "to contribute to such a renewal, and especially to help make it available to students" (12). He found special inspiration in *Fides et Ratio*, and was guided in his writing by three basic requirements, laid down in the encyclical, which must be met if philosophy today is to restore the spirit of the perennial philosophy. First and foremost, philosophy must be sapiential; it must be committed to the pursuit of wisdom. Second, as a counter to the skepticism that pervades so much of modern philosophy, it must be committed to the notion that the human mind was made for the truth and is capable of attaining it. Third, philosophy must find its fitting flowering in metaphysics, where, in engaging with the full range of being, it is led inevitably to the Source of all being. Professor Carlson acknowledges that he is beholden in the development of his thought to Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, and Pierre-Marie Emonet, O.P., along with Etienne Gilson, William Wallace, O.P., and W. Norris Clarke, S.J.—certainly an illustrious group of philosophers.

Understanding Our Being is very well organized, and for that reason will efficiently fulfill its intended role as a textbook. It is divided into three major sections, entitled respectively "Being," "Our Personal Being," and "Natural Theology." Each of the three parts is in turn divided into five sections. In the first part of the book, Professor Carlson lays out a comprehensive account of the realist approach to philosophy, and then presents the foundational principles of natural philosophy and metaphysics. In his survey of natural philosophy he treats of the key distinction between substance and accident, the hylomorphic theory, the essence of change as the transition from potency to act, the four causes, the nature of time and space, the difference between

transitive and immanent action, the three degrees or orders of abstraction, and ends, with some helpful reflections on the relation between the positive sciences and the philosophy of nature. In moving into the realm of metaphysics, the first part of the book explores the seminal notions of act and potency, the distinction between essence and existence, the nature and critical importance of analogy, the transcendental attributes of being, the nature of human freedom, the principle of identity, the principle of sufficient reason, and the principle of finality.

The second part of the book is taken up with what is traditionally known as philosophical psychology, in which are to be found incisive explorations into the nature of the person. Here we find a thoroughgoing account of the nature of human knowledge, both that intellectual knowledge which can be described as properly human, and the sense knowledge on which it so completely depends. Careful exploration is given to the external and the internal senses. The second part ends with a telling treatment of the human soul, and shows how it is fitting to regard the soul as that which “founds” the person.

The third part of the book, dedicated to natural theology, deals in a constructively innovative manner with St. Thomas’s five ways for proving the existence of God. Referring to the basic metaphysical principles that are integral to the arguments, Professor Carlson appositely remarks: “The seeing of such things obviously requires mastering the insights and formulations of metaphysics” (202). This is a point completely lost on those, many philosophers included, who would dismiss the five ways out of hand as being of no real philosophical significance. Those who are ignorant of metaphysics cannot be expected to recognize the force of arguments solidly founded upon metaphysics. Professor Carlson advances the opinion, one with which I am inclined to agree, that many regard St. Thomas’s third way, the argument from contingency, as the most telling of the five arguments, although it would seem that St. Thomas himself, given his extensive elaboration of it in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, put most stock in the first way, the argument from motion, a venerable argument whose antecedents can be found in both Plato and Aristotle. Creation constitutes part of the subject matter of the third part of the book, as does eternity; in the treat-

ment of the latter Professor Carlson mounts a telling critique of the notion of “everlastingness,” as a purported appropriate alternative to the eternity of God, in which he shows how it inevitably leads to contradiction. Here we also find telling critiques of “process thought,” which might be described as a kind of latter-day Hegelianism which makes too much of becoming and not enough of being. One of the central concerns of natural theology as traditionally taught is the nature of divine providence, and how that is to be reconciled with the existence of evil, and both are treated here with good effect. A particularly interesting element in this part of the book is an analysis of John Hick’s relativistic pluralism as applied to religion. Professor Carlson shows that an anemic point of view of this sort undermines what should be philosophy’s unvarying commitment to the fact that there is truth, and that the human mind is capable of attaining it.

In all, *Understanding Our Being* provides us with a complete course in Scholastic philosophy, succinct but in every way substantive. An additional and particularly valuable feature of the book—again keeping in mind its intended purpose as a textbook—is a sixteen-page glossary, containing all those terms which have for centuries composed the basic vocabulary of Scholastic philosophy. Mention must also be made of the bibliography, which offers us a veritable treasure trove of important sources. It would be more than merely a nice thing were the perennial philosophy, centered on the thought of St. Thomas, to be restored to its rightful place as the dominant presence in our Catholic colleges and universities. It is imperative that this should happen, if those institutions are to recover an authentic Catholic identity. Given the aforementioned resurgence in Thomistic scholarship, we have good reason to hope that that restoration will in fact come about, and it will be books like *Understanding Our Being* which will play a significant role in that happy eventuality. If ever a book was timely, this one certainly is.

There are helpful summaries at the end of each section of the book, and at the end of each of the books three major parts there are “Questions for Reflections.” They are well named, for, avoiding the wooden quality of the questions found in many textbooks,

these are calculated to stimulate thought, not simply regurgitation, and for that reason have a real philosophical flavor to them. Another very helpful feature of this book is the fact that it represents an attempt, not simply to lay out in a clear and pointed way the foundational principles of the perennial philosophy, but to show how that philosophy responds to positions that are antithetical to its own. In other words, we have in the book an ongoing and constructive conversation between the perennial philosophy and the philosophical world at large, in which are to be found, specifically in sections entitled “Challenges and Opportunities,” any number of highly problematical philosophical/theological positions such as: scientism, positivism, postmodernism, nihilism, biblicism, fideism, and non-cognitivism or symbolism, the last referring to “those who hold to a purely metaphorical, or figurative, or symbolic interpretation of Biblical and similar texts” (18). There are also to be found in the book telling critiques of phenomenism and rationalism.

Moral Theology after Humanae Vitae: Fundamental Issues in Moral Theory and Sexual Ethics. D. Vincent Twomey, S.V.D., Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010.

Reviewed by William E. May, Emeritus Michael J. McGivney Professor of Moral Theology, Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America, and Senior Fellow, the Culture of Life Foundation.

This is *must* reading for everyone concerned with the state of moral theology in the Church today. Twomey, a student of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, is emeritus professor of moral theology at the Pontifical College of St. Patrick, Maynooth, Ireland, where he remained loyal to the magisterium in the turbulent years after publication of Pope Paul VI’s courageous encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*.

Twomey divides his work into two parts: Part I on moral theory, and Part II on sexual ethics. The four chapters in Part I consider (1) “The Cultural Situation” at the time the encyclical was issued and today; (2) some “Fundamental Considerations” regarding human nature, the natural law, and preliminary

remarks on conscience; (3) the “Crisis in Moral Theology,” including the philosophical context, the crisis of authority, the teaching of *Veritatis Splendor*, the meaning of intrinsically evil acts, fundamental option theory, the recovery of passions and of virtue; and (4) “Towards a Renewal in Moral Theology,” in which he considers the nature of moral knowledge and the public responsibility of theologians, with concluding reflections on conscience.

The three chapters of Part II deal with (5) “New Attitudes toward Human Sexuality” such as the Kosnik report, the Gnostic dualism characterizing dissenting theology, the true meaning of human sexuality and sexual desire, and the inseparability of love and procreation; (6) “The Passion of Love,” in which the role of passions in the moral life is taken up along with an analysis of conjugal love and marriage; and (7) “The Virtue of Chastity Revisited,” where the traditional understanding of chastity within the framework of the virtues of fortitude and temperance is set forth.

In the chapters of Part I Twomey first gives a masterful presentation of contemporary culture’s “desacralizing” of sex with the consequence that sex is understood primarily as a means to gratify desires. This secularization and desacralization has led to a hatred of procreation, the spurious right of women to abortion, and the efforts of Western nations and the UN to impose “family planning” with contraception and abortion as the best ways of preventing the birth of unwanted children.

Twomey then exposes the fallacy of theologians who contrast a so-called static or classical worldview with a “dynamic” or “historical” one according to which human nature changes radically, and who then conclude that there are no intrinsically evil acts proscribed by absolute, exceptionless moral norms. He shows that the anthropology that separates the “person,” understood as the consciously existing subject, from his or her own body, is central to the situation ethicist Joseph Fletcher and to proportionalists like Louis Janssens, who with others claims that Church teaching is a form of “physicalism, biologism, naturalism.”

He emphasizes that our “consciousness of the basic rudiments of natural law” can be understood as “primordial conscience . . . because of which we can distinguish between good and evil” (he

returns to the notion of “primordial conscience” later in considering Ratzinger’s understanding of it as a basic *anamnesis* or remembering). In human persons natural law is the work of “practical” reason and is understood by the Church as the interpreter of that “higher reason,” that is, the Wisdom of God, the eternal reason of “the Creator and Ruler of the Universe.” Because of our fallen nature, practical reason, in its task of discerning good and evil, needs to be aided by divine revelation and by faith.

Twomey sees the crisis in moral theology as rooted in the rejection of the Church’s authority: the common assumption, that acceptance of Church teaching must be based on the reasons given to support the teaching, in fact reduces Church teaching to the level of an opinion like other opinions and confuses truth with knowledge.

In the chapters of Part II Twomey begins by showing that the Kosnik understanding of sex is grounded in the Gnostic separation of the “person” from his or her body and emphasizes that “[a]ll perversion consists in the transferral of sexual desire from the face (the true self or ‘person’) to the body, with the resultant primacy of the body of the other person and so the exploitation of the other primarily on the basis of his or her sexual values.” Masterfully using the work of people like C. S. Lewis, Twomey probes the true meaning of love in its various forms and beautifully develops the meaning of marital love. In an excursus to his chapter on love he provides an excellent appreciation of Benedict’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*.

In his revisitation of chastity, he emphasizes, as did St. Thomas, the difference between continence and chastity, and in doing so shows how profoundly important the passions are in the moral life.

The final chapter of Part II offers a wonderful analysis and appreciation of *Humanae Vitae*.

My principal criticism of this excellent work is that in discussing chastity, Twomey used the thought of Josef Pieper as the basis for his presentation; I wish he had used instead the thought developed by Karol Wojtyła so magnificently in *Love and Responsibility*.

This is a most important and valuable book. Readers interested in a review essay of this work can read my piece forthcoming in the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2011).

Chicago Catholics and the Struggles within Their Church. Andrew M. Greeley, (New Brunswick, 2011), pp. xiii, 205

Reviewed by Marvin R. O’Connell

About forty-five years ago, the editor of the St. Paul archdiocesan weekly, *The Catholic Bulletin*, decided to try a journalistic experiment. Or perhaps the better term would be a trendy gimmick. This was, bear in mind, the mid-1960s, a couple of years after Vatican II, and the time when the cultural wars, which are more or less with us still, were just beginning. On the slender evidence of some protest letters I had written to the *Bulletin*—the substance of which I have long since forgotten—the editor had concluded that I was a passably literate member of the William F. Buckley, Jr., school of thought. So over a very pleasant luncheon he proposed that I write a regular column for the *Bulletin*’s op-ed page. At the same time and on the same page he planned to introduce the weekly column, already syndicated, written by Father Andrew Greeley. Thus, he explained, his readers would be engaged in what was fast becoming the life blood of contemporary journalism, ideological controversy. O’Connell the conservative and Greeley the liberal, two Irish-American priest-academics in their mid-thirties, a match made in a Catholic newspaper man’s heaven.

The experiment, alas, did not work. I like to think that the failure was not my fault, that in what I wrote every Friday (and ultimately forty-eight times a year for seven years) I adhered pretty consistently to conservative principles, at least to the degree that I understood them. But the “debate” which the editor had envisioned never developed. One reason, which he should have foreseen, was that his two combatants were not in contact with each other (I met Andrew Greeley only many years later), so that any subject matter selected by one columnist seldom related to that chosen by the other. There was plenty to argue about in such tumultuous times. Perhaps the more basic problem, however, lay rooted in Greeley’s unpredictability. He simply resisted categorization, which might be dubbed a virtue in an age of political correctness; better to eschew ideological differences by eliminating the labels. But there was nothing bland about the positions Father Greeley took on public matters; “conservative” sometimes, “lib-

eral” more often, but always aggressively and unblushingly Greeleyesque.

This has been the case over an extraordinarily prolific literary career. The syndicated column continued its commentary on current affairs, but was accompanied by a deluge of books. In the catalogue of the University of Notre Dame Libraries, Andrew Greeley is credited with no less than 180 titles. He never had an unpublished thought, observed one not unfriendly critic. Much of this vast deposit was made up of forgettable fiction, novels which pretended to illuminate the social and sometimes sexual crises within the same Irish-American Catholic community in which he himself had grown up. Over a considerable span of time two of these potboilers went to press annually, and one year there were four of them.

The rest of Greeley’s *opera*, similarly massive, stands in a far different class. He is a superbly trained sociologist who, in association with the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC), has since 1966 turned out an enormous amount of invaluable data. Most of his work has been devoted to an exploration of American Catholicism, or rather to the state and status of American Catholics during these recent, very trying decades. It is arguable that like most sociologists he may not put proper limits on the overall value of counting people, but so far as I can see—and I speak here as one less wise—Greeley has always scrupulously abided by the canons of his discipline and exhibited a high level of scholarship, combined with an awesome industriousness. To be sure, often enough his conclusions have not been welcome to ecclesiastical authorities, or, on other occasions, similarly displeasing to the prevailing liberal orthodoxy. In either case Father Greeley has never hesitated to present his version of truth to power. Indeed, it seems as though he is prepared if need be to call down the plague on nearly everybody’s house.

This characteristic shines through, I think, in his latest book (and most likely his last; he remains incapacitated more than two years after a tragic and bizarre accident which left him severely injured). *Chicago Catholics and the Struggles within Their Church* is in many respects a messy book. This is due largely to the fact that it was pasted together after Father Greeley’s accident by his colleagues at NORC. They assure the reader that

the work is essentially his, and certainly some of the text smacks of Greeleyesque punch and charm, but other parts appear to have been extracted from preliminary notes. Actually only sixty or so pages of narrative purport to come from the author’s pen; the bulk of the book is taken up by three appendices, two of which deal with the methodology employed in the study (presented in jargon comprehensible only to a sociology graduate student), and a third which reproduces several of the conversations between subjects and unnamed interviewers.

These interviews are exclusively with former Catholics, who make up nearly a quarter of the sample—“400 thousand lost lambs,” as Greeley writes, extrapolating that figure from the prior total population of the archdiocese of Chicago. “I confess,” he continues, “that I am surprised and shocked by the percentage of Catholics who have left the Church. It is double that reported only a few years ago.” The reasons for this disenchantment are many and real, and the study examines them in detail. And yet—here one sees and appreciates Father Greeley’s capacity for paradox—the bulk of those who have remained, a hearty seventy-five percent of the sample, have if anything a deeper loyalty to the faith than their forebears. This level of commitment does not, admittedly, extend to every non-creedal issue—not certainly to the proscription of artificial contraception, long a dead letter among American Catholics. But four-fifths of Chicago Catholics approve of the pope, the cardinal, and their own pastor. Ninety-five percent are raising or have raised their children as Catholic. And so the positive litany goes on, without for a moment sweeping under the rug the clear and present dangers. The situation at any rate is a far cry, says Greeley with undisguised satisfaction, from the gloom and disdain propagated by “the chatter of Chicago’s liberal Catholic elite”: a member of which he clearly does not consider himself to be.

Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam. Fred M. Donner, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. xviii + 280 pages. (Cloth) \$25.95.

Reviewed by Jude Dougherty, The Catholic University of America.

Donner makes the case that a proper understanding of Islam requires that it be examined in its beginnings against the background of religious trends that prevailed in the Near East in late antiquity, that is, from the third to the seventh century. He admits that the task is a challenge to the professional historian. Throughout his treatment of the origins of Islam he finds it necessary to distinguish between the “traditional narratives” and the hard evidence available to the historian. The traditional narratives he uses sparingly and with caution. The most important source of information about the early Community of Believers, he holds, is the Qur’an itself.

The early followers of Mohammad thought of themselves as a “Community of Believers,” open to all who believed in the oneness of God and in righteous living. Donner refers to its early years as its ecumenical period when Jews and Christians (Monophysites, probably) could be found among its members. It was later tradition, about a century after Muhammad’s time that his followers began to identify themselves as Muslims, that is, as those who submit. The Qur’an, as a written document was not available to the early Believers. It did not yet exist. Donner finds that the revelations which comprise the Qur’an did not take the form of a written book until about twenty years after the Prophet’s death. It was then that the scattered written and unwritten parts of the revelations were collected by an editorial committee and compiled in definite written form.

The Qur’an in addressing people whom it calls “Believers” sets out their basic commitments. They believed, first of all, in the oneness of God, in a strict monotheism. They are mindful and obedient to God’s will, a God who created all things and gave us life. They believed that on the Day of Judgment, the last day, the whole of mankind will be brought before God and in a final judgment consigned either to paradise or to the torments of hell. Most beliefs flowed from the centrality of the belief that God is one, not Trinitarian. Believers also held that God uses angels to intervene in mundane affairs when it is His will that they do so. Satan is recognized as a fallen angel. Sin requires atonement. Theft, adultery, infanticide, bearing false witness, and disobeying the Prophet are proscribed. Someone guilty of sin was enjoined to pray or offer a

zakat, a fine or payment in exchange for Muhammad's prayer that the sinner may be purified.

Mere intellectual acceptance of these key doctrines is not enough. One also has to live properly. One is obliged to help the less fortunate and must engage in regular prayer. Ritual prayer is prescribed for the two ends of the day. The mandate prescribing five clearly defined times for prayer occurred a century after Muhammad's death. Jihad is also an integral part of Islamic belief. It is an activist commitment to work in the cause of God. Donner finds its source in Qur'an 8.65, where the Prophet instructs Believers to fight against unbelief and even to "make great slaughter in the earth" in the struggle against unbelievers. Chapter nine of the Qur'an begins with a passage ordering the Believers to capture and to kill unbelievers by every means, but then, Donner notes, it pulls back rather abruptly and commands that unbelievers be allowed to go unharmed if they repent or if they ask the Believers for protection. Protection required the payment of a special tax, *dhimma*.

The story of Islam as Donner constructs it begins with Muhammad's consolidation of political power over Medina, his justification of raiding parties, his conquest and occupation of Mecca and the town of Ta'rif in western Arabia, and his organized military expeditions in the north against Tabuk. Once he achieved sufficient power he dispensed with the policy of making alliances with pagan tribes, something previously necessary in his struggle with Mecca. He announced a new policy of non-cooperation with polytheists; they were to be attacked and forced to acknowledge God's oneness. By the end of Muhammad's life, the Believers were not merely a religion with an emphasis on God but a militant pietistic movement bent on aggressively searching out and destroying what its members considered practices odious to God. Following the death of Muhammad the Islamic conquests lasted, with various interruptions, for roughly a century and carried the Believers as far as Spain and India.

The expansion of the Community of Believers and the struggle for leadership occupies the greater part of this volume and concludes with Donner's account of the emergence of Islam under the Umayyads. Donner reminds his readers that the Qur'an provides no direct information on the expansionist

movement. Here, he says, one must rely on the traditional narratives, which, as a professional historian, he finds "very problematic." Given the clarity of his prose, one may hope that he plans a second volume carrying the story forward. Like Ignaz Goldziher's classic work, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, written a century ago, this book has the ring of truth where so many of the volumes recently published by university presses seem partisan or merely apologetic works. A not insignificant merit of *Muhammad and the Believers* is the appendix wherein Donner provides his notes and an extensive guide for further reading.

Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person, Gilbert Meilaender. New Atlantis Books, 2009, Pp.118. \$21.95

Arland K. Nichols, Associate Director, Converging Roads: Bioethics, Health Care and Catholic Teaching, San Antonio, Texas

"God made the angels to show his splendor, as he made the animals for their innocence and plants for their simplicity. But man he made to serve him wittily in the tangle of his mind."

Sir Thomas More speaking to his daughter, Margaret, in "A Man for All Seasons"

The second creation account emphasizes that man, the *imago dei*, experiences original solitude after his creation. Even though he is alone with God and walks with Him, he is not a god, so God seeks to create a helper fit for him. But, among the beasts fashioned by His Creator and named by Adam (signifying his dominion over them), no suitable partner can be found. Man's original solitude is only overcome when God fashions woman from Adam's very rib so that Adam can say, "At last, this one is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." We see in this account of creation a rich theological exposition and a foundation for Gilbert Meilaender's thesis: Man is neither beast nor God, and an authentic account of the dignity of the person will cohere with this theological and anthropological truth. When we strive to be a God, as we see in Genesis chapter three, we lose ourselves, and when we degrade ourselves by imitating the beasts, we no longer recognize that

we are our brother's keeper.

A member, from 2002-2009, of the now-defunct President's Council on Bioethics, Gilbert Meilaender has written a cogent defense of the concept of dignity by rooting dignity in a proper anthropology and by considering the implications of dignity for human life. *Neither Beast, Nor God* is a development and deepening of his essay, "Human Dignity: Exploring and Explicating the Council's Vision," published in the Council's 2008 report on human dignity. This report, *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics*, reveals a lack of consensus concerning the nature of dignity, its meaning, and its usefulness as a concept. Meilaender's paper and the current book under review argue that dignity is a fitting concept that serves as a placeholder for what is characteristically human.

Meilaender suggests that there are three basic characteristics of the human being. 1) "Preservation and Purpose" is expressed in the work of the human organism in sustaining its life through openness to and exchanges with the world. Humans engage purposively with the world through metabolic processes, and the capacity for perception, emotion, movement, and reflection. We, by nature, have a purpose: we are not bound by the matter of which we are made, but by "the deepest principle of life" which is "appetite or desire" (13). 2) "Procreation and Sacrifice." Meilaender emphasizes that by nature we yearn for a complementary union with another; sexual desire directs the individual to marriage. The end of this desire is children, who reveal the fundamental self-sacrificial nature of marital intercourse. For Meilaender the *telos* of sexual desire/*eros* is to "produce children who will replace us" (14). I do not disagree. However, I would like to observe that for Meilaender this universal concerning the relationship between children and marital intercourse has no intrinsic bearing upon the sexual act itself, as expressed by a Catholic articulation of natural law. Rather, for Meilaender, children follow the sexual act as a sort of tertiary, optional effect for the sake of the "one flesh union." He believes children are necessary to propagate the species, but does not hold that procreation is a necessary element of the marital embrace itself. Children, Meilaender stresses, are the *telos* of *eros*, but

a child is not the inherent *telos* of every specific act of *eros*. As stated in his 1998 contribution to the *First Things* symposium on contraception, “If a husband and wife want to hold together within their marriage the love-giving and life-giving purposes of sex, they must ‘make love’ not as the other animals mate but in ways that will fittingly and appropriately realize and sustain each of these purposes [children, unity and family] within a union of one flesh.” The use of contraception is “a right use of reason” in support of the one flesh union. This reveals a poverty in his thought, and in my estimation will weaken later arguments against Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART). 3) “Love and Worship.” Our longings, openness to the world, desire to live well, and dread of death reveal a desire for God, a desire to be in relation with Him and to encounter the very truth of God. It is for Him that we yearn so deeply. In the end, being human only makes sense in relation to God.

Meilaender distinguishes between two different ways of speaking of the dignity of the human person. “Human dignity” is realized in the “kind of life” that upholds our nature as such. Concerned with powers and limits, we manifest our dignity by living according to our nature, or we subvert our human dignity when we make ourselves out to be a god or when we act as the beasts. Living lives unworthy of our nature can diminish our dignity. To put it plainly, sin attenuates our dignity; a life of virtue expresses and augments our dignity. Human dignity will be manifest in some persons more than in others, and certain sorts of actions will make us more dignified than others. “Personal Dignity” on the other hand, is that dignity possessed by virtue of being an individual person regardless of one’s powers or limitations. It is intrinsic to the human person, and is a fundamental base which ought to inform and illuminate our human dignity. We can offend personal dignity or ignore it. But it cannot be destroyed, as personal dignity admits of no gradation. These two different ways of speaking of dignity are common and, one might argue, essential in discourse today. “In general, we cannot make sense or achieve sympathetic understanding of appeals to the concept of dignity unless (whatever terminology we choose to use) we distinguish human dignity from personal dignity, for they involve differ-

ent sorts of claims” (84).

In chapter three, with a focus on human dignity, Meilaender emphasizes the need to rekindle a sense of gratitude and wonder at being human. He does so with a wary eye directed toward “transhumanism,” which seeks to use biotechnology in order to modify, enhance, and fundamentally change the human being. “Transhumanism” makes us ask why we should want to “remain human.” In this context we must appreciate the hallmark of human dignity, the “in-betweenness” of our condition; that is to say, the recognition that the person is both body and soul. As articulated in his report to the President’s Council, “We should not seek to live in disembodied ways more suited to gods than to human beings, nor should we treat our bodies as if they were things utterly open to our manipulation” (pg 272). Since we increasingly have the capacity to do so, why not destroy “what is distinctively human about ourselves” for the sake of becoming more advanced (21)? Meilaender echoes *Dignitas Personae* n. 4, which emphasizes that eugenic and transhumanistic practices “cannot be utilized when they involve the destruction of human beings or when they employ means which contradict the dignity of the person or when they are used for purposes contrary to the integral good of man.” He addresses “transhumanism” by turning to procreation, children and the family—the goods (one might argue) which are most vulnerable with the move toward transhumanism.

Meilaender states that the cause of our failing to recognize “the dignity of the relation between parents and children was first compromised in our thought, not in our technologies of reproduction” (27). With an exaggerated sense of autonomous choice, our notion of procreation has shifted away from the begetting of children that recognizes them as ends themselves towards a stale reproduction of children. Meilaender notes that “the child is not a product, but a gift or a blessing” and is “an internal fruition of an act of love” (34). However, his argument against artificial reproduction is relatively impotent and seems to be inconsistent with his view that the marital act is not intrinsically procreative. Likely as a result of his commitments to the goodness of contraception (at least when it does not lead to childless marriages), Meilaender does not recognize children as the par-

ticular *fruit to which every marital act must be open*, or as the *intrinsic “crowning glory” of specific acts of marital intercourse*. This is not unimportant, as it is precisely upon the intrinsic relationship between the procreative and unitive meanings of the marital act that the Church decries illicit ARTs. As *Dignitas Personae* n. 16 emphasizes, “The Church moreover holds that it is ethically unacceptable to *dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act*: human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution.” While Meilaender articulates that ARTs place children at the disposal of the powerful who make them, and then subjects them to quality control like any other product, his argument is ultimately only capable of establishing a universal, namely, that ARTs are “incompatible with understanding the child as the *telos*—not of our own choosing—of the work of being human” (34). But here one must note that children are not solely the “work of being human,” but the particular work or end of a specific human act, marital intercourse, which is *intrinsically* procreative. Furthermore, though he laments that through ARTs we now see “reproduction as autonomous choice,” the irony is that he views the marital act as the sort of act which may be dominated by autonomous choice (“the intervention of human reason and will”) to such an extent that we may *subvert its very meaning* by deliberately making it infertile. He argues against the production of children by ARTs by stating “When we disaggregate the sexual act into its parts, using the body for our purposes... the nature of the act is changed” (34). But if this is true, (and it is) it is entirely contradictory to his position on contraception. His approval of depriving the marital act of its procreative meaning, as we see in contraception, lends credence to the separation of the unitive meaning from procreation, as we see with *in vitro* fertilization. If the “intervention of human reason and will” can legitimately render a conjugal act infertile, upon what basis can there be a proscription against an “intervention of human reason and will” when that intervention is through ARTs? If one may disaggregate the sexual act into its parts by means of contraception, one cannot argue against ARTs based upon the principle that one may not disaggregate the sexual act of its parts. The center does not hold, or, more

precisely, there is no consistent center in his argumentation. It is difficult to envision how Meilaender's argument against ARTs can hold up to scrutiny if he believes that one may autonomously choose to change the meaning of the very act that is meant, by nature, to engender new life. Meilaender is absolutely correct that "the dignity of the relation between parents and children was first compromised in our thought, not in our technologies of reproduction" (27).

Peter Lawler has described Meilaender as "a rather extreme theist—that is, an Augustinian." Nowhere is his appreciation of Saint Augustine more evident than in his chapter on childhood. Appealing to the Doctor of Grace's famous, "You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you," Meilaender argues that children need "nurture and direction" toward the good—God—and that immediate reliance upon medication (Ritalin etc.) to quiet their restlessness and discontent does not recognize who they are as children. Often we do not appreciate the full humanity of children, treating them as a mere body that must be medicated in order to achieve the desired result of a productive and mature adulthood. He suggests that we should not view childhood as an intermediate or "prospective state," nor the child as a potential adult, but rather the child ought to be treated as a person, possessing a special dignity. Childhood as such is of particular import. At the same time, we want children to become "a person of a certain sort" (50). As human persons, we must foster their development of both body and mind—they are, after all, human beings—neither beast nor God.

In his discussion of death, Meilaender recognizes that human dignity is displayed in how one lives rather than in how long one lives. Recalling that the particular nature of the person is neither beast nor God, Meilaender argues that living a longer life is an "unqualified good" because death is an "offense," and "an enemy" that "puts an end...to a unique and irreplaceable person" (74). At the same time death "is not simply an evil." To believe that death is an unqualified evil is to fail to perceive the "destiny" of the human being—the beatific vision. Aging, the breakdown of our bodies, and the reduction of our capacity to enjoy goods points to the transitory nature of our lives as well as the goal

of our lives—God. Meilaender contends that the experience of our finitude "is integral to the dignity of being human" (74). By encountering death with virtue, one can flourish in terms of his human dignity. On the other hand, by grasping for death prematurely, one diminishes his dignity by harming those relationships (God, neighbor, and self) which are so fundamental to our in-betweenness. One ought not seek death prematurely. After all, "we cannot master the very event that announces to us our lack of mastery" (74).

His final chapter focuses on the equal personal dignity of each human being. Each person, Meilaender emphasizes, possesses dignity equally, but as individuals we each display human dignity quite differently. So the person who has diminished his dignity by his evil actions, for example, still possesses the dignity that is his by dint of his being a person who is a member of the species and *by virtue of his equidistance from God*. Each person is of equal worth before God. Human dignity, then, is subordinate to personal dignity, though "the dignity of our humanity and the dignity of our person...coinhere" (103). "Between the concepts of human dignity and personal dignity there is a dialectical relationship. Each needs the other to supplement its central concern. We need the language of human dignity to talk about matters that involve the integrity and flourishing of the human species, and we need the language of personal dignity to express respect for persons regarded as equal and non-interchangeable individuals" (87).

Meilaender's distinction between human and personal dignity is found in the typical way in which "dignity" is used within Catholicism. For example, William E. May articulates similar distinctions in his *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (pg. 41-44). Along with May, I would like to suggest that there is a third type of dignity recognized within the Catholic tradition; namely, the dignity accrued to us by virtue of our divine adoption as sons and daughters of the living God in our Baptism. This "infused dignity" is pure gift, and builds upon the dignity we possess by virtue of our human nature. It comes to us by means of grace and through those virtues which are infused in God's benevolence. The gratuitous gift of God's life, given at Baptism, nourished in the other Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, deifies us even as it augments human and

personal dignity. Likewise, the infused virtues do not radically change what we are, but elevate us to heights that we cannot accomplish merely of our own accord.

Gilbert Meilaender's *Neither Beast Nor God* is a valuable contribution to the public discourse on the concept of dignity. If that discourse will be effective, clarity in the use of terminology is essential. Meilaender's book is an articulate expression of the usefulness of the concept of dignity and helps to define the terms that are so essential to preserving the integral good of that singular being who is *Neither Beast Nor God*.

Infinite Bandwidth: Encountering Christ in the Media, Eugene Gan. Foreword by Fr. Mitch Pacwa, S.J.
Emmaus Road Publishing; ISBN 978-1-931018-67-8

*Reviewed by Christopher Chapman,
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Diocese of Pittsburgh*

Dr. Eugene Gan, an associate professor of interactive media at Franciscan University of Steubenville, has put-together a well-structured and accessible discussion on how Catholics can and should interact with the many new forms of media that have appeared and proliferated over these past 10-15 years. He studiously avoids being either too sanguine or too negative. The entire discussion takes place with a view toward virtuous engagement of media and a realistic appraisal of what is good and what is bad, and/or what must be negotiated on a case by case basis. This wide-ranging discussion encompasses video games, movies, blogs, television, cell-phones, and just about every other device or medium that currently flirts for our attention. Though wide-ranging, the discussion is remarkably disciplined and engaging just like a good classroom or story.

The overarching structure of the book is based on 7 key principles, or "keys" as he calls them, which Dr. Gan argues should be the guiding principles that ground a person's decisions on what, how, and when to use technology and media. He deftly weaves together scripture quotes, snippets of Vatican documents, practical examples, and sound thinking

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to build a template on the habits of mind and heart that should be in place to make virtuous decisions. Each chapter introduces a new key, as he builds his picture of the virtuous media user.

While articulating these 7 keys, Dr. Gan beautifully integrates other elements of the Catholic tradition. He affirms the bodily nature of our humanity and the importance of the senses. He reiterates fundamental truths of the Catholic faith, such as the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice. His use of Vatican documents reminds us of the importance of consulting authority to form our consciences properly. His wide-ranging knowledge of film and video-games punctuates the text with interesting examples that remind us of the beauty of legitimate diversity and human creativity.

In a book that refers to the virtue of fortitude, Dr. Gan exhibits this virtue himself, by calling attention to how seductive the media can be about controversial contemporary subjects such as homosexuality, euthanasia, etc. For instance, his discussion of the critically acclaimed movie *Milk* draws needed at-

tention to the manipulation of thoughts and feelings about homosexual activity through art, where ultimately the truth about the human person is undermined through skillful movie making. At other points in the book, he offers up arresting counter examples of movies and media where the truth about the human person shines forth.

He makes some fine distinctions about the violence of *Saving Private Ryan* as compared to a movie such as *Nightmare on Elm Street*. He carefully articulates how context and presentation can change the meaning and significance of violence in a film. The former movie is actually about human dignity, sacrifice, and nobility, precisely because of the way it depicts violence, while the latter clearly violates all questions of dignity and decorum. Both movies contain graphic violence, but each calls for a different judgment from the mature Catholic.

At the end of each chapter, under the headings of *Prayer, Research, Ask Questions, Integration, and Passing it On*, Dr Gan repeats practical suggestions for helping to build the right habits to make

correct judgments. Perhaps this feature highlights the greatest strength of the book; in discussing the many facets of technology, the author takes great pains to lay down the right principles that will lead to virtue. Consequently the book exudes a clear and firm evangelization and catechesis directed toward producing more mature Catholics. Like all good teachers, he lays out a plan and a picture to engage the students with provocative questions and observations, always deftly avoiding becoming a scold or bitter in the process.

This is a dynamically good book that could be profitably used by high school teachers, youth ministers, undergraduate professors, parents and teenagers. *Infinite Bandwidth* is as much about the human person as it is about technology. Whether you download this to your e-reader or buy a good old-fashioned print copy, this is profitable reading.

Christopher Chapman is Director of Secondary School Catechesis and Associate Director of Youth and Young Adults, Diocese of Pittsburgh

BOOKS RECEIVED

If you would like to receive a complimentary copy of one of the books below in order to review it for a future issue, please email your request to Alice Osberger at osberger.1@nd.edu

Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone. True Stories of Divine Wonders, Miracles and Messages. Elizabeth Ficocelli. Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, LLC, (2010), paper.

The Little Way of Lent: Meditations in the Spirit of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Fr. Gary Caster. Cincinnati: Servant Books, (2010) paper.

The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion. Nicholas E. Lombardo, O.P. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, (2010), 319pp., paper.

More Christianity: Finding the Fullness of the Faith. Fr. Dwight Longenecker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, (2010), 275pp., paper.

Preach the Word: Homilies on the Sundays and Feasts of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. Kenneth Baker, S.J. Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's, (2010), paper.

Treatise on Human Nature, The Complete Edition, by Thomas Aquinas. Translated by Alfred J. Freddoso. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, (2011), 353 pp., paper.

The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism. Edward Feser. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, (2008), 291 pp., paper.

My Correct Views on Everything. Leszek Kolakowski. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, (2011), 284 pp., paper.

Both Sides of the Altar. Frank Morgan. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, (2011), 214 pp., paper.

Conscience Protection at Risk

By William Saunders

In October 2010, at a central European meeting with pro-life colleagues, I learned that in a few days there was going to be a vote in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning rights of conscience. The vote was on the “McCafferty Report,” which strongly recommended significant restrictions on rights of conscience. For instance, the Report “oblige[s] the healthcare providers to provide” (emphasis added) abortion in cases of “emergency.” “Emergency” here does not mean what you and I would think; rather, the term was defined in the Report to include any threats to the woman’s “health.” “Health” is, in turn, an endlessly elastic term stretched by courts to include any situation, no matter how insignificant. In essence, the Report would have required the sacrifice of conscience rights whenever an abortion was vigorously sought.

The Parliamentary Assembly’s vote would not, under European laws, bind any state. But the political propaganda value of such a vote against conscience would be immense. With a favorable vote in hand, anti-life forces would be able to badger governments to restrict conscience rights based on the argument that such a vote represented a “European consensus.” And, of course, anti-life collaborators within those governments would readily agree that it did. (This argument based upon an alleged “European consensus” has been used by anti-life forces in other contexts as well, including the recently-decided *ABC v. Ireland* abortion case.) My pro-life European friends expected the McCafferty Report to pass easily.

In the event, however, the vote turned out to be a minor miracle. Instead of adopting the anti-conscience recommendations of the Report, pro-life parliamentarians succeeded in adopting recommendations much more favorable to conscience rights. Yet they

still required that healthcare providers refer patients for those procedures to which “the patient is legally entitled” (which includes abortion), but which the provider refuses to perform.

I recount all this to illustrate that attacks on rights of conscience in health care are not limited to the United States. They are going on everywhere. And I think it is no exaggeration to see such rights as being dangerously at risk.

In the United States, we can expect conscience rights to be restricted very soon. In December, in a lawsuit challenging the conscience protection regulations enacted by the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) at the end of the Bush administration, but which remain in effect and thus bind the Obama administration, government attorneys, on behalf of the administration, informed the court, in writing, that HHS would issue its “revision” of the Bush regulations by the end of this month—in other words, by the end of February. The administration had issued an “intent” to revoke those regulations in the first weeks of Obama’s presidency, but had not so far done so. Thus, the court forced the Obama administration to make its intention clear. Now the question is whether the Obama administration will “revoke” or “revise” or, as many think likely, pretend to revise while doing so in a way that amounts to revocation. We shall soon see.

Conscience protections under U.S. federal law are disorganized and haphazard, consisting of three separate provisions, enacted years apart. HHS under President Bush wished to clear up misunderstanding about the extent of federal conscience protection and make sure HHS would have regulatory authority to enforce it; its solution was to issue the conscience protection regulations, which Obama is moving to rescind.

The mere *existence* of the regulations, however, is no guarantee they will be *enforced*. For instance, Obama’s HHS seems disinclined to do so in a particularly egregious case, the case of Nurse Cathy Cenzone-DeCarlo. She was required to participate in an abortion despite conscience objections. A federal court, in a suit brought by DeCarlo, held

that individuals whose conscience rights under the federal law were violated, *nevertheless* lack the right to sue to enforce those laws. Enforcement, in other words, is left to HHS. So far Obama’s HHS has declined to do so.

Nurse DeCarlo is also pursuing a case in state court in New York. In the United States as well as many other countries, conscience protection is not left solely to national law. In the absence of national law, the individual states are free to enact conscience protections. Americans United for Life and other organizations have developed model laws that can be adopted by state legislatures. Idaho adopted AUL’s comprehensive conscience protection model law last year, though efforts are already underway by anti-life forces to amend it so that healthcare providers must assist suicide, if Idaho legalizes it. Of all the states, Alabama is most in need of enacting conscience protection laws.

The issue of conscience protection reduces to this: should someone involved in healthcare (including institutions) be required to perform—or to assist in, or to refer a patient to someone else who will perform—a procedure he or she believes is morally wrong? With the legalization of abortion and assisted suicide, anti-life advocates argue that it is only reasonable that healthcare professionals should be required to perform “legal medical procedures,” and, unfortunately, much of the public will agree, not recognizing the conscience issues hidden therein.

Freedom of conscience needs all the help it can get these days, both within and outside the United States. Anti-life forces are determined that freedom of conscience be eliminated. In this context, it was regrettable that the Bush administration waited until the last days of its eighth year to issue federal regulations. But it would be much worse if, as expected, the Obama administration revokes them altogether.

William Saunders is Senior Vice President of Legal Affairs at Americans United for Life. A graduate of the Harvard Law School, he writes frequently on a wide variety of legal and policy issues.

SPEAKERS FUND

This past year the Fellowship was able to match an anonymous challenge grant of \$10,000 for the development of a special fund to support the travel and lodging expenses of the speakers at our annual conventions. So, I am happy to report that we now have some \$20,000 in this fund. Needless to say, such a fund could be easily exhausted, and so we need to continue to build it up.

If you would like to make a donation or suggest someone whom we could approach, please contact me at: koterski@fordham.edu

Rev. Joseph. W. Koterski, S.J.
President of the Fellowship

Issue #	Scheduled publication date:	Manuscripts are needed by:	Special topic
34/2	Summer 2011	May 1, 2011	Role of episcopal authority in regards to religious orders
34/3	Fall 2011	Aug.1, 2011	The ecclesiology of <i>Communio</i> and the demands of loyalty
34/4	Winter 2011	Nov. 1, 2011	Reiki, Healing Touch, the New Age

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Robert Drinan, S.J. and Catholic Moral Theologians Failed the Kennedys on Abortion in 1964

In his *The Birth of Bioethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), Albert Jonsen, a religious ethicist and former Jesuit, gave an eyewitness account of an historic meeting that took place in Hyannisport, Massachusetts, at Bobby Kennedy's home in the summer of 1964. Sargent Shriver, the brother-in-law of Teddy and Bobby Kennedy, invited to the Kennedy home the Dean of Boston College Law School, Robert Drinan, S.J., Dr. André E. Hellegers, soon to be the founder and first Director of Georgetown's Kennedy Institute of Ethics, and five Catholic moral theologians: Joseph Fuchs, S.J., Richard McCormick, S.J., J. Giles Millhaven, S.J. (no longer a Jesuit), Albert Jonsen, S.J., and Charles Curran. The purpose of the meeting was to help the two Kennedy brothers "formulate a political stance on abortion that would be compatible both with Catholic teaching and with the political climate of the country" (p. 290). This stance would accept the immorality of abortion, but not argue for its legal prohibition in every instance.

Invoking the thought of John Courtney Murray, S.J. (whether justifiably is a debatable point), Fr. McCormick distinguished Catholic moral teaching on abortion from the feasibility of making abortion illegal. According to Jonsen's recollection, McCormick echoed the thought of the other four moral theologians in arguing "that the translation of a rigorously restrictive ethics of abortion into law was unlikely to be enforceable or to achieve its positive goals without significant attendant social evils" (p. 291). Jonsen says that McCormick and the other moral theologians favored the approach taken by the American Law Institute in their 1962 model statute on abortion, which allowed abortion in a limited number of circumstances. Then, without criticism, Jonsen reports that Drinan's public comments on abortion legislation at a 1967 Harvard conference, reiterated what he said privately at Hyannisport: "One way to avoid the necessity of making these choices [carving out exceptions to the legal prohibition of abortion as suggested by the American Law Institute] would be for the law to withdraw its protection from all fetuses during the first 26 weeks." *Roe v. Wade* gave Drinan what he wanted and then some, since it established an unlimited right to abortion.

Teddy Kennedy did not adopt a full-fledged pro-choice position until the early 1970s. Even as late as August 3, 1971, Teddy wrote to a constituent the following: "When history looks back to this era it should recognize this generation as one which cared about human beings enough to halt the practice of war, to provide a decent living for every family, and to fulfill its responsibility to children from the moment of conception." Caroline Kennedy, Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, and Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend also adopted pro-choice positions.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article Anne Hendershott reports a 1984 reflection by Giles Millhaven on the upshot of the Hyannisport meeting. Speaking to Catholics for a Free Choice Millhaven said, "All theologians present at the meeting agreed that 'a Catholic politician could in good conscience vote in favor of abortion.'"

To what extent did Drinan and the five moral theologians influence the Kennedys to adopt pro-choice positions? It is hard to answer this question with certitude. Writing in the *Boston Globe* about the meeting forty years later (May 23, 1984), Scott Stossel, author of a book on Sargent Shriver, said the Kennedys and Shriver met with "the country's leading Catholic theologians" and "heard the latest Catholic thinking on the issue." Stossel then wrote, "Abortion, as McCormack (sic) would later write, should . . . be 'legally acceptable if the alternative is tragedy, but unacceptable if the alternative is mere inconvenience.' This became, in essence, the stance adopted by Bobby and Ted for their [Senate] campaigns that year."

Even without Stossel's testimony, one could surmise that the theologians' advice would have an influence on the Kennedys, who wanted to hear that they could support some legalization of abortion with a clear conscience. With the passage of time the limited legalization of abortion that McCormick favored did not stand a chance of prevailing in the minds of Catholic politicians in competition with Drinan's acceptance of removing all restrictions on abortion for the first twenty-six weeks of pregnancy.

What can be said with certitude is that Drinan, Hellegers, and the five moral theologians passed up a golden opportunity to educate Sargent Shriver and the

Kennedys about a great work they could accomplish for America. The learned academics could have attempted to persuade the Kennedy household to take up the challenge of maintaining the protection of children “from the moment of conception.” They could have explained how difficult this would be in the coming years, but that they would be supported by so many in the Catholic community, especially by Catholic intellectuals and the U.S. bishops. With this kind of help and the prestige of the Kennedy name, so much could have been accomplished. Instead, the learned Catholics succumbed to the lure of being accepted by the secular elites. They decided to go along with the drift of the culture instead of finding reasons to oppose the first movements of the culture of death with reasons prompted by love. They hid from themselves their abdication of responsibility by judging that political prudence dictated deference to public opinion and “pluralism” before making an all-out effort to protect the unborn by means of scholarship, education, and political action.

Imagine if the learned academics had spoken, for example, like Cardinal Francis George, John Paul II, Walker Percy, and Gov. Robert Casey on the necessity and importance of giving the unborn the protection of the law. Several years ago Cardinal Francis George said, “Laws that place unborn children outside the protection of law destroy both the children and the common good, which is the controlling principle of Catholic social teaching. One cannot favor the legal status quo on abortion and also be working for the common good.” Back in 1988 Pope John Paul II addressed the same issue in his book-length exhortation on the vocation and mission of the laity. “Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other rights, is not defended with maximum determination.”

As for the long term effects of abortion on the nation, consider what the well-known Catholic novelist Walker Percy wrote in a 1988 letter on abortion to *The New York Times*, which the newspaper chose not to publish. There are serious consequences to accepting the proposition that “innocent human life can be destroyed,” as the Nazis proclaimed and implemented. “At any rate, a warning is in order. Depending on the disposition of the majority and the opinion polls—now in favor of allowing women to get rid of unborn and unwanted babies—it is not difficult to imagine an electorate or a court ten years, fifty years from now, who would favor getting rid of useless old people, retarded children, anti-social blacks, illegal Hispanics, gypsies, Jews.” Some of these possibilities may seem quite far-fetched, but not all. Eugenic abortion, female-targeted abortion, euthanasia, and deep prejudice against Hispanic immigrants are already upon us. Insightful novelists often see things before the rest of us.

Finally, attend to these heartfelt words pro-life Democrat Robert E. Casey delivered at the University of Notre Dame in 1995. “And so, it is for me the bitterest of ironies that abortion on demand found refuge, found a home—and it pains me to say this—found a home in the national Democratic Party. My party, the party of the weak, the party of the powerless. . . . [L]egalized abortion . . . is inconsistent with our national character, with our national purpose, with all that we have done, and with everything we hope to be.”

With words like those of Cardinal George, Pope John Paul II, Walker Percy, and Gov. Robert Casey, the moral theologians, Robert Drinan, and Dr. Hellegers could have perhaps moved the Kennedys to be leaders in the movement to protect unborn human life. ✕

J. Brian Benestad
Editor

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