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## Fellowship of Catholic Scholars

Scholarship Inspired by the Holy Spirit,  
in Service to the Church

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**Reminder:** Membership dues will be mailed out the first of the year and are based on a calendar (not academic) year.

## THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# Faith and Prayer in the Life of Academics

by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.

When Pope Benedict XVI came to Madrid for the 2011 World Youth Day, he also gave his attention to a number of other groups. He visited at some length with the handicapped. He spoke to a large group of consecrated women religious. And, of especial relevance for those with our *métier*, he addressed an assembly of young professors.

Significantly, he chose the magnificent monastery at the Escorial as the venue for speaking with them about the relation of faith and reason. Many of them had just participated in the World Congress of Catholic Universities in Avila on a theme that has so often engaged us in the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, "The Identity and Mission of the Catholic University." This very setting spoke volumes of the witness that Catholic scholars can give when their lives integrate prayer and study.

Mindful of his own experience as a young professor at the University of Bonn—especially the poverty of Germany immediately after the Second World War and the confusion in the universities that resulted from the collaboration of some professors with the Nazis—Pope Benedict urges those involved in academe to bear in mind the real demands of this calling in the present situation. "The theme of the present World Youth Day, 'Rooted and Built Up in Christ, and Firm in the Faith,'" he says, "can also shed light on your efforts to understand more clearly your own identity and what you are called to do." He puts special focus on the words "rooted, built up and firm" as pointing to Christ as the solid foundation on which to construct our lives.

From the long battles that many of us have fought in our own institutions we will readily recognize the soundness of his advice. Part of the situation is undoubtedly structural: the content of the core curriculum, the scandal of institutional support for certain health-care programs that contravene Catholic teaching, the efforts to balance genuine academic freedom with requests to stage inappropriate and even immoral theatrical activities, the compromises invariably required by financial exigencies, and the challenges of retaining a Catholic character in the faculty of our institutions when increasing numbers have more loyalty to their professions than to their religion or their local institution.

In this address Pope Benedict puts his focus on one of the personal aspects of the situation—the personal witness that a Catholic professor needs to give, whatever the institutional arrangements. He urges his listeners to bear in mind the challenges facing their students:

“Where will young people encounter those reference points in a society which is increasingly confused and unstable?”

He rejects the widespread idea that the mission of a university professor is exclusively to form competent and efficient professionals. Over and against this sort of utilitarian approach to education, he appeals to the memory of what drew us to our professions in the first place: “You who, like myself, have had an experience of the University, and now are members of the teaching staff, surely are looking for something more lofty and capable of embracing the full measure of what it is to be human. We know that when mere utility and pure pragmatism become the principal criteria, much is lost and the results can be tragic: from the abuses associated with a science which acknowledges no limits beyond itself, to the political totalitarianism which easily arises when one eliminates any higher reference than the mere calculus of power. The authentic idea of the University, on the other hand, is precisely what saves us from this reductionist and curtailed vision of humanity.”

In these few lines Pope Benedict connects the personal and the public. He bids us to remember the personal experiences that elicited from us a commitment to the long years of study and research that gave us the knowledge and the credentials to serve in institutions of higher learning. But he also reminds us of the social consequences of intellectual life, and especially of the tragic consequences that flow from allowing mere utility and pure pragmatism to provide the principal criteria for decision-making. Whether it be in that kind of scientific research that becomes forgetful of the intrinsic dignity of human subjects (for instance, experimentation on embryonic human beings that brings about their destruction) or in that kind of medicine that treats the dying as a source of organs for transplantation rather than respects the vulnerable dying person, there is considerable danger in allowing the pragmatic principle of “maximizing utility” to replace the traditional principle of “do no harm.”

Pope Benedict’s focus is not restricted to the medical and the technological. In the same passage he makes reference to the possibilities of political totalitarianism as increasing to the extent that decision-making processes allow no considerations other than the mere calculus of power. These are questions for law and business as well as for the arts and humanities. As he notes, “In truth, the University has always been, and is always called to be, the ‘house’ where one seeks the truth proper to the human person. Consequently it was not by accident

that the Church promoted the universities, for Christian faith speaks to us of Christ as the Word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:3) and of men and women as made in the image and likeness of God. The Gospel message perceives a rationality inherent in creation and considers man as a creature participating in, and capable of attaining to, an understanding of this rationality. The University thus embodies an ideal which must not be attenuated or compromised, whether by ideologies closed to reasoned dialogue or by truckling to a purely utilitarian and economic conception which would view man solely as a consumer.”

The pope’s recurrent theme in the entire address is the personal responsibility of each professor to live up to the educational mission involved in working at a university. We are part of a “chain of men and women committed to teaching the faith and making it credible to human reason. And we do this not simply by our teaching, but by the way we live our faith and embody it, just as the Word took flesh and dwelt among us.”

Living this mission is both a matter of doing good work in our professions and of making honorable choices in our ways of life. “Young people need authentic teachers: persons open to the fullness of truth in the various branches of knowledge, persons who listen to and experience in own hearts that interdisciplinary dialogue; persons who, above all, are convinced of our human capacity to advance along the path of truth. Youth is a privileged time for seeking and encountering truth. As Plato said: ‘Seek truth while you are young, for if you do not, it will later escape your grasp’ (*Parmenides*, 135d). This lofty aspiration is the most precious gift which you can give to your students, personally and by example. It is more important than mere technical know-how, or cold and purely functional data.”

The fascinating reference here to a text by Plato reminds us of the relevance of time, change, and personal maturation. We do well to remember the intellectual passions of our youth and the experiences that life has brought to us in the time since. “I urge you, then, never to lose that sense of enthusiasm and concern for truth. Always remember that teaching is not just about communicating content, but about forming young people. You need to understand and love them, to awaken their innate thirst for truth and their yearning for transcendence. Be for them a source of encouragement and strength.”

Perhaps individually we do some regular examination of conscience about the daily events of our lives, but the Pope also calls us to include in that examination of

conscience some regular concern for the way in which we live our callings. "For this to happen, we need to realize in the first place that the path to the fullness of truth calls for complete commitment: it is a path of understanding and love, of reason and faith. We cannot come to know something unless we are moved by love; or, for that matter, love something which does not strike us as reasonable."

In these remarks Pope Benedict cautions us against the compartmentalization of life that can easily become an excuse for keeping our personal lives and our faith separate. In giving this reminder he quotes briefly from his most recent encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*: "Understanding and love are not in separate compartments: love is rich in understanding and understanding is full of love" (§30). What he proposes as a personal task for each of us is to work at a consistency in life and thought that is crucial for the ability to inspire others that is demanded of every good educator.

Pope Benedict is also mindful here of the need for humility and for real faith. His counsel here directs us to join prayer and study: "We need to recognize that truth itself will always lie beyond our grasp. We can seek it and draw near to it, but we cannot completely possess it; or put better, truth possesses us and inspires us. In intellectual and educational activity the virtue of humility is also indispensable, since it protects us from the pride which bars the way to truth. We must not draw students to ourselves, but set them on the path toward the truth which we seek together. The Lord will help you in this, for he asks you to be plain and effective like salt, or like the lamp which quietly lights the room (cf. Mt 5:13). All these things, finally, remind us to keep our gaze fixed on Christ, whose face radiates the Truth which enlightens us."

It is no surprise that an old professor, now the pope, had a special light in his eyes when addressing fellow professors. We all do well to take his words to heart. ✠

PAPAL ADDRESS

# Pope Benedict XVI's Address to Young Professors on August 19, 2011

Dear friends, I have looked forward to this meeting with you, young professors in the universities of Spain. You provide a splendid service in the spread of truth, in circumstances that are not always easy. I greet you warmly and I thank you for your kind words of welcome and for the music which has marvelously resounded in this magnificent monastery, for centuries an eloquent witness to the life of prayer and study. In this highly symbolic place, reason and faith have harmoniously blended in the austere stone to shape one of Spain's most renowned monuments.

I also greet with particular affection those of you who took part in the recent World Congress of Catholic Universities held in Avila on the theme: "The Identity and Mission of the Catholic University."

Being here with you, I am reminded of my own

first steps as a professor at the University of Bonn. At the time, the wounds of war were still deeply felt and we had many material needs; these were compensated by our passion for an exciting activity, our interaction with colleagues of different disciplines and our desire to respond to the deepest and most basic concerns of our students. This experience of a "Universitas" of professors and students who together seek the truth in all fields of knowledge, or as Alfonso X the Wise put it, this "council of masters and students with the will and understanding needed to master the various disciplines" (*Siete Partidas*, partida II, tit. XXXI), helps us to see more clearly the importance, and even the definition, of the University.

The theme of the present World Youth Day—"Rooted and Built Up in Christ, and Firm in the Faith" (cf. Col 2:7) can also shed light on your efforts

to understand more clearly your own identity and what you are called to do. As I wrote in my Message to Young People in preparation for these days, the terms “rooted, built up and firm” all point to solid foundations on which we can construct our lives (cf. No. 2).

But where will young people encounter those reference points in a society which is increasingly confused and unstable? At times one has the idea that the mission of a university professor nowadays is exclusively that of forming competent and efficient professionals capable of satisfying the demand for labor at any given time.

One also hears it said that the only thing that matters at the present moment is pure technical ability. This sort of utilitarian approach to education is in fact becoming more widespread, even at the university level, promoted especially by sectors outside the University. All the same, you who, like myself, have had an experience of the University, and now are members of the teaching staff, surely are looking for something more lofty and capable of embracing the full measure of what it is to be human. We know that when mere utility and pure pragmatism become the principal criteria, much is lost and the results can be tragic: from the abuses associated with a science which acknowledges no limits beyond itself, to the political totalitarianism which easily arises when one eliminates any higher reference than the mere calculus of power. The authentic idea of the University, on the other hand, is precisely what saves us from this reductionist and curtailed vision of humanity.

In truth, the University has always been, and is always called to be, the “house” where one seeks the truth proper to the human person. Consequently it was not by accident that the Church promoted the universities, for Christian faith speaks to us of Christ as the Word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:3) and of men and women as made in the image and likeness of God. The Gospel message perceives a rationality inherent in creation and considers man as a creature participating in, and capable of attaining to, an understanding of this rationality. The University thus embodies an ideal which must not be attenuated or compromised, whether by ideologies closed to reasoned dialogue or by truckling to a purely utilitarian and economic conception which would view man solely as a consumer.

Here we see the vital importance of your own mission. You yourselves have the honor and responsibility of transmitting the ideal of the University: an ideal which you have received from your predecessors, many of whom were humble followers of the Gospel and, as

such, became spiritual giants. We should feel ourselves their successors, in a time quite different from their own, yet one in which the essential human questions continue to challenge and stimulate us. With them, we realize that we are a link in that chain of men and women committed to teaching the faith and making it credible to human reason. And we do this not simply by our teaching, but by the way we live our faith and embody it, just as the Word took flesh and dwelt among us.

Young people need authentic teachers: persons open to the fullness of truth in the various branches of knowledge, persons who listen to and experience in [their] own hearts that interdisciplinary dialogue; persons who, above all, are convinced of our human capacity to advance along the path of truth. Youth is a privileged time for seeking and encountering truth. As Plato said: “Seek truth while you are young, for if you do not, it will later escape your grasp” (*Parmenides*, 135d). This lofty aspiration is the most precious gift which you can give to your students, personally and by example. It is more important than mere technical know-how, or cold and purely functional data.

I urge you, then, never to lose that sense of enthusiasm and concern for truth. Always remember that teaching is not just about communicating content, but about forming young people. You need to understand and love them, to awaken their innate thirst for truth and their yearning for transcendence. Be for them a source of encouragement and strength.

For this to happen, we need to realize in the first place that the path to the fullness of truth calls for complete commitment: it is a path of understanding and love, of reason and faith. We cannot come to know something unless we are moved by love; or, for that matter, love something which does not strike us as reasonable. “Understanding and love are not in separate compartments: love is rich in understanding and understanding is full of love” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 30). If truth and goodness go together, so too do knowledge and love. This unity leads to consistency in life and thought, that ability to inspire demanded of every good educator.

In the second place, we need to recognize that truth itself will always lie beyond our grasp. We can seek it and draw near to it, but we cannot completely possess it; or put better, truth possesses us and inspires us. In intellectual and educational activity the virtue of humility is also indispensable, since it protects us from the pride which bars the way to truth. We must not draw students to ourselves, but set them on the path toward the truth which we seek together. The Lord will help you in this,

for he asks you to be plain and effective like salt, or like the lamp which quietly lights the room (cf. Mt 5:13).

All these things, finally, remind us to keep our gaze fixed on Christ, whose face radiates the Truth which enlightens us.

Christ is also the Way which leads to lasting fulfillment; he walks constantly at our side and sustains

us with his love. Rooted in him, you will prove good guides to our young people. With this confidence I invoke upon you the protection of the Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom. May she help you to cooperate with her Son by living a life which is personally satisfying and which brings forth rich fruits of knowledge and faith for your students. ✠

## ARTICLES

## Chaput's Unconvincing Critics

by William L. Saunders

Considering the subtitle of Michael Sean Winters's attack upon the newly selected Archbishop of Philadelphia, Charles Chaput, to wit, "The problem with Culture Warrior Bishops," one is tempted to remark that the "trouble" is that there are *far too few* of them. But that would be to accept Winters's misleading and unhelpful characterization of the issue, and that would be a mistake.

It is difficult to imagine a time when Catholic teaching was as challenged as it is now. As we know, marriage formation rates are low, and marriage maintenance rates are, if anything, worse. Many young people demand both a right to live with their girlfriend (or boyfriend) and the "right" to a Catholic marriage. Regarding marriage itself, there is a determined, organized effort to redefine it to include same-sex relationships, which has met with success in, among other places, the New York legislature and the California courts.

The federal government funds research directly tied to the destruction of the smallest, youngest, most defenseless, and most dependent of human beings—the embryo—and some states, teetering on the brink of bankruptcy (such as California), rush to do likewise. This is done in the name of a "greater good" (curing suffering) while neglecting the elemental fact that the very idea of the common good is contradicted when some members of the human family are defined outside the protection of the law. In America, abortion is still legal, for any reason and during all nine months, pursuant to legal opinions by the Supreme Court (*Roe v. Wade*, *Doe v. Bolton*, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*) that scholars on the left as well as the right regard as laughable.

If Catholic teaching on matters of life and death and marriage and the family were purely sectarian, it nonetheless seems to me that, given the existence of the "legalized" wrongs mentioned above, no one could fairly object to Catholic leaders calling upon Catholics to do something about it. But of course, those teachings are anything but sectarian. They are addressed to "people of good will" and seek to secure the common good, not a Catholic good, but a common good, for all citizens. The reason it is reasonable for those teachings to address all citizens (including Catholics) is that the matters addressed are fundamental to a free and virtuous society.

For instance, it is a mockery of the very concept of "social justice" to think a society can be "just" when it kills over 3,000 of its children every day. As Mother Teresa taught the assembled magnates when she won the Nobel Prize, "the unborn are the poorest of the poor." Pope John Paul II put it clearly: The right to life is the "first right;" without its guarantee it is meaningless to speak of other "rights"—nothing can be guaranteed if freedom from arbitrary killing is not.

Likewise, matters that were once purely science fiction (think *Brave New World*) are now scientifically possible (human cloning, human embryonic stem cell research, genetic manipulation). Indeed, an industry may soon be built upon the scavenged bodies of embryos (through stem cell research).

If one merely understands the scientific fact of when life begins (a commonplace of embryology), one sees that killing those unborn is wrong, and it beggars the imagination that any society can hope to achieve "equality" with such a deep contradiction at its core.

Does marriage matter? Social science research

shows that for a society to be healthy, healthy marriages are needed. Thus, the Church sanely teaches: “a family policy must be the center and driving force of all social policy.”

Does it matter who marries whom? No, if marriage is simply about emotional fulfillment of adults. But, if marriage is instead about the best interests of children rather than adults, if it is about the perpetuation of society itself, if it is about (most importantly) finding the proper structure for the expression of sexuality, then, yes, it matters a great deal. The consequences of a misunderstanding of human sexuality surround us—indeed, they threaten to submerge us—broken marriages, kids raised without one (or both) parents, sexually transmitted diseases, teen suicide, depression, *etc., etc., etc.*

And anyone with eyes to see will notice one thing: on all these matters, legal changes were acquiesced in, if not lead by, self-identified “Catholic” politicians.

Any bishop who calls attention to these things is

not a “warrior,” as Winters asserts; he is merely being honest. If a man sees his home ablaze and cries, fire, he is not being reactionary; he is merely reacting properly, for there is no way to put out the fire—and eventually to re-build the house—unless someone calls attention to the fact that it is now burning down.

Charles Chaput is one of the kindest, gentlest men you can imagine. He does not thunder, he does not condemn; rather, he simply and clearly tells it like it is. He repeats the teaching of the Church, a teaching that is meant for the common good and which benefits us all, a teaching about fundamental human rights.

Philadelphia is lucky to get him. And we all will benefit—Catholics and non-Catholics alike—when, as is likely, he is elevated to the College of Cardinals. He is a man of good common sense and moral courage. What is there to complain about? ✠

*William L. Saunders is an attorney in Washington, D.C.*

# The Pursuit of “Success” in Catholic Higher Education

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by James Hitchcock, *St. Louis University*

**A** turning point for Catholic higher education was the 1955 essay by the historian Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life,” which argued that the Catholic universities were inferior to secular schools in terms of scholarly achievement. Over the next half century the Catholic schools embarked on a concerted effort to “overtake” those secular schools.

But the thirst for academic respectability was not their sole motive. Discussion of the Ellis thesis was vague as to which secular institutions were being invoked. St. Louis University, for example, was clearly not the academic equal of Harvard, but how did it compare to the University of Missouri? Catholic educational reformers compared the Catholic schools only to the most elite secular institutions, a comparison in which the Catholic schools were bound to be deficient.

The discussion was also carried on primarily among professors, who assumed that everyone saw higher education in a professorial way. The Harvard

faculty were regarded as on the whole more scholarly than the faculty of Boston College, but was that the reason parents wanted to send their children to Harvard? Ultimately the prestige of a university does depend on the quality of its faculty, but such reputations are built by a very indirect process, and most parents (and most students) know very little about the scholarly achievements of the professors.

Amidst all the controversy over the nature of Catholic higher education, the word that is perhaps the key to the entire issue has, fastidiously, rarely been uttered. That word is “success.”

Despite the predominant spirit of vocationalism, higher education retains a certain nostalgic attachment to the idea of disinterested truth, so that many educators are still squeamish about acknowledging the degree to which worldly success is their ultimate “product.”

As Princeton in the late nineteenth century ceased to be a training ground for Presbyterian clergy, Woodrow Wilson announced a new agenda—“Princeton in the nation’s service,” educating students to work for the good of the nation and the world, usually in public

life. Over the next century enough graduates did so to make the claim plausible, but this obscured the fact that most alumni pursued conventional careers in business or the professions.

The increasingly heavy costs of higher education force most parents and students now to be concerned primarily with its tangible benefits, and few are willing to shoulder enormous debts simply to insure, for example, that students learn to appreciate poetry under the tutelage of the best literary critics.

Rather, the desired benefits of higher education have to do primarily with access—to yet more prestigious education, at the professional level; to career opportunities; to networks of personal contacts that may be useful throughout life. If along the way the student does acquire a genuine liberal education, that is an optional bonus.

In this as in so many other ways, the Kennedy family serves as the prime American Catholic exemplar. Joseph Kennedy Sr. wanted his sons to attend secular schools, while his daughters could be educated by nuns, because women did not have to make their way in the world as men did.

Joseph Sr. attended Harvard, but what he got from it in terms of education was not at all obvious, and his sons could scarcely be called intellectuals, despite efforts to portray John F. Kennedy as such. (Famous for having brought Pablo Casals to the White House, Kennedy fell asleep during the concert.)

The significance of the writings of Father Andrew Greeley—both his sociology and his novels—has not been adequately understood, which is his dual role as both a detached recorder and an exuberant celebrator of the worldly success of American Catholics.

In the mid-1960s he announced the surprising finding that, next to Jews, Irish-American Catholics (his own ethnic group) were the most prosperous religious group in the United States (a finding that held only if Protestants were not subdivided more precisely, as, for example, into white Episcopalians).

A few years earlier Greeley had announced with satisfaction that American Catholics were faithful in observing the Church's teaching about birth control. But at the end of the decade he proclaimed angrily that *Humanae Vitae* alone accounted for almost all those who had left the Church since the Second Vatican Council.

Exactly what Greeley's statistics showed, and how he arrived at them, remain unclear. What is relevant is that by the end of the 1960s it had occurred to him, and to everyone else who was paying attention, that

Catholic sexual morality was disdained by enlightened opinion, as represented, for example, by *The New York Times* or the University of Chicago faculty.

The failure to use contraceptives was itself seen as an obstacle to Catholic social advancement, since historically a declining birth rate is correlated with rising prosperity. By 1970 self-consciously enlightened parents were boasting that they had decided to have only one child, so to be able to give that child "the best of everything," including the best (and most expensive) education.

Thus Greeley's findings were welcomed because they demonstrated that Catholics had become sensible, in seeing the need to limit the size of their families, and that their economic success showed that they had transcended their immigrant roots. In their rejection of *Humanae Vitae* and other moral teachings, Catholic liberals reduced the rich 2000-year-old Catholic tradition to merely "the immigrant Church" now being rapidly left behind. (Joseph Kennedy Sr. despised Boston Irish culture.)

Beyond the alleged necessity of population control, Catholic sexual morality was disdained by enlightened opinion simply for what it was. The descendants of the New England Puritans, having long ago thrown off the burden of their own past, considered Christian sexual morality repressive and backward.

The fact that ecumenical relations were not encouraged before Vatican II meant that Catholics had an inadequate, primarily textbook knowledge of Protestantism and so did not understand the real issues. Most Protestants were thought to believe in "*sola scriptura*," for example, and Episcopalians were thought to be like Catholics except for belief in the pope. The reality, however, was that "mainstream" Protestants had largely abandoned their own traditions, so that a major difference between Protestants and Catholics was simply that Catholics took religion more seriously. This was itself cause for liberal Protestant alarm, as the sudden reappearance of a supposedly moribund Evangelicalism soon became cause for even greater alarm.

Part of the process by which Catholics have become "mainstream" in American life is that they too now take their faith less seriously. They have, as Greeley the sociologist found to his satisfaction, "invented new ways of being Catholic."

Greeley's novels have been criticized as inappropriately "sexually explicit." But whatever their author may intend, they can be looked upon as a kind of fictionalized sociology. Greeley came to understand at some point that social and economic success is often accompanied by a relaxed attitude toward sex. Thus his novels



and his sociology both record and celebrate the way in which upwardly mobile Irish American Catholics now behave, even as his novels shows that not even priests retain the old prudishness.

Greeley once proposed that President Kennedy be declared a doctor of the Church, and the Kennedys, along with the Daleys of Chicago, serve as actual models of the path of Irish American assimilation. Mayor Richard Daley Jr. retained political power in Chicago by embracing the very people who despised his father and by embracing precisely those issues—abortion, homosexuality—that were anathema to the working-class Catholic culture from which his father emerged.

John F. Kennedy made liberalism seem stylish and exciting and conservatism seem stodgy, and the Democratic Party, having ceased to be the party of the working class, has served as a major vehicle by which Catholics have “emancipated” themselves from the demands of their faith.

Despite disclaimers, President Obama’s 2010 appearance at the University of Notre Dame was welcomed not solely because he is America’s head of state but because he represents the epitome of enlightened politics.

His presence was intended to witness to the fact that such provincial Catholic issues as abortion are not important enough to interfere with the real purpose of his visit, which was to confer standing on the univer-

sity, an achievement that was, however, to some extent marred by vociferous protests that showed the continued existence of a backward constituency.

Over the years there have been numerous protests, some of them successful, against the appearance of various Republicans at prestigious schools. The Catholic University of America is not thought to have lost status because in 2011 many of its faculty opposed having House Speaker John Boehner address its graduates. This is not mere partisanship in the narrow sense—protests against Boehner helped the university’s prestige in some quarters by showing that many of the faculty hold appropriate opinions on public issues.

Kenneth Woodward, a Notre Dame graduate who was formerly religion editor of *Newsweek*, hailed Obama’s Notre Dame appearance as “quite a coup,” and a writer in the Jesuit magazine *America*, Michael Sean Winters, enthused that “. . . we are thrilled such a distinguished Catholic university is considered such a part of the life of the nation.” To liberal Catholics generally, the university’s very ability to attract Obama showed that in certain ways it had indeed “caught up” to Harvard.

Students at Catholic universities may in fact be under a cloud of suspicion in applying for certain jobs or applying to medical schools that do not want students who are pro-life. But, as Notre Dame’s 2010 graduates prepared to go out into the world, they were once again assured of the worth of their diplomas. ✠

# Doctrinal Clarity for the New Evangelization: The Importance of *Lumen Gentium* 16

by Ralph Martin

**B**lessed John Paul II’s repeated calls for a “new evangelization” are well known. And now Benedict XVI has institutionalized this emphasis on evangelization with his establishment of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization and his choice of topic for the next World

Synod of Bishops to be held in 2012, namely, the “new evangelization.”

In this study I would like to identify one aspect of the ecclesiology of Vatican II that is central for a well-founded understanding of the importance of evangelization. It is an aspect that is often overlooked. Vatican II clearly teaches that it is possible to be saved without explicit faith in Jesus and incorporation into the Church,

but at the same time it teaches, although this teaching is much less known, that such salvation is not to be presumed and, indeed, faces considerable obstacles.

Being clear about what Vatican II actually teaches about the fundamental reason for evangelization is important because we are increasingly living in the midst of a “culture of universalism,” even within the Church, a culture which seriously undermines the urgency to evangelize. If it is the case that virtually everyone is ultimately saved, and there is minimal risk of being lost, the urgency to evangelize is considerably lessened. Not only is the urgency to evangelize lessened but also the motivation to resist temptation, to live a life of holiness and self-sacrificial love, and the motivation to become a priest or enter religious life.

John Sachs, S.J., in a lengthy article on universal salvation that appeared in *Theological Studies*, expresses what he claims is the current Catholic theological consensus.

We have seen that there is a clear consensus among Catholic theologians today in their treatment of the notion of apocatastasis and the problem of hell. . . . It may not be said that even one person is already or will in fact be damned. All that may and must be believed is that the salvation of the world is a reality already begun and established in Christ. Such a faith expresses itself most consistently in the hope that because of the gracious love of God whose power far surpasses human sin, all men and women will in fact freely and finally surrender to God in love and be saved.

When Balthasar speaks of the duty to hope for the salvation of all, he is articulating the broad consensus of current theologians and the best of the Catholic tradition. Like other theologians, notably Rahner, he intentionally pushes his position to the limit, insisting that such a hope is not merely possible but well founded. . . . I have tried to show that the presumption that human freedom entails a capacity to reject God definitively and eternally seems questionable. And, although this presumption enjoys the weight of the authority of Scripture and tradition, it would seem incorrect to consider this possibility as an object of faith in the same sense that the ability of human freedom in grace to choose God is an object of faith.<sup>1</sup>

While neither Rahner, Balthasar, nor Sachs formally teaches universalism, the questions they raise about whether it is really possible for human freedom to finally reject God have contributed to an atmosphere of universalism. If I were to describe how many Catholics today think about the issue of the likelihood of those

who are not explicitly Christians being saved, I would describe it like this:

Wide is the gate and easy the way that leads to salvation and many there are who are entering by it. Narrow the gate and difficult the way that leads to hell and few there are who are taking that way.

The difficulty with this prevailing mentality is that it is the exact opposite of what Jesus teaches about our situation.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mt 7:13-14) RSV

Or the parallel text in Luke:

Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” He answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’ Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where (you) are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!’” (Lk 13:23-30) NAB

These are not isolated texts. The whole message of the NT is that one does not enter the kingdom by drifting along with the prevailing culture, the “broad way” of Mt 7:13-14.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the clarity and ubiquity of the “two ways” theme in both the Old and New Testaments<sup>3</sup> the question must be addressed: But what does Vatican II teach about this?

The primary text from Vatican II that most thoroughly and authoritatively deals with this question is *Lumen gentium* 16.<sup>4</sup> There are two other Vatican II texts that deal with this question that should be noted: *Ad gentes* 7, and *Gaudium et spes*, 22. Since *LG* as a Constitution is considered the “keystone” of the documents of Vatican II, and other documents often explicitly ground their teaching by referencing it, we will focus, in this short article, only on the *LG* 16 text, since *AG* explicitly relates its teaching to the theological framework of *LG* and *GS* 22 specifically cites *LG* 16 as a basis for its teaching.

LG 16 is only ten sentences long. The first four sentences explain how “those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways.” The Jews, Moslems, and “those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God” are specifically mentioned. The “relatedness” is clearly a nonsalvific relatedness. A footnote cites Aquinas’s teaching on the “potential” for membership in the Church that exists in every human being (*ST* III, q. 8, a. 3, ad 1) as grounding for this “relatedness.”<sup>5</sup> Because of the restraints of a short article we will focus on the last six sentences that treat of how salvation for various categories of non-Christians might be possible, and the difficulties in fulfilling these conditions.

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience<sup>6</sup>—those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel<sup>7</sup> and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.

We will designate the above three sentences of LG 16 as LG 16b. The Council here is teaching that under certain very specific conditions salvation is possible for non-Christians. What are these conditions? That non-Christians be not culpable for their ignorance of the Gospel. That non-Christians seek God with a sincere heart. That non-Christians try to live their life in conformity with what they know of God’s will. This is commonly spoken of as following the natural law or the light of conscience. It is important to note, as the Council does, in order to avoid a Pelagian interpretation, that this is possible only because people are “moved by grace.”

That non-Christians welcome or receive whatever “good or truth” they live amidst—referring possibly to elements of their non-Christian religions or cultures which may refract to some degree that light that enlightens every man (Jn 1:9). These positive elements are intended to be “preparation for the Gospel.” One could understand this to mean either a preparation for the actual hearing of the Gospel or preparation for, perhaps,

some communication of God by interior illumination.

There is a very important doctrinal clarification contained in the footnote in this section that references the *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston*,<sup>8</sup> which, issued in 1949, gave an important ruling on Father Leonard Feeney’s strict interpretation of the theological axiom *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*.<sup>9</sup>

To make a long and fascinating story very short: while originally the axiom seems to have been primarily intended to indicate the gravity of heretics and schismatics separating themselves from the Church, therefore seriously violating unity, charity, and obedience, it later was extended to cover all “outsiders” as well. With the discovery of the “new world” and its vast unevangelized populations a theological ferment began which eventually reached a certain consensus and found Magisterial confirmation in the encyclical of Pope Pius IX, *Quanto conficiamur moerore*, published in 1863.<sup>10</sup> The position taken in this encyclical essentially prepared the way for LG 16.

It is known to Us and to you that those who labor in invincible ignorance concerning our most holy religion and who, assiduously observing the natural law and its precepts which God has inscribed in the hearts of all, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life can, through the working of the divine light and grace, attain eternal life, since God, who clearly sees, inspects and knows the mind, the intentions, the thoughts and habits of all, will, by reason of his supreme goodness and kindness, never allow anyone who has not the guilt of willful sin to be punished by eternal sufferings.<sup>11</sup>

In the same encyclical Pius IX also reaffirmed the necessity of the Church for salvation and noted that those who are “contumacious against the authority and the definitions” of the Church or “who are pertinaciously divided” from her “cannot obtain eternal salvation.”<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, an important distinction must be kept in mind. Just because people are not culpably ignorant does not mean that thereby they are saved. Their personal response to the illumination that God gives is required. As Father Sullivan puts it:

For the first time in the history of the Catholic Church, we have papal authority for explaining that this axiom means: “No salvation for those who are *culpably* outside the Church”.... It is important to note *how* Pope Pius said they can be saved, because he has sometimes been taken to

mean that people can be saved by ignorance, or merely by keeping the natural law. If one reads his statement carefully, one sees that being “invincibly ignorant of our most holy religion” is a *condition* that must be fulfilled to avoid culpability, but is in no sense a *cause* of salvation. Neither is it correct to say that people are saved merely by keeping the natural law; this would be to fall into Pelagianism, of which Pius IX is surely not guilty. The operative words in his statement are: “through the working of the divine light and grace.” It is this that effects salvation, provided, of course, that people freely cooperate with divine grace.<sup>13</sup>

The *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston* sums up this long doctrinal development and makes some very important clarifications about the kind of “implicit” faith or “unconscious” desire or longing that are needed to be considered salvific, the kind of response to grace that is necessary. The *Letter* make clear that a rather “high level” of implicit desire is required for the possibility of salvation to be realized.

But it must not be thought that any kind of desire of entering the Church suffices that one may be saved. It is necessary that the desire by which one is related to the Church be animated by perfect charity. Nor can an implicit desire produce its effect unless a person has supernatural faith: “For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11: 6). The Council of Trent declares (Session VI, chap. 8): “Faith is the beginning of man’s salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God and attain to the fellowship of His children” (DS 1532).<sup>14</sup>

Since supernatural faith and charity are necessary for salvation it is clear that not just any metaphysical or vague acknowledgement of God or “religion” or “morality” is sufficient in itself for salvation. Some kind of personal response to grace that involves a surrender in obedience to God who reveals himself, with an accompanying measure of the conforming of one’s life (charity) to his will as he makes it known and as he gives grace to live in harmony with it, and persevere in it to the end, is essential for salvation.

The Council doesn’t clarify how this all precisely happens but there is an interesting body of theological reflection that attempts to throw light on this question.

There continues to be significant theological reflection on how exactly it might be possible for someone

who is inculpably ignorant<sup>15</sup> of the Gospel to actually come to supernatural faith and charity without the “propositional clarity” of positive revelation. Rahner points to the probability of there being more dimensions to human consciousness than we have traditionally understood.

There must be more dimensions to human consciousness in its knowing and free decision making, more foreground and background, more data, verbalized or not, accepted or repressed, than traditional theology has explicitly recognized.<sup>16</sup>

Both Pagé<sup>17</sup> and Journet cite Maritain as one who has made a significant contribution in understanding how this might be possible. Journet posits two kinds of “lights” that come to human beings from God. One is “prophetic light” that illumines things that we must perceive for our salvation. The other is “sanctifying light” that calls us to assent to what is illumined in the prophetic light.<sup>18</sup> Journet extensively quotes Maritain<sup>19</sup> on how this process may possibly take place in a “pre-conceptual” manner among those who do not know the Gospel. Maritain himself bases his reflections on the teaching of St. Thomas (*ST I-II*, q. 89, a. 6) concerning the theological significance of the first human act of an unbaptized child.<sup>20</sup> Maritain’s point, following Thomas, is that contained in that first moral act—if it is an act that chooses the good—there may be an embryonic or rudimentary response to a prophetic and sanctifying light given by God that may actually involve a supernatural faith that is salvific, although quite vulnerable and perhaps unstable if it does not come to consciousness.

With this pre-conceptual, pre-notional knowledge, through the will, of the “good which brings salvation,” of the “good by which I shall be saved,” we receive the least degree of prophetic light necessary in order that theological faith should be able to come into action and make the understanding, really, actually, supernaturally, assent to the mystery of the God who “exists,” and who “rewards those who try to find him.” [Based on Hebrews 11:6, the two foundational beliefs—credibilia—that must be present for salvation.]

But this is a provisional, unstable, dangerous state of faith, a state of childhood; and knowledge of the mysteries of salvation will require that it should leave the shadows, be perfected, reach an adult state, and find its first conceptual expression in the two basic “credibilia.”<sup>21</sup>

Étienne Hugueny makes an even stronger point about the instability and fragility of such a first moral choice.

The good influences of the environment are unfortunately insufficient to prevent the falls and often the corruption of the will in formation; indeed, few there are who are able to resist the evil influences of the environment in which they are developing. It's therefore common that the young unbeliever, in a pagan environment, will follow the inclination of his corrupt nature and the evil example of the environment where he lives, when the hour arrives for him to choose his primary orientation to his moral life. Avoiding therefore the call of God, the number of negative infidels [this refers to unbelievers who have not yet made a positive choice against God but are unbelievers because of the environment of unbelief in which they grow up] will grow, who by a first sin against God who presented himself to their reason, have placed an obstacle to interior illumination or to exterior revelation, through which God would have given them the gift of faith, bringing to perfection their first religious idea.<sup>22</sup>

To casually jump from the possibility of people being saved without hearing the Gospel, under certain specific conditions, to the presumption that almost everyone is probably saved, is not warranted by the text of *LGb* and the theological and doctrinal tradition of the Church within which it explicitly situates itself. Still less is it warranted by the scriptural foundations of our faith that are specifically cited in the last three sentences of *LG 16*, which we will designate *LGc* and to which we will now turn.

Many commentators mention only the second part of the teaching of *LG 16* that we are considering (*LGb*) about the possibility under certain conditions of people who have never heard the Gospel being saved, ignoring the doctrinal specifications of the important footnote, and either briefly mentioning or more often, completely ignoring the third part of the teaching, the last three sentences of *LG 16*, which points out that very often these conditions are not met<sup>23</sup>

But very often (*at saepius*),<sup>24</sup> deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and served the world rather than the Creator (cf. Rom 1:21, 25). Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Hence to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all these, the

Church, mindful of the Lord's command, "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:16) takes zealous care to foster the missions.

In other words, even though it is possible under certain very specific conditions for people who have never heard the Gospel to be saved, the environment in which such people live is not a "neutral" environment. It is the environment of original and actual sin, personal and social, that is so tellingly described in Romans 1—the whole chapter needs to be considered when understanding what the Council intends by the short citation given—and which more and more is coming to characterize even the environments of previously Christian cultures and civilizations. It is an environment of hostility to God, culpable suppression of the truth, rationalization and justification of abominable behaviors, and the disintegration of personal identity and relational cohesion. It is an environment in which as the societal supports for respect for God and his Law are stripped away it becomes more and more an environment in which "demonic lies" can be infiltrated into the lives of many, even many within the Church, through "plausible liars," and the destruction of human lives and relationships becomes manifest in an unrestrained lawlessness.<sup>25</sup>

Fr. Francis Martin speaks of the often subtle individual responsibility in this suppression of the truth, but he also recognizes the creation of a *culture* that is constructed on a suppression of the truth. In commenting on the Greek word for "suppression," Martin says:

The verb used here designates the source of all that follows, pointing as it does to the way of a culture that has designed itself to be impervious to the evidence of God. However, the expression speaks most of all of a subtle interior movement by which what is dimly grasped is prevented from growing into full knowledge.<sup>26</sup>

Most commentators focus on the individual's responsibility, but Martin broadens the discussion, which is important for the situation we are facing today, to include the reality of a culture of suppression and the particular responsibility of the leaders in constructing such a culture.

It is important to realize that this suppression is initially personal, on the part of some leaders who shape the culture, and then also communal or cultural in that the resulting lack of the knowledge of God and

the consequences of this becoming embodied in the institutions and thought world of the society. Paul is condemning a *culture* and is uncovering . . . the root cause of an aberration that is so mysteriously easy to generate and perpetuate and finally results in a culture that becomes a bondage.<sup>27</sup>

The actual condition of the culture in which theology happens can very much influence its preoccupations and even its conclusions. The theology done in a Christendom situation was different from theology done when the Church was illegal and persecuted. As we transition into a post-Christendom situation in the West and deal increasingly with cultures that are hostile to Christianity, our theology and our pastoral strategies will be impacted. Parts of Scripture that did not “resonate” or “make sense” will again make sense. The analysis of hostility to God and the personal and social decay found in Romans 1, which wasn’t applicable in the same way at other times in the Church’s historical embodiments, is becoming increasingly applicable and relevant to our own contemporary situation.<sup>28</sup>

As Father Francis Martin puts it in his study of John’s Gospel as it relates to evangelization:

The essential action of the Paraclete in this passage [Jn 16:7–11] is to prove that the world is culpably wrong, to establish its culpability as world. The difficulty arises when we seek to define the recipient of this action. Is it that the world is brought to acknowledge its sin or that the believers are given irrefutable proof that the world is in sin? Basically, it must be the second. If the world were able to acknowledge its sin, it would no longer be the “world,” that is, a place which, despite the fact that there is still room for freedom and choice, is nevertheless at its depths a demonic, universe of refusal and rejection. . . . The root sin of the world is refusal to believe in Jesus and the place he holds next to the Father as the Revelation of the Father, the root sin is to reject the Truth. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath” (Jn 3:36).<sup>29</sup>

LG 16 as it locates its teaching firmly within the biblical world view of Romans 1, and the doctrinal tradition of the Church, shows how appropriate a “hermeneutic of continuity” is in the interpretation of this important text. Closely read, LG 16 reaffirms the basic biblical and doctrinal traditions that make of evangelization not simply an “enrichment” for those who are already for the most part “anonymously Christian,” or

an “extra” for those who won’t ultimately be able to resist the offer of salvation anyway, no matter what they do, but an urgent responsibility concerning the salvation of many. Those many who are loved by God and for whom Christ died who have not responded in faith and charity to the light that God has given them but have “exchanged the truth for the lie,” culpably suppressing the truth, and have been given over to “foolish thinking” and destructive behavior, desperately need to be called to repentance and faith, for the sake of their salvation. As Joseph Fitzmyer, in his commentary on Romans, puts it:

Paul regards this futility of thinking and misguided conduct as manifestations of the wrath of God, not provocations of it. He realizes that *only the apocalyptic light of the gospel can penetrate such darkness*.<sup>30</sup>

The “new evangelization,” if it is to be successful, must embody a doctrinal clarity that a careful reading of LG 16 can provide. ✠

## ENDNOTES

- 1 John R. Sachs, “Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell,” *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 252–253.
- 2 The traditional interpretation of this text is that it means what it says; that many are heading to destruction and comparatively fewer are heading to salvation. Some modern commentators, uncomfortable with the traditional interpretation, look for alternate interpretations. The attempts to neutralize the text are well described by B. F. Myer, “Many (= All) are Called, but Few (= Not All) Are Chosen,” *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 1 (1990): 89–97. Of the various attempts he identifies he thinks only one has any merit, that is, to try to ascertain the underlying Aramaic which does not have the clarity that the Greek has when referring to the many and the few. But, as the International Theological Commission pointed out in its document on eschatology, “Some Current Questions in Eschatology,” in *International Theological Commission, vol. II, Texts and Documents 1986–2007*, ed. Michael Sharkey and Thomas Weinandy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 72, the Greek of the New Testament is no less inspired than the Hebrew of the Old Testament: “Looking at matters from another perspective it cannot be supposed that Hebrew categories alone were the instrument of divine revelation. God has spoken ‘in many and varied ways’ (Heb 1:1). The books of Sacred Scripture in which inspiration is expressed in Greek words and cultural concepts must be considered as enjoying no less authority than those which were written in Hebrew or Aramaic.” The Greek words for many and few are not ambiguous in their meaning. Attempts to get behind the Greek to the Aramaic, while of interest, cannot replace our close attention to the inspired Greek text. John P. Meier, *Matthew: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, ed. Wilfrid Harrington, Donald Senior, *New Testament Message*, vol. 3. (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1980), 72–75, thinks it is important to see Mt 7:13–14 as part of the whole concluding discourse to the Sermon on the Mount with a strong eschatological framework that underlines the seriousness of Jesus’ teaching being followed in light of the impending judgment and separation of those who are on very different paths. He sees Matthew as using “antithetical parallelism” contrasting the two gates, the two ways, sheep and wolves, two types of trees, two foundations, as describing two

types of disciples who despite external similarities live totally different lives before God. The current mixture in the Church will be revealed and separated at the final judgment. (*Lumen gentium* 14 transmits the same teaching.) Meier points out that the future tense used in these parables of judgment is important to note. They show that the words of Jesus are not empty threats. The judgment will happen and will happen in accordance with the criteria that Jesus mercifully reveals to us. While Meier sees this text as referring to those who are actually members of the Church, the situation of those not explicitly members of the Church is even more challenging. As Peter puts it: “For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?” (1 Pt 4: 17-18). Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, in the *Sacra Pagina Series*, vol. 1 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 108-111, concludes: “The scene is a warning to the audience that to enter the kingdom is hard and only a few do so.” He thinks this meaning is confirmed and deepened when we consider the larger section of which Mt 7:13-14 is a part. Harrington, as do other commentators, points out the very similar message in a second set of Jesus’ teachings in Mt 13:1-52.

- 3 There are those who choose the way that leads to life and others that choose the way that leads to death, those who choose the blessing and those who choose the curse (Deut 30:15-20). We see the difference between the wise and the foolish (Sir 21:11-28), between those who serve God and those who refuse to serve him, between those who fear the Lord and trust in him and those who wickedly defy him and trust in themselves (Mal 3:16-21), between those who believe and those who refuse to believe, between those who truly know the Father and those who do not, between those who grieve and quench the Spirit and those who do not, between those who worship the one God in Spirit and truth and those who have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worship the creature, between the city of God and the city of man, between those who love the brethren and those who do not, between the good and the wicked. There are those who are “vessels of mercy” and those who are “vessels of wrath” (Rom 9:22-23), those for whom Christ is the “cornerstone chosen and precious” and those for whom he is a stumbling stone and scandal (1 Pt 2:6-8). There are those who eagerly await the return of the Lord and cry out “Come Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20), and there are those who cry out to the mountains, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?” (Rev 6:16-17). This separation was signaled on the hill of Calvary when one thief humbly turned to Christ with faith, hope and love, and the other thief bitterly mocked and blasphemed him (Lk 23:32-43). St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 46, a. 11, comments on the significance of this separation of the human race that was manifested at the crucifixion itself, citing Chrysostom, Jerome, Pope Leo, Augustine, Hilary and Bede. Thomas’s citation of Augustine will give a sense of these patristic commentaries: “‘The very cross, if thou mark it well, was a judgment-seat: for the judge being set in the midst, the one who believed was delivered, the other who mocked Him was condemned. Already He has signified what He shall do to the quick and the dead, some He will set on His right, others on His left hand’ (Augustine, *Jo. vii.* 36). This separation which exists even now is finalized and the eternal reward and punishment appropriate to each individual is carried out definitively on the great Day of Judgment.”
- 4 The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) cites *LG* 16 as the authority for its teaching on the theological points that pertain to the salvation of those who have not heard the Gospel. The treatment is straightforward and includes each of the three main units of *LG* 16. Numbers 761, 839, 841-844, 847, 1260, and 1281 of the Catechism all cite *LG* 16. There is though one unfortunate mistranslation of a key text which significantly changes the meaning of the original Latin. In #1281 of the 1994 edition of the Catechism, the English translation: “Those who died for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek

God sincerely and strive to fulfill his will, are saved even if they have not been baptized (cf. *LG* 16).” The official Latin text though is this: #1281 *Qui mortem propter fidem patiuntur, catechumeni et omnes homines qui, sub gratiae impulsu, quin Ecclesiam cognoscant, Deum sincere quaerunt et Eius voluntatem implere conantur, salvari possunt, etiamsi Baptismum non receperint.* The key phrase “salvari possunt” should be translated as “may be saved” or “can be saved,” not as “are saved.” This is how the phrase is translated in the leading English translations of *LG* 16 and also how it is translated in other places where it appears in the CCC. The jump from possibility to certainty about the salvation of people in this situation, common as it is, is not warranted by the text. This mistake was corrected in the 1997 edition of the CCC but as of this writing (April 26, 2011) the mistranslation is still present in the English text published on the official Vatican website. The 1992 French edition also mistranslates the text and has “sont sauvés” rather than “peuvent être sauvés.” The French translation on the Vatican website is now correct. According to Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 64-65, *LG* is the Council document most frequently cited in the CCC.

- 5 See also the recent doctoral dissertation of Caroline Farey: “A Metaphysical Investigation of the Anthropological Implications of the Phrase: ‘Ipse enim, Filius Dei, incarnatione sua cum omni homine quodammodo se univit’” (for, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with each man—*Gaudium et spes*, 22), Ph.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 2008.
- 6 The following footnote is inserted here as part of the Council text: Cf. Epist. S.S.C.S. Officii ad Archiep. Boston.: *Denz.* 3869-72. The reference to the *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston*, which offers doctrinal clarifications on the issues raised by Father Leonard Feeney in his strict interpretation of *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* provides important insight to the proper understanding of the text as we will see.
- 7 The following footnote is inserted here by the Council Fathers as backing for this text: “See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, I, 1: PG 21, 28 AB.” Joseph Ratzinger, “La Mission d’Après Les Autres Textes Conciliaires,” in *Vatican II: L’Activité Missionnaire de l’Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 129, n. 11, indicates that this reference to Eusebius does not really support the point being made, but, of course, the point can be supported in other ways. “The reason for this allusion is not very clear, since in this work Eusebius, in treating of the non-Christian religions, has another emphasis than our text: Eusebius underlines the aberrations of the pagan myths and the insufficiency of Greek philosophy; he shows that Christians are right in neglecting these in order to turn to the sacred writings of the Hebrews which constitute the true “preparation for the gospel.” (*La raison de cette allusion n’est pas très claire, car dans cet ouvrage l’orientation d’Eusèbe, par rapport aux religions non chrétiennes, est tout autre que dans notre texte: Eusèbe signale les égarements des mythes païens et l’insuffisance de la philosophie grecque; il montre que les chrétiens voient juste en les négligeant pour se tourner vers les livres saints des Hébreux qui constituent la véritable ‘préparation évangélique.’*) The Sources Chrétiennes translation of this text, *La Préparation Évangélique: Livre I*, trans. Jean Sirinelli et Édouard des Places (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 97-105, shows that Eusebius, in the chapter cited, only mentions the non-Christian religions and philosophies as being in dire need of conversion. He speaks of them as representing a piety that is “lying and aberrant,” (*mensongère et aberrante*) and cites the Scripture that speaks of “exterminating all the gods of the nations” and making them “prostrate before Him.”
- 8 The entire text of the letter in its original Latin along with an English translation was first published in *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 127 (October 1952): 307-315. It is also available in Neuner/Dupuis, 854-857, and DS 3866-3872.
- 9 There are many fine treatments of the history of the interpretation of this axiom, most of which are largely in agreement on how the Church’s current understanding of this axiom historically developed. Maurice Eminyan, *The Theology of Salvation* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1960); Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2002); Karl Rahner, “Membership of the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII’s

- Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi,'" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963): 1-88; Avery Dulles, "The Church as Locus of Salvation," in *The Theology of John Paul II: A Collection of Essays and Studies*, ed. John M. McDermott (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993), 169-187; Jean Guy Pagé, *Qui est L'Église ?* vol. 3, *L'Église, Peuple de Dieu* (Montréal: Les Editions Bellarmin, 1979); Gerard Philips, *L'Église et Son Mystère au IIe Concile du Vatican: Histoire, Texte et Commentaire de la Constitution Lumen Gentium*, vol. I (Paris: Desclée, 1967); G. Thils, "Ceux qui n'ont pas reçu l'Évangile," in *L'Église de Vatican II*, ed. Guilherme Barauna (Paris: Cerf, 1966); Kevin McNamara, "The People of God," in *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*, ed. Kevin McNamara (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), 142-146; Aloys Grillmeier, "The People of God," trans. Kevin Smyth, in Vorgrimler, *Commentary*, 1:169-175; Bernard Sesboué, *Hors de l'Église pas de salut: Histoire d'une formule et problèmes d'interprétation* (Paris: Desclée, 2004); and the International Theological Commission's document "Christianity and the World Religions," in *International Theological Commission, vol. II, Texts and Documents 1986-2007*, ed. Michael Sharkey and Thomas Weinandy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 168-170. An excellent doctoral dissertation also exists which very thoroughly explores the history of the development of this doctrine: Richard A. Marzheuser, "The *Votum Ecclesiae* and the Necessity of the Church: An Examination of *Lumen gentium* of the Second Vatican Council," S.T.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1988.
- 10 Sullivan, 108-112.
- 11 *Acta Pii IX*, I/3, 613. Sullivan, 114. An English translation of the Encyclical is available: *The Papal Encyclicals: 1740-1878*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, N.C.: McGrath Publishing Co., 1981).
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Sullivan, 114-15.
- 14 DS 3872. Sullivan, 138. See Charles Morerod, *The Church*, 108-109, for a contemporary description of "implicit desire," based on the teaching of Aquinas: "Implicit desire is possible—in the line of St. Thomas—because the articles of faith are included in some most basic truths (God's existence and his providence [ST II-II, q. 1, a. 7]), and thus someone may desire implicitly baptism by being firmly attached to the more elementary truths that he already knows [ST II-II, q. 2, a. 5]."
- 15 See Stephen Bullivant, "Sine Culpa? Vatican II and Inculpable Ignorance," in *Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (March 2011): 70-86, for a recent consideration of how inculpable ignorance may apply to contemporary unbelievers.
- 16 Karl Rahner, "Forgotten Dogmatic Initiatives of The Second Vatican Council," *TI*, vol. 22, 9, 99.
- 17 Pagé, 63-65.
- 18 Charles Journet, *What is Dogma?* (New York: Hawthorn, 1964), 15.
- 19 Jacques Maritain, "La Dialectique Immanente du Premier Acte de Liberté," in *Raison et Raisons* (Paris: 1947), 131-156. Also in translation: *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 66-85 (cited in Journet, 130 ff).
- 20 See Thomas O'Meara, "The Presence of Grace Outside Evangelization, Baptism and Church in Thomas Aquinas' Theology," in *That Others may Know and Love—Essays in Honor of Zachary Hayes OFM*, ed. Michael F. Cusato and F. Edward Coughlin (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1997), 119-124, for a useful discussion of this concept in Aquinas. Riccardo Lombardi, in *The Salvation of the Unbeliever* (London: Burns & Oates, 1956), provides a comprehensive study of the question of what constitutes saving faith and how, in various situations, it might be possible for it to come into existence. Lombardi's work particularly focuses on the theological works in Latin and Italian that explored this question before Vatican II.
- 21 Journet, 35.
- 22 Étienne Hugué, "Le scandale édifiant d'une exposition missionnaire," in *Revue Thomiste*, no. 76 (1933): 217-42, and no. 78-79 (1933): 533-67. The citation is on page 562. (*Les bonnes influences du milieu ne suffisent malheureusement pas à empêcher les défaillances et souvent la corruption des volontés en formation; mais très rares sont celles qui résistent aux influences mauvaises du milieu où elles s'épanouissent. C'est donc le plus souvent, que le jeune infidèle, en milieu païen, suivra la pente de sa nature corrompue et les exemples mauvais du milieu où il vit, quand viendra pour lui l'heure de poser la première orientation de sa vie morale. Se dérobant à l'appel de Dieu, il grossira le nombre des infidèles négatifs, qui, par un premier péché contre le Dieu que leur présentait leur raison, ont mis obstacle à l'illumination intérieure ou à la révélation extérieure qui leur aurait donné le Dieu de la foi, en perfectionnant leur première idée religieuse.*)
- 23 Josephine Lombardi, *The Universal Salvific Will of God in Official Documents of the Roman Catholic Church* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2007), 79-80, in the book based on her doctoral dissertation briefly mentions the full text of LG 16 once, but leaves out the critical phrase "very often" and substitutes for it her minimizing paraphrase "some." She refers repeatedly to the teaching of LG 16b (more than a dozen times) to reinforce her argument for a development of the Council teaching in the direction that she points out Jacques Dupuis and Paul Knitter have taken, but never avers to or comments on the significant "third part," the LG 16c teaching. Karl Rahner, when claiming support in the teaching of Vatican II for his theory of the "anonymous Christian" and the "salvation optimism" he claims is a major contribution of Vatican II, mentions only LGb and ignores the difficult obstacles noted in LGc. See Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations* vol. 6 of 23, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 397-398.
- 24 The Walter Abbott translation that appeared in 1966 translates the Latin phrase as "But rather often." The commonly used Flannery translation of the Council documents translates the Latin *at saepius* as "very often." This is the translation we are using. (*Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. New Revised Edition, vol. 1, ed. Austin Flannery [Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1996]). Other English translations use "but often" (the translation of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the precursor of the National Council of Catholic Bishops; contained in: *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II: Introductions by Douglas G. Bushman* [Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1999]). The Vatican website translation which is available in Appendix I also uses "but often." The English translation (by Clarence Gallagher) of *Lumen Gentium* in Norman Tanner's two volume collection of the *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990) uses "more often, however." The French translation of the text that Congar collaborated on translates *at saepius* as "mais trop souvent." *L'Église de Vatican II*, Tome I, Texte Latin et Traduction, P.-Th. Camelot (Paris: Cerf, 1966). The Vatican website French translation uses "bien souvent." The Italian translation on the Vatican website is "ma molto spesso." The Spanish translation on the Vatican website is "pero con mucha frecuencia."
- 25 See 1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Pet 2:1-22; 2 Pet 3:1-4; 2 Thes 2:3-10.
- 26 Francis Martin, "Revelation as Disclosure: Creation," in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2007), 219.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 223.
- 28 Richard John Neuhaus, on the *First Things* website (www.firstthings.com), "The Coming *Kulturkampf*" (November 14, 2008), commenting on H. Richard Niebuhr's classic book, *Christ and Culture*, states that we are again entering a time when we need to reassess the relationship between Christ and the Church and culture: "Anytime is the right time for Christians to think anew about the perennial question of Christ and culture. *Christ*, in the phrase *Christ and culture* always means Christ and his Church. Christ and the Church constitute a distinct society within the surrounding culture that is Babylon. At least that is the depiction in the New Testament and the Great Tradition of Christian teaching. In this community, the promised *not yet* keeps breaking into the *now*. The surrounding Babylon assumes many different cultural forms that may be viewed as different cultures. To look at the larger picture of the relationship between Christ and culture is, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a dizzying experience."
- 29 Francis Martin, "The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me: The Role of the



Holy Spirit in the Work of Evangelization,” in *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, ed. Steven Boguslawski and Ralph Martin (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 72–73. See also 74–76.

30 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 283. Emphasis is mine.

#### Author Note

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# Responding to Teachings Proposed Authoritatively but Not Irreformably by the Magisterium and the Criterion for Determining that a Human Person Has Died<sup>1</sup>

by William E. May

I will begin by summarizing Magisterial teaching on the different ways in which that teaching is articulated. I will then cite Magisterial sources describing the response owed to teachings proposed authoritatively but not irreformably (= infallibly) by bishops and/or the pope. I will then consider the response due to the teaching of Blessed John Paul II regarding the criterion for determining that a human person has died.

## Different Ways of Articulating Magisterial Teachings

### *Teachings infallibly proposed*

At times the Magisterium proposes matters of faith and morals infallibly, i.e., with the assurance that what is proposed is absolutely irreformable and is thus a matter to be held definitively by the faithful. At other times the Magisterium proposes matters of faith and morals *authoritatively* and as *true*, but not in such wise that the matter proposed is to be held definitively and absolutely. But still the matter proposed is *to be held* by the faithful and to be held as *true*. If a teaching has not been proposed infallibly, it is wrong to say, as some dissent-

ing theologians do, that it has been proposed *fallibly*. It has been proposed authoritatively and as true, and the teaching may later be proposed infallibly—for instance, the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin.

Moreover, the Magisterium can make infallible pronouncements in *two different ways*. The first, which can be called the “extraordinary” exercise of the Magisterium, occurs when a matter of faith and morals is solemnly defined (*de fide definita*) by an ecumenical council or by the Roman Pontiff when, “as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, he . . . proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals” (Vatican I, *DS* 3074). Secondly, and this is most important to recognize, the Magisterium can propose matters of faith and morals *infallibly* in the ordinary, day-to-day exercise of its authority when specific conditions are fulfilled. The Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) clearly stated these conditions:

Although the bishops individually do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim the teaching of Christ infallibly, even when they are dispersed throughout the world, provided that they remain in communion with each other and with the successor of Peter and that in authoritatively teaching on a matter of faith and morals they agree in one judgment as that to be held definitively (no. 25).

My primary concern here has to do with Magisterial teachings that are *not* proposed infallibly but rather *authoritatively*. Nonetheless, it is most important to recognize that many Magisterial teachings on faith and morals have in fact been proposed infallibly in this way. In fact, Blessed John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium vitae* explicitly declared that the Magisterium's teaching on the absolute inviolability of innocent human life and the absoluteness of the norm proscribing the intentional killing of such life has been proposed infallibly according to the conditions given in *Lumen gentium*. He did this three times: when writing (1) of the absolute inviolability of innocent human life, (2) of the grave moral evil, never to be willed, of abortion, and (3) of the grave moral evil, never to be willed, of euthanasia. Thus in no. 57 he declared:

Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, *I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral*. This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. *Rom* 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.

In a note (no. 51) at the end of this passage Blessed John Paul referred Vatican Council II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 25. He uses the same language and refers to the same passage from *Lumen gentium* in treating abortion in no. 62 and euthanasia in no. 65. With other moral theologians I am convinced that the moral norms presented in the Fifth through Tenth Commandments, *as understood constantly by the Magisterium*, have been proposed infallibly by the ordinary exercise of the Magisterium.<sup>2</sup>

### **Teachings proposed authoritatively and as true**

The Magisterium, moreover, is an authoritative teacher of Catholic faith and morals when it exercises its teaching authority in a manner that is not clearly intended to be infallible. Vatican II's *Lumen gentium* teaches us the response due to teachings of this kind. The relevant text is the following:

Bishops who teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff are to be revered by all as witnesses of divine and Catholic truth; *the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their bishops' decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to adhere to it*

*with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind* [my emphasis]. *This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff* [my emphasis], even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated (no. 25).

When the bishops teach on matters of faith and morals in their capacity as bishops, Vatican II also affirms, they

speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul (*obsequio religioso*). This religious submission of will and mind (*Hoc verum obsequium religiosum voluntatis et intellectus*) must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme teaching authority is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will (*Lumen gentium*, 25).

From this it follows that a Catholic *cannot respond to teachings of this kind by dissenting from them*, and it would be a grave wrong and matter for mortal sin for any theologian or other person, no matter how learned, to advise Catholics to set such teachings aside and substitute for them the views of any theologian or learned person.

During the discussion of this text at the Second Vatican Council three bishops had raised the possibility that a learned person could not, for serious and well-founded reasons, give internal assent to some teaching proposed in this way. What ought such a person do? The reply of the Theological Commission charged with responding to questions raised by bishops during the Council was that in such instances "approved theological treatises should be consulted."<sup>3</sup> If we examine "approved treatises," as did Germain Grisez<sup>4</sup> and William Smith,<sup>5</sup> we learn that these treatises said that one could "withhold" or "suspend" assent. Doing so is *not* dissenting, and such a response to teachings authoritatively

but not irreformably (= infallibly) proposed is in accord with the authoritative teaching of Vatican Council II.

Moreover, such a withholding or suspending of assent is in conformity with the teaching we find in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 1990 document *Donum Veritatis (Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian)*. This document recognized that theologians (and others) might question not only the form but even the substantive content of some authoritatively but not irreformably proposed Magisterial teachings. It held that it is permissible in such instances to withhold assent, to raise questions (and present them to the Magisterium), and to discuss the issues with other theologians (and be humble enough to accept criticism of one's own views by them). To discuss the issues with other theologians (and learned persons) it follows that they can publish materials in which they present their views and the reasons why they cannot assent to a particular teaching but rather suspend or withhold assent until the issue is finally decided (by the Magisterium).<sup>6</sup> They can propose their views as hypotheses to be considered and tested by other theologians and *ultimately to be judged by those who have, within the Church, the solemn obligation of settling disputes and speaking the mind of Christ.*

## The Response Owed to Blessed John Paul II's Teaching on the Criterion for Determining that a Human Person Has Died

The most recent Magisterial statement on this issue was Blessed John Paul II's in his August 29, 2000 Address to the 18<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Transplantation Society. In it he reaffirmed the position taken by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in its meetings of 1986 and 1989, namely, that the "neurological" criterion (sometimes identified as the "brain death" criterion) for determining that human person has died can be used to provide us with moral certitude that a human person is dead and that his or her vital organs can be used for transplantation into the bodies of persons in need of such organs in order to remain alive. In this Address Blessed John Paul declared:

Here it can be said that the criterion adopted in more recent times for ascertaining the fact of death, namely the *complete* and *irreversible* cessation of all brain activity, if rigorously applied, does not *seem* [emphasis mine] to conflict with the essential elements of a sound anthropology. Therefore a health-worker professionally responsible for ascertaining death can use these criteria

in each individual case as the basis for arriving at that degree of assurance in ethical judgment which moral teaching describes as 'moral certainty.' This moral certainty is considered the necessary and sufficient basis for an ethically correct course of action. Only where such certainty exists, and where informed consent has already been given by the donor or the donor's legitimate representatives, is it morally right to initiate the technical procedures required for the removal of organs for transplant (no. 5).

Recall that *Lumen gentium*, no. 25 instructs us that "sincere assent" is to be given to authoritative but not irreformable teachings according to the pope's "manifest mind and will." Thus, in examining what Blessed John Paul II said in this address, careful attention must be given to his "manifest mind and will." This is known principally by "the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated" (*Lumen gentium*, no. 25). Of these criteria the most important one with regard to the August 29, 2000 address is the pope's "manner of speaking." Note that in this address John Paul II makes clear that "the Church does not make technical decisions" with regard to the scientific criteria for determining death. Therefore, the Holy Father's "manner of speaking" in this address is necessarily dependent on the technical decisions of medical science. If questions about the reliability of neurological criteria for determining death emerge within medical science, the "moral certainty" for reliance on such criteria might need to be reconsidered. Therefore, a person who brings forth findings of medical science that challenge the exclusive reliance on neurological criteria for determining death is neither dissenting nor withholding assent from authentic Magisterial teaching. To call attention to the findings of medical science cannot in any way be understood as dissent from what was expressed by the Holy Father in his statements regarding the "neurological" criterion.

## Conclusion

Here I first note that the Gonzalo Miranda, L.C., a professor of bioethics at the Pontifical Athenaeum of the Queen of Apostles in Rome and editor of *Studia Bioethica* had the following to say in a recent issue of that journal.

Benedict XVI briefly returned to this theme [of

encephalic death] (7 November 2008), inviting an interdisciplinary research and reflection that keeps always present in mind the principal criterion of respect for the life of the donor and, therefore, the removal of organs for transplant may be consented to only in the presence of his real death. Affirming this in this way the present Pope has seriously called even more into doubt the validity of the criterion [of encephalic death or the “neurological” criterion]. His invitation to increase research and reflection was welcomed with seriousness and sincerity....One has the impression that he wants to go beyond the debate and to profit from the doubts raised by authors opposed to the encephalic criterion in so far as defenders of human life oppose the introduction of utilitarian practices that go in the opposite direction [my translation].<sup>7</sup>

I think it should now be evident that theologians (and other learned persons) who withhold or suspend assent from the teaching of Blessed John Paul II on the criterion for determining that a human person has died are not dissenting from a teaching authoritatively but not irreformably proposed, and that they ought *not* to be accused of being disloyal Catholics or dissenting theologians or philosophers. ✠

## ENDNOTES

- 1 I want to thank Christian Brugger, Mark Latkovic, and Robert Fastiggi for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Their comments and suggestions have helped me very much.
- 2 On this see my *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, Second Edition (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003), 241-244.
- 3 See *Acta Synodalia Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani Secundi*, III/8 (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1976), 88; n. 159.
- 4 See his *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 853, 867-869, nn. 38-42.
- 5 See his “The Question of Dissent in Moral Theology,” in *Persona, Verità, e Morale: Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Teologia Morale: Rome 7-12 Aprile 1986* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1987), 239-240. There he identifies some approved authors, among them Francis Sullivan, S.J., in his pre-Vatican II Latin textbook *De Ecclesia*, which was used at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome, and the *De Ecclesia* by N. Saliverri et al. and published by Biblioteca Autores Cristianos.
- 6 See Pierre Eyt, “Del coraggio per osare, della pazienza per maturare,” in *Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, “Donum Veritatis” Istruzioni e commenti*, No. 14 in the Collana “Documenti et Studi” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 145-151. In the same volume see my article, “Il dissenso, sua natura e inconciliata con la missione del teologo nella Chiesa,” 139-144.
- 7 Gonzalo Miranda, L.C., “La morte encefalica: confronto,” in *Studia Bioethica: Rivista della Facoltà di Bioetica, Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum* 2, no. 2 (2009): 3-5, at 3-4. The Italian text reads as follows: “Benedetto XVI è tornato brevemente sul tema [di morte encefalica] (7 novembre 2008), invitando ad incrementare la ricerca e la riflessione interdisciplinare e a tener sempre presente come criterio principale il rispetto per la vita del donatore e che, dunque, il prelievo degli organi per il trapianto sia consentito solo in presenza della sua morte reale. Affermare che, in questo modo, il Papa attuale ha messo seriamente in dubbio la validità del Criterio appare quanto meno mesato. L’invito, però, del Papa e incrementare la ricerca e la riflessione va accolto con serietà e sincerità....Si ha l’impressione che si voglia cavalcare il dibattito e approfittare dei dubbi suscitati dagli autori contrari al Criterio [encefalica] in quanto difensori della vita umana, per introdurre delle pratiche utilitaristiche che vanno in senso contrario.”



# Body as Real Symbol and Gift in the Digital Age: Reflections for an Anniversary

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**T**ruth is told in various genres. For example, in the syndicated cartoon, “Family Circus,” Dolly (perhaps seven-years-old) teaches her little brother Jeff the meaning of time. Her explanation goes something like this: “Yesterday is over, so we call it the past; tomorrow isn’t here yet, so we call it the future. But today is a gift. That’s why we call it the *present*.” It is a privilege on this 154<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American College, to reflect on the meaning of *present* in two ways: first, the human body as *gift*; and second, the *present time* as both gift and challenge.

Anniversaries concern memory in a particular way. Memory is not simply a faculty for recall, nor an information-retrieval system. Memory, rather, is the ability to retain and integrate experience in ways that permeate the entire body-person. Anniversaries, those memory knots we tie into life’s timeline, concern continuity. Within continuity, each of us remembers specific persons and insights that have changed life significantly forever. In his book *Eschatology*, a younger Joseph Ratzinger wrote:

There are some moments that should never pass away. What is glimpsed in them should never end. That it *does* end, and, even more, that it is only experienced momentarily . . . this is the real sadness of human existence. How can we describe that moment in which we experience what life truly is? It is the moment of love, a moment which is simultaneously the moment of truth when life is discovered for what it is.<sup>1</sup>

On this Anniversary of the American College, we are living one of those “moments of truth when life is discovered for what it is”—the real and definitive closure of a beloved seminary. In Resurrection faith, however, we celebrate it within the mystery of continuity, assured, in the words of the Easter Preface, that “life is changed, not taken away.” The closure of the American College is occurring within a larger context of change. In his message for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day,

2011, Pope Benedict XVI notes:

The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation. . . . New horizons are now open that were until recently unimaginable; they stir our wonder at the possibilities offered by these new media, and at the same time, urgently demand a serious reflection on the significance of communication in the digital age.<sup>2</sup>

Such “serious reflection” needs to focus initially on the prime medium of human communication, the body. There is a particular urgency in doing this, because the meaning and destiny of the human body is being radically questioned and reinterpreted by many today.

Benedict Ashley noted in *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian*: “In fact any question I know how to ask concerns bodies, since even if something exists that is not bodily, I will know it only if somehow it contacts me as I am a body. Therefore, the puzzle of my body-self is a *universal* question, conditioning every other question I may ask.”<sup>3</sup>

What does it mean to be expressed bodily, in this place, in this digital age? The fundamental answer does not derive from the self, nor from our most cogent empirical investigations. Body-meaning is a mysterious given. In the first two chapters of Genesis, in amazingly spare, poetic language, it is revealed that the first humans were created bodily by divine choice, created for loving, fruitful, mutual self-gift. From the beginning of human existence, there is the vocation to be an *embodied image of God*—the Trinity of Divine Persons given and received in perfect, loving Self-Gift, which is theologically expressed in the word *Perichoresis*.

Episcopal Bishop Arthur Vogel affirmed that “[t]he body we live is not something to which we must give meaning before it is significant to us.”<sup>4</sup> Rather, the body “is meaningful to us in the first instance, and becomes a source of the meaning of other things because it is the primary location of our presence.”<sup>5</sup> While personal presence is “more than the body,” it can be known only through the body, never without a body. Further, *words* are extensions of our bodies. Vogel described words as

“meaning in matter, a location of presence, embodied presence.”<sup>6</sup> It is only because we are embodied that we can *be* our words, mean what we say, truly stand behind them. Edward Schillebeeckx pointed out that Israel made no distinction between a word and the thing or event it signified. Words were not merely spoken. They were *done*. Schillebeeckx summarized: “The life of a person is the word that he utters; that word *is* himself.”<sup>7</sup>

We can still be amazed at the power of thoughtfully spoken words. I remember keenly a parish Sunday Mass in Cameroon. An Irish missionary pronounced the Gospel response in the local idiom. Following the familiar Scriptural passage, he paused briefly, and then said with conviction, “*This one now, God, He talk!*”

The lived human body is not simply an object. It makes personal presence locatable in time and space. How a body is lived both structures personal life in the world and affects every other being in the universe in some manner. That is not an extravagant claim. An observation in a biology text stresses that the human body is a living crossroad, a place of interchange, a midpoint between distant galaxies and subatomic particles. That means, the author noted, that an electron from the textbook I was reading could now *be* at the far reaches of the Milky Way.<sup>8</sup>

The bodies we live are *gifts received*. Along with components of our genealogy, they incorporate soil, elements of vegetable and animal life, and subatomic particles from outer space. Paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin said:

The prevailing view has been that the body . . . is a *fragment* of the Universe, a piece completely detached from the rest and handed over to a spirit that informs it. In the future we shall have to say that the Body is the very Universality of things . . . my *matter* is not a *part* of the Universe that I possess *totaliter*: it is the *totality* of the Universe possessed by me *partialiter*.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Body and Real Symbol and Gift***

**T**here is reason to wonder at the mystery of being a personal living body, called to be image of God. Karl Rahner dealt with this mystery in two landmark essays, “On the Theology of the Incarnation” and “The Theology of the Symbol.” First, he noted that a “mystery” is not merely something “still undisclosed. This would be to confuse mystery with the still undiscovered unknown.”<sup>10</sup> Rather, said

Rahner, mystery is impenetrable, “already present and [to use his delightful colloquialism] does not need to be fetched.”<sup>11</sup> As the “indomitable dominant horizon of all understanding,” mystery will remain incomprehensible and can never be “non-mysterious.”<sup>12</sup> The human body-person is mysterious in essence, in nature. After describing and defining all that we are, said Rahner, we will have said nothing about ourselves “unless we have included or implied the fact that we are beings who are referred to the incomprehensible God. . . . Our whole existence is the acceptance or rejection of the mystery we are, as we find our poverty referred to the mystery of the fullness.”<sup>13</sup>

In “Theology of the Symbol,” Rahner laid foundations for a theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To do this, he said, it was necessary to begin with a general theology of symbol. He first noted that “symbol” in common parlance refers to the relationship between two realities that “agree” with one another on a certain point, so that it is possible for each of them to refer to the other and “hence *be used by us as a symbol for the other, precisely by reason of the ‘agreement.’*”<sup>14</sup> We are all familiar with this everyday use of the term “symbol,” and its varied levels, from *conventional symbols* such as a “red circle with a slant line” to indicate that a particular activity is forbidden—to *natural symbols* such as flowing water, fire, and water. *Associative symbols* find agreement between two beings on both intellectual and sensual levels: a Stradivarius violin and Belgian chocolate, for example—each expresses a certain perfection in its own order of being.

If not transcended, however, these levels of understanding symbol reduce its meaning to an *external* comparison or to what represents, replaces, or shows similarity to an other.

Rahner, on the other hand, explicated the most profound and primordial meaning of symbol. He explained that all beings are by their nature symbolic not because they resemble some other being. Rather, every being is a “plurality” within its own wholeness. It necessarily expresses itself from within its own being in order to realize itself, and attain its nature.<sup>15</sup> This is true of every being, says Rahner, including the Trinity. Within its own nature, “a being is, of itself, independently of any comparison with anything else, plural in its unity.”<sup>16</sup> “A being,” he says, “comes to itself by means of ‘expression’, insofar as it comes to itself at all.”<sup>17</sup>

This expression is the symbol allowing a being to be known. THAT is what is meant by *real symbol*—not something apart from, or representative of a person or

thing. That is why Rahner affirms that the human body is the real symbol of the person.

Further, in every human expression, the whole person is present, even though an action starts in a particular portion of the body. As an example, Rahner cites a common understanding in medical science: it is never simply a particular bodily organ that is sick, but the whole person. The substantial presence of the soul “implies that it determines and informs each part as part of the *whole*.”<sup>18</sup> In his densely packed explanation Rahner says:

In a real theology of the symbol, based on the fundamental truths of Christianity, a symbol is not something separate from the symbolized. . . . On the contrary, the symbol is the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as an inner moment . . . of itself, which reveals and proclaims the thing symbolized, and is itself full of the thing symbolized, being its concrete form of existence. . . .

Reality and its appearance in the flesh are forever one in Christianity, inconfused and inseparable. The reality of the divine self-communication creates for itself its immediacy by constituting itself present in the symbol.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of these insights on this anniversary. Although several decades separate Rahner’s essay on real symbol from the series of audiences which Pope John Paul II gave in the 1980s, developing a Theology of the Body, there is a profound continuity between them. The entire series of papal audiences on Theology of the Body deals with the body-person as total, personal, and integral.

Pope John Paul focused particularly on the divine meaning and purpose of God in creating woman and man as *embodied* image of God. He dwelt on Christ’s response to Pharisees who questioned him about the indissolubility of marriage (Mt 19:3-8). Christ responded to their query by saying that it was necessary to “look to the beginning” as revealed in the opening Chapters of Genesis. Only in understanding what is revealed there about the divine intent in creating human persons could one receive the meaning of indissoluble self-gift in marriage.

Reflecting on the purpose and meaning of human beings from “the beginning,” John Paul spoke in terms of “three originals” manifest at the origins of human life: original solitude, original unity, and original nakedness. He noted that what is called mysteriously the

“tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17) designates a boundary line between two original situations: the state of original innocence and the state of human sinfulness. Although we live historically in the latter, Pope John Paul states firmly: “*Christ’s words, which appeal to the ‘beginning,’ allow us to find an essential continuity in man and a link between these two different states or dimensions of the human being.* The state of sin is part of ‘historical man.’” Yet, he said, in every person without exception, the historical state “plunges its roots deeply” into “theological ‘prehistory,’ which is the state of original innocence.”<sup>20</sup> Thus the three originals of primeval innocence, unity, and nakedness have enduring meaning in our own time as touchstones for understanding the divine intent in the creation of embodied human beings.

In Audiences 13 through 19, given in 1980, Pope John Paul interpreted the meaning of the human body as gift. He said:

Man, whom God created “male and female,” bears the divine image impressed in the body “from the beginning”; man and woman constitute, so to speak, two diverse ways of “being a body” that are proper to human nature in the unity of this image. . . . The dimension of gift is decisive for the essential truth and depth of the meaning of original solitude-unity-nakedness. It stands also at the very heart of the mystery of creation.<sup>21</sup>

If the human body is *to be gift*, it is essential to consider the meaning of “gift,” which, like “symbol,” is often reduced to superficial levels. In regard to gift, that reduction can happen on sentimental, utilitarian, or economic levels. I remember two pamphlets displayed in a florist shop. One said discretely, “Send yourself flowers. Only you and your florist will know.” The other pamphlet featured an attractive woman, with the slogan: “Forget Her Birthday.” It suggested that men fill out the enclosed form, listing their “significant other’s” birthday, anniversary, etc. The florist would deliver a gift on each of the days, and send the bill to the “forgetter.”

How does one describe the characteristics of genuine gifts? They differ from something acquired or offered in exchange. A REAL gift is totally gratuitous, freely bestowed. It cannot be required of another, earned, or demanded as a right. A genuine gift is personal, expressing sacrificial love and is appropriate for both giver and receiver. One of the most fundamental qualities of a gift is the element of *surprise*—unexpected in ways that sometimes alter life significantly. Scripture

is replete with the meaning and experience of such Divine Gifts that culminate in the Eucharist. To be given in the fullness of personal real symbol *as food and drink*, is the ultimate self-gift. As a poet has said in another context: “If you had made the world, would you have thought of that?”<sup>22</sup>

There is an indissoluble relation between body as real symbol and person-gift. This is crucial for understanding the body in human becoming, in true marriage and authentic celibacy. Only when the body outwardly expresses truthfully the reality of the integral person can there be a self-gift appropriate to a committed relationship. The more truthful and complete this is, the more fully, also, does a person grow in being the image of God, the Trinity of Divine Persons totally given and totally received by one another. Perhaps no other has explicated the “Why” of the Trinity in this regard better than Richard of St. Victor who expounded the reality of the Trinity from the perspective of perfect love, given and received.<sup>23</sup>

John Paul said in Audience 14:

In fact, the gift reveals, so to speak, *a particular characteristic of personal existence*, or even of the very essence of the person. . . . Communion of persons means living in a reciprocal “for,” in a relation of reciprocal gift. And this relationship is precisely the fulfillment of “man’s” original solitude.<sup>24</sup>

In describing the Genesis 2:23 cry of Adam upon seeing Eve: “She is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone,” said Pope John Paul, Adam is simply affirming the human identity of both. He seems to say:

*Look, a body that expresses the “person”! . . . man now emerges in the dimension of reciprocal gift, the expression of which . . . is the human body in all the original truth of its masculinity and femininity. . . . This is the body: a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs.*<sup>25</sup>

John Paul termed this gift-foundation of body-meaning “spousal.” This is applicable, he said, not only to the married, but also to those called to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. “If a man or a woman is capable of making a gift of self for the kingdom of heaven,” he said, “this shows in turn, (and perhaps even more) that the freedom of the gift exists in the human body. This means that this body possesses a full ‘spousal’ meaning.”<sup>26</sup> “The freedom of the gift” does not come

without truthful, sacrificial love. As a small banner, posted on the door of a retreat center, affirms: “*The truth will make you free, but at first it will make you miserable.*”

How deep the continuity between the original divine intent in creating human persons as free, living gifts, and the call to *truthful*, bodily expression of the inner person through the body—a transparency of inner spirit within outward bodily expression! Such transparency resonates with “original nakedness.”

At times, we glimpse that reality even briefly—what Ratzinger described as “moments of truth when life is discovered for what it is.” Gospel-like, their transparent profundity is simple and concrete. For example, since early childhood, I desired to experience the Alps. Reading Johanna Spyri’s book *Heidi* convinced me that nothing could taste better than goat cheese roasted over a Swiss-Alpine fireplace. A few years ago I attended a meeting in Neuchatel, Switzerland, where the Jura Mountains rise abruptly behind the city. On a free Sunday afternoon, I made inquiries about the possibility of seeing the Alps from a brow of the Juras. I was told that it *might* be possible, and that a funicular in lower Neuchatel could be ridden to the top. I was the only passenger that afternoon, and emerged in a pasture where belled cattle were grazing. I had decided to follow a footpath toward a knoll on the horizon when I noticed a single chalet-home across the pasture. It seemed wise to ask the locals if the Alps were visible from there.

The woman who answered my knock on her door was obviously surprised to see a Sister in habit, but in hesitant English, she suggested that the knoll might be the best vantage point. I had walked about half a kilometer when I heard someone running rapidly behind me. Turning, I recognized the woman from the chalet. After catching her breath she said shyly that she and a friend were going to enjoy the first cherry pie of the season made of fruit from the tree in her yard. Would I care to join them?

At the chalet a table was set for dessert. An elderly woman, dignified and elegant in a high-buttoned dress awaited us. I always remember her as a cameo of pristine propriety. She did not speak English, nor did I speak German. Yet, as we shared the cherry pie, there was an intimacy among the three of us that remains indelible in memory—it had all the elements of a true gift. I didn’t see the Alps that day, but it was a mountain-top experience where I *glimpsed* something of original innocence, original unity, and original nakedness: the transparency of embodied self-gift, and the surprise of personal presence given and received.



Why emphasize the meaning of body as real symbol and authentic self-gift at this final public anniversary celebration of the American College? Because that meaning is at the heart of Catholic identity, sacramental reality, seminary formation, priestly consecration—and the ultimate purpose of every human life. Our own realization as human persons depends on how we understand *why* we are embodied. There is an immense dignity in the lived human body that will attain full realization only in eternal life. We need to reflect on the body on this anniversary, not only because it bears upon the enduring meaning of this College, but also because *we have moved into a time of losing an understanding of the body as real symbol and gift, as a sacred place of personal presence.*

The body is not raw material for endless reconstruction. Nor is the body an imposition to be escaped, nor a superfluous “thing” to be superseded by electronic patterns. It is urgent that we ask: how is the body understood in the “Digital Age”—within a WorldView that is increasingly virtual?

## *The Human Body in the Digital Age*

There is a new validity and freshness in lines from T. S. Eliot’s poem “East Coker,” helpful in describing our present moment:

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy....

You must go through the way in which you are not.

And what you do not know is the only thing you know . . .<sup>27</sup>

A “worldview” is a basic perspective from which to interpret life and the universe. It affects the manner in which people respond to God, to one another, and to the material world. In past ages, worldviews persisted over centuries, and, in retrospect, were named quite deliberately.

*There is no univocal name for the contemporary worldview in technically advantaged societies.* For example, our moment has been termed “the digital age,” “the post-modern age,” and the “post-human age.” Each label emphasizes a different characteristic of the worldview in which we are immersed. From these monikers, “digital age” seems apt for describing the current worldview that is increasingly virtual in outlook and applications,

in nations that are progressively dependent upon technological media, and which are electronically networked in ways that touch deeply what it means to be a human person.

To turn a phrase, “It isn’t your father’s Plato’s Cave anymore”—shadowy walls simply enhanced by technicolor, speed, and remote control. Humans now stoke the fire, configure the shadows, and plan scenarios. As commonly noted—*anyone* can become producer, actor, script-and-scenery changer in technically contrived worlds.

Michael Heim gives a succinct description of the virtual. “Virtual reality,” he says, “*is an event or entity that is real in effect, but not in fact.*”<sup>28</sup> That evokes the crucial question: what manner of continuity can be found between an understanding of the human body as *real symbol* of the human person, created to be self-gift in image of God—and increasingly diverse understandings of body? Is it as an outdated organic base, eventually to be surpassed by robots with artificial intelligence and impervious to disease, aging, and death?

In *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*,<sup>29</sup> researcher N. Katherine Hayles says that already in the 1950s, “Norbert Wiener proposed it was theoretically possible to telegraph a human being” and that producers of *Star Trek* operated “from similar premises when they imagined that the body can be dematerialized into an informational pattern and rematerialized, without change, at a remote location.”<sup>30</sup>

Hayles identifies major assumptions within a “post-human” point of view: the body is made subject to informational patterns, including the perception that “embodiment in a biological substrate is . . . an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life.”<sup>31</sup> The body, in this view, is an “original prosthesis” that we all learn to manipulate, but which can be extended or replaced by other prostheses. Hayles writes:

[T]he posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.<sup>32</sup>

Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauze Professor of Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has studied over three decades the psychological impact that robots and virtual

worlds have on real people. She explains that while we say “technology is just a tool,” we are ill prepared for the psychological world we are creating.<sup>33</sup> She states: “The question is not what computers can do or what computers will be like in the future, but rather, what *we* will be like. What we need to ask is not whether robots will be able to love us but rather why we might love robots.”<sup>34</sup> This is, so to speak, only the tip of the electronic iceberg. There are multiple ways in which individuals are affected by the virtual projections of their imaginations, and which absorb significant portions of real life.

With these technological applications, says N. Katherine Hayles, privilege is given to pattern and randomness, making presence and absence seem irrelevant. Information technologies do more than change modes of text production, storage, and dissemination. They fundamentally alter the relation of signified to signifier.<sup>35</sup> Hayles makes a basic distinction. Even though information “provides the basis for much of contemporary society, it is never present in itself.”<sup>36</sup> “Technological tools” can promote indifference to the distinction between presence and absence, between sign and signifier. If memory is the inner faculty directly concerned in holding continuity between past and future, the *imagination* is the prime inner faculty for development of alternate worlds, personae, and relationships.

The diminished respect for embodiment and real presence did not occur suddenly in the twentieth century, with the development of computers and digital innovation. In his paper “Brains, Bodies, Selves, and Science: Anthropologies of Identity and the Resurrection of the Body,”<sup>37</sup> Fernando Vidal of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science shows that since the Middle Ages, “[w]e have witnessed a gradual disembodiment” in understanding resurrection. He uses the phrase “successive amputations of the body” in the interpretation of the meaning of resurrection. These interpretations have led some to ask how much, or what part of flesh, is needed for personal identity. If some are convinced that the brain is all we need for accountability and conscious personality on Judgment Day—and perhaps even a fraction of the brain would provide sufficient information necessary for defining the self—why “bother with the body”? Vidal says of such convictions:

A computer program might therefore be enough. The resurrected *I* need be nothing other than the computer equivalent of my brain. In this way, thanks to the progress of technology, to resurrect might eventually mean to be emulated by supercomputers; thus resur-

rected, we shall inhabit a hereafter whose technical name is cyberspace.<sup>38</sup> But how much can “we” disembodiment ourselves without becoming simulacra? Are we still “us” in a state of “postorganic” immortality?<sup>39</sup>

### *Why Is All of This Important for This Anniversary?*

**W**hy should contrasting views of the body concern us on this anniversary? Does it matter that there is growing indifference about presence and absence—often a *preference* for absence over real presence, and the artificial over the real? Does it matter that *signified* and *signifier* have no relation in the information-patterns of cyberspace? Should it concern us that many today spend significant amounts of *real life* projecting avatars in “social networks” to represent themselves in imaginary worlds?

More than any anniversary group that preceded them, the community of seminarians and scholars at the American College of the Immaculate Conception this year will bear an increased responsibility for witnessing belief in Real Presence, for upholding the reality of sacramental oneness between signifier and signified. Priestly ordination in our time requires both a clear grasp of the present digital age and a graced capacity for maintaining continuity with the deepest personal truths of faith. The reflections on real symbol, gift, and the digital age, so briefly presented here tonight concern basic realities of Catholic faith, on being anointed *in persona Christi*, and indeed, on grasping what it means to be a human person. Consider a few examples.

Users of one social network, *Second Life*, which was begun in 2003 by Linden Labs, rocketed in number of users from 2 million in 2005 to 18 million in 2010. The time that users (called “residents” by the fabricators of the site) spend online at *Second Life*, varies from an average of 100 minutes per on-site visit, to 12 hours or more.<sup>40</sup> Users either purchase or fashion an *avatar* (an image) to represent them in *Second Life*, enabling interaction with other avatars. Many of these “alter egos” resemble comic book characters, or animals, but there are no boundaries, and avatars can be changed at any time.

So-called residents of digital worlds can purchase imaginary land, homes, even specially designed clothing for their avatars. They may *simultaneously* maintain several different imaginary “identities” online. This is not without repercussions in real life. Sherry Turkle says that

in a dangerous world that offers few safe places, “online worlds” provide places of “identity play”:

But some people who gain fluency in expressing multiple aspects of self may find it harder to develop authentic selves. Some children who write narratives for their screen avatars may grow up with too little experience of how to share their real feelings with other people. For those who are lonely yet afraid of intimacy, information technology has made it possible to have the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship.<sup>41</sup>

We live in a culture of simulation. Our games, our economic and political systems, and the way architects design buildings, chemists envisage molecules, and surgeons perform operations all use simulation technology.<sup>42</sup>

When I see children (perhaps three-years-old) furiously working their thumbs across hand-held instruments, I wonder if they might grow up thinking that humans were created with opposing thumbs in Divine forethought of video games! Multi-millions of adults have plateaued on a child’s level of make-believe and games. Some who are married in actual life attempt “avatar marriages” online, writing avatar-vows in imaginary worlds such as *Second Life*. Davey Wilder tells of a couple who decided to marry simultaneously online and in real life. On August 4, 2007, they were married. Computer screens were placed on the altar so that they could control their avatars “in-game at the same time as exchanging vows in real life,” “loving the idea” (as the bride said) that “our union will live in cyberspace long after we leave the real world.”<sup>43</sup>

In the article “Who Am We?” Turkle reports that virtual sex consists of two or more “players” who type descriptions of physical acts, words, or emotional reactions for their avatar-characters. “In cyberspace,” she says, “this activity is not only common but, for many people it is the centerpiece of their online experience.”<sup>44</sup> A distressed wife, says Turkle, will struggle to decide if her husband is unfaithful when he is writing real-time erotica in cyberspace. Even more, she (the real wife) may wonder if the “online mistress” might in real life be an eighty-year-old man in a nursing home, or a twelve-year-old boy or girl.<sup>45</sup> The user cannot be sure.

In an interview for *Frontline: Digital Nation*, Turkle points out the complex ways in which the use of imaginary worlds, communication instruments, and robotic companions touch what it means to be an embodied person. Already, robots (or “bots”) are built into imagi-

nary worlds and computer games. In this play, people become used to relating to *artificial* intelligence, as if it were personal.

Turkle reports how real people, at meetings of their organization, are in rooms “feet away from one another” but are sending each other e-mail. When asked *why*, they say, “Oh. It’s more convenient; I don’t have to bother anybody, waste anybody’s time.” It is, says Turkle, as though everybody lived in a world where we’re all “wasting each other’s time.”<sup>46</sup> She thinks that we are out of the habit of staying with something that is difficult:

You go to a conference, and the person on your left is downloading images from *The New Yorker* that they want to use in their presentation, the person to the right is doing their e-mail on their Blackberry, and the speaker knows that they’re speaking to people who are really otherwise occupied.... To hear someone else out, you need to be able to be still for a while and pay attention to something other than your immediate needs. So if we’re living in a moment when you can be in seven different places at once, and you can have seven different conversations at once on a back channel here, on a phone here, on a laptop, how do we save stillness? How threatened is it? How do we regain it?<sup>47</sup>

These questions relate to what Pope John Paul II called our “rootedness in original solitude.” Yet, the language of love, relationship, and commitment is being used variously in the digital world. A website’s opening page is called “home,” and “friending” is reduced to electronic access on Facebook, where “friends” are touted up like notches on a belt. The preciousness of the WORD is denigrated repeatedly in the contrived info-worlds of cyberspace.

A kind of inversion has occurred in regard to the presence or absence of what is authentic: the worth or influence of the REAL being measured by its simulation. Have you heard someone looking at a real rose exclaim: “It is so perfect you would think it’s artificial!” In other words: the artificial is perfect; the real is flawed. At times, the horror of a real disaster, such as the recent tsunami in Japan, is described as “just like the movies.”

There are robots that are fashioned to look somewhat human, and programmed to make sounds that simulate human voices, to suggest emotions and needs—a threshold is crossed between the screen-interface and tangible, simulated figures. Some people say that robots make fewer demands than real people.

“People disappoint; robots will not,” says Turkle. “When people talk about relationships with robots, they talk about cheating husbands, wives who fake orgasms, and children who take drugs.”<sup>48</sup> A forty-four-year-old woman told the researcher: “After all, we never know how another person really feels. People put on a good face. Robots would be safer.”<sup>49</sup> A man, aged thirty, remarked: “I’d rather talk to a robot. Friends can be exhausting. The robot will always be there for me. And whenever I’m done, I can walk away.”<sup>50</sup>

This is not science fiction. It is a sampling of electronically induced convictions, already held by some who may attend Mass where a priest lifts *the reality of the Body and Blood of Christ after the Consecration*. How can one help a person to desire their integrity and personal wholeness, if disappointments have led him or her to find robotic companionship better than human friendship? Research shows that some persons who build a following on Facebook and My Space, and present a “self” (or selves) through online personae, have no sense of having *communicated*, despite hours of being *connected* online. Turkle asks: “Does virtual intimacy degrade our experience of the other kind and, indeed, of all encounters, of any kind?”<sup>51</sup>

In a thoughtful essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, William Deresiewicz observes, “The goal now, it seems, is simply to become known, to turn oneself into a sort of miniature celebrity.... What does friendship mean when you have 532 ‘friends?’” He dwells on the loss of solitude:

The camera has created a culture of celebrity; the computer is creating a culture of connectivity. As the two technologies converge . . . the two cultures betray a common impulse. Celebrity and connectivity are both ways of becoming known. This is what the contemporary self wants. It wants to be recognized, wants to be connected: It wants to be visible.... This is the quality that validates us, this is how we become real to ourselves—by being seen by others. The great contemporary terror is anonymity.<sup>52</sup>

These are signs of our times, and issues that affect us all, personally. The artificial, the simulated, are so pervasive in daily life that it takes deliberate effort to maintain real presence, real communication above and beyond the use of cybernetic necessities that underlie the functioning of contemporary society. It is not a matter of rejecting what can effectively assist physical and sacramental real presence. It is, rather, the need for growing awareness of how we are changing even while being

grateful for the speed, availability, and convenience that necessary technological tools offer. Does our use of them enhance real, live, embodied relationships, or take their place? Answering that question requires personal integrity and self-discipline.

Pope Benedict XVI in his Message for the World Day of Social Communications spoke of the horizons offered by new media, and noted that they “urgently demand a serious reflection on the significance of communication in the digital age.... There exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others.... [T]he truth of Christ is the full and authentic response to that human desire for relationship, communion and meaning which is reflected in the immense popularity of social networks.”<sup>53</sup>

At every step toward ordination, the candidate responds to the call of being acolyte, lector, deacon, or priest with “Present,” or some form of “Here I am.” These spoken words require fully aware body presence, the *real symbol of the person*. One called by name presents himself bodily, kneels, receives into his hands a real lectionary and chalice, and is truly anointed with real chrism. Hebrews says: “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body thou hast prepared for me.... Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God.... And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:5, 7, 10).

Long before technical alternatives to human embodiment, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a great price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

There is a poignant prayer in the Third Canon of the Mass: “May he make us an everlasting gift to you.” The priest prays for the community’s union with the real body and blood, real personal presence, and real, perpetual self-gift of Jesus Christ.

Repeatedly, the psalms ask the grace of seeing the Face of God, ask that God will turn His Face upon us and bless us. The “face” (particularly the eyes) is revelatory in loving and truthful relationship. The face can reveal the inner reality, so that what is being outwardly expressed is at-one with the inner truth of the person, *the real symbol*. We know this already in human love relationships. One of the great love songs of the twentieth

century was “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face.” It is no wonder that everlasting life is expressed in faith as “seeing God face to face.”

May reverence for the body be one of the legacies of those who have been part of the American College. We live, walk, and breathe the city of Leuven and the country of Belgium, which is sacred ground. Particularly in the two World Wars of the past century, the body and blood of many who lived here, together with those who fought for freedom here, have made this holy ground. This anniversary is an occasion of remembering, of gratefully carrying forward in ourselves the gifts enabled by those who have gone before us.

There is a certain urgency in what is shared here tonight. Serious futurists are openly encouraging us to realize the speed of technological innovations. In his book *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Ray Kurzweil explains that “the power of ideas to transform the world is itself accelerating.”<sup>54</sup> We are in a time of transition in which change is occurring “exponentially” and the so-called Singularity is near. What, then, is the “Singularity”? Kurzweil writes:

It’s a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian or dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself.<sup>55</sup>

The Singularity will represent the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots. . . . Although the Singularity has many faces, its most important implication is this: our technology will match and then vastly exceed the refinement and suppleness of what we regard as the best of human traits.<sup>56</sup>

Kurzweil is not the final interpreter of the future. His predictions, however, underscore the need for awareness and for ongoing assessment of authenticity in our own commitments—above all, our growth in personal union with the One in Whom all the realities of our existence are found.

June 30 will mark a closure of the American College, a dying to one way of being-given. We profess in Catholic faith, that death is a point of transformation, a closure that opens to “we know not what.” In faith, closure is not a finality. Before the celebration of the anniversary

of Christ’s birth each year, the “O Antiphons” are sung at Vespers. Among them is the Antiphon in which Christ is addressed as “Key of David,” the One who shuts and opens. The key to closure of one way of being is already the same key that opens to new possibilities. This key is a Person, given in Real Body and Real Blood.

In resurrection trust, tonight, let us bless this place, this Leuven land, as good soil in which we plant the living seed of the American College, that in its closure, it be the seed of new life we cannot yet see. May *Sedes Sapientiae*, the Immaculate Conception, patroness of Belgium and this seminary, be its patron, together with St. Joseph her husband, and the illustrious Archbishop Fulton Sheen, who so valued the American College and the Catholic University of Leuven—and who was among the first to recognize and contribute to the meaning of electronic/technological potential for the good of the Church and society. Long live the American College of the Immaculate Conception of Louvain! ✠

## ENDNOTES

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# To Live Each Day With Dignity Requires an Embrace of Humility and a Culture of Compassion

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by Denise J. Hunnell, M.D.  
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The month of June saw a confluence of independent events that thrust the topic of assisted suicide and euthanasia into the spotlight. It began with the death of Dr. Jack Kevorkian on June 3, 2011. Then in mid-June the BBC aired *Choosing to Die*, a documentary by celebrated author Sir Terry Pratchett. Within days of this the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released “To Live Each Day with Dignity,” their statement on physician-assisted suicide.

In the 1990s, Dr. Jack Kevorkian was the face and voice for the physician-assisted suicide movement. His brazen public display of performing and advocating for assisted suicide brought what was once a clear taboo into mainstream discussions. His work paved the way for the approval of Oregon’s physician-assisted suicide law. When “60 Minutes” released the video of Kevorkian administering a lethal drug to Thomas Youk, a patient with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s Disease), he was charged and convicted with second-degree murder. The public spectacle of his trials and eventual imprisonment made him a martyr for the cause of assisted suicide and euthanasia. His ascendancy to hero status was recently enshrined by the Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning HBO movie, “You Don’t Know Jack.”

On the other hand, Terry Pratchett is known more for his lighthearted novels than for political advocacy. But the documentary *Choosing to Die* was not a romp through Discworld, the fictional setting of his fantasy books. This was a much darker journey, exploring the world of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Pratchett traveled to the Swiss clinic *Dignitas* to explore using its assisted suicide services and followed the course of two British men who did the same. The death of one of the men, Peter Smedley, was captured on camera and the scene was included in the

BBC broadcast of the documentary. This graphic look at euthanasia and assisted suicide has provoked both horror and praise.

*Choosing to Die* was a very personal project for Terry Pratchett. In 2007 he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and made no secret of his desire to have control over his own death. After his diagnosis was made public, he said he would like to die in his, “own home, in a chair on the lawn, with a brandy in my hand to wash down whatever modern version of the ‘Brompton cocktail’ some helpful medic could supply. And with Thomas Tallis on my iPod, I would shake hands with Death.”

What drives a man who is in no pain at the moment to take a cup of poisoned tea in his hand and willingly gulp it down? I believe there are two factors. The first of these is pride, which seems to be a primary motive for Mr. Smedley. He had made a large fortune in the hotel industry, and was used to having others look to him for guidance. Now, he had a degenerative neurological disease, and soon he would be dependent on others for the most basic of needs. Similarly, Sir Pratchett asserted that he did not fear death, but he did have fear. In a 2009 interview with *The Telegraph* he stated, “And not having that fear [of death] is a great release, I find. But I do fear a protracted death and loss of senses and loss of control and total dependence on other people. Of course I do.”

The motives of both Sir Pratchett and Mr. Smedley implicitly acknowledge the key to understanding suffering and debilitating disease. Ultimately, allowing others to care for us when we are in need is an act of generosity and holy humility. Yes, it is humbling to have someone else bathe us and feed us. It is humbling to have someone see us when our hair is unkempt and our breath stinks. But in that humility, we allow others to be virtuous: We give others the opportunity to feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, clothe the naked, and minister to the sick. Blessed John Paul II gave voice to this in *Salvifici Doloris* (n. 54): “suffering is present

in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbor, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a ‘civilization of love.’”

But do others want to be virtuous by suffering with the sufferer? When physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia were being discussed in light of the Oregon assisted suicide law, attention was given primarily to cancer patients who had a grim prognosis. It was argued that failure to provide assisted suicide would commit these patients to unremitting pain. In 1995, Chochinov, et al., writing in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, noted that 76% of terminally ill cancer patients with severe pain wanted to hasten death compared to 46% of terminally ill cancer patients who were experiencing moderate to no pain. Upon the release of the study, we in the medical community realized we had not been adequately addressing pain. Suddenly pain assessment became part of every practice of medicine. This is the origin of the now ubiquitous query about your level of pain on a scale of one to ten every time you seek medical attention.

Terry Pratchett and others with degenerative diseases fear becoming a burden. Will anyone really take care of them? Will they be treated with kindness and compassion? Will they be laughed at or treated with dignity? Wander through any nursing home and you will see elderly souls who are shadows of their former selves. They often seem warehoused and forgotten. In our self-gratifying culture, is it any wonder that self-sacrifice for the debilitated seems almost unthinkable? Blessed John Paul II lamented this condition in *Ecclesia in America* (n. 63):

Nowadays, in America as elsewhere in the world, a model of society appears to be emerging in which the powerful predominate, setting aside and even eliminating the powerless: I am thinking here of unborn children, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and incurably ill, subjected at times to euthanasia; and the many other people relegated to the margins of society by consumerism and materialism.

There can be little doubt that we live both in the midst of a consumerist and materialist society which

fosters pride and a society that tends to marginalize the powerless, fostering fear. While we may recognize this, pastors and medical professionals need to be reminded from time to time of the obligations that this fact entails.

The timely statement from the Catholic bishops of the United States outlines the threat to human dignity posed by the acceptance of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. Suicide should be viewed as a tragedy to be avoided for all people. As our bishops articulate, “[t]here is an infinitely better way to address the needs of people with serious illness.” Allowing physician-assisted suicide effectively designates a segment of humanity—the elderly, sick, and disabled—as disposable. In fact, such acceptance implicitly states that it would be better for all concerned if these people would just hurry up and die. Much as the medical community realized that our failure to assess and address pain contributed to the appeal of suicide and euthanasia, our culture must see that our failure to embrace the opportunity to care lovingly for the chronically ill and disabled breeds a fear of these conditions that makes death look desirable. And with the advocates of “managed death” making rapid gains in both public sympathy and law, the urgent need of a clear, active, and public response is obvious.

Our bishops challenge us to a better way, a more Christ-like way:

The sufferings caused by chronic or terminal illness are often severe. They cry out for our compassion, a word whose root meaning is to “suffer with” another person. True compassion alleviates suffering while maintaining solidarity with those who suffer. It does not put lethal drugs in their hands and abandon them to their suicidal impulses, or to the self-serving motives of others who may want them dead. It helps vulnerable people with their problems instead of treating them as the problem.

Indeed. I would also offer that those of us in the medical profession have a special obligation to follow the lead of our bishops and the Holy Father, and help to foster humble and compassionate communities and homes where the humanity of every person is recognized and cherished. Then pride and fear might give way to humility and hope. ✠



# The “True Opinion” of Paul Craig Roberts

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by Jude P. Dougherty  
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Paul Craig Roberts may be remembered, if for no other reason than for the title he used for his farewell syndicated column: “Truth has fallen and taken liberty with it.”<sup>1</sup> Although syndicated as a newspaper columnist, Roberts was primarily an economist in the mold of Von Mises. The holder of a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, a degree capped with advanced study at the University of California, Berkeley, and Merton College, Oxford, he served during the Reagan Administration as Assistant Secretary of Treasury. At one time he was an associate editor and columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and for a decade wrote as a columnist for the Scripps Howard News Service. He was carried in 300 newspapers. Those credentials apart, he is the author or coauthor of eight books, notably *The Tyranny of Good Intentions* (2006), *How the Economy was Lost* (2010), *New Color Line* and *How Quotas and Privilege Destroy America* (1997). Those titles alone would indicate the direction of his thought and how he became anathema within elite intellectual circles and eventually was all but silenced by the mainstream media.

Whether writing as an economist or as a commentator on social issues Roberts writes in a domain where demonstration is rare or impossible. In reading him one is reminded of Plato’s discussion in the *Meno*, where after introducing the notion “true opinion,” Plato has Socrates speak of the value of such knowledge. True opinion, although supported by fact, falls short of demonstrative knowledge but is nevertheless required by he who would govern. “Men,” says Socrates, “become good and useful to states not only because they have knowledge, but because they have right opinion.”<sup>2</sup> The contribution of Roberts to political and social discourse can without doubt be called “true opinion” and valued in the Platonic sense. Pope Benedict XVI advanced a similar notion in his address to the *World of Culture* meeting in Venice: Rejecting the notion that European culture is “liquid,” he affirmed that cultural and economic decisions depend on one’s historical insight. “Men and women are free to interpret and give meaning to reality,” but in doing so, they “must not be afraid

of the Gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

With Roberts, there is never any difficulty discerning what he holds to be true on any topic he chooses to address, i.e., foreign policy, multiculturalism, affirmative action, sub-prime mortgages, derivatives, globalization, national identity, immigration policy, the secularization of America, or the tyranny of Brussels over the member states of the European Union. Roberts speaks clearly with a wisdom rooted both in scholarship and experience. Anyone who has followed his work has found there a coherent social philosophy indebted to the time-transcendent sources of Western culture. In an essay published on Christmas day, 2003, he wrote: “There is plenty of room for cultural diversity in the world, but not in a single country. . . . All Americans have a huge stake in Christianity. Whether or not we are individually believers in Christ, we are beneficiaries of the moral doctrine that has curbed power and protected the weak. . . . Power that is secularized and cut free of civilizing traditions is not limited by moral and religious scruples.”<sup>4</sup>

Multiculturalism and group rights based on victim status, Roberts is convinced, are eroding equality in law and free speech. “Both the United States and Europe now have crimes of opinion. Americans and Europeans are subject to arrest and imprisonment for words judged offensive to the therapeutic state. The frightening departure from Western tradition is justified in the name of curtailing hate and advancing human rights.”<sup>5</sup>

In *The New Color Line* Roberts argues that the United States took a wrong turn when the Supreme Court decided to forcefully impose integration on the country.<sup>6</sup> In doing so it discarded the fundamental presumption of any democratic order, namely, good will among the citizens regardless of race, class, or color. Without good will there is no basis for uniting different people under democratic self-rule.

In *How the Economy was Lost* he surveys the damage done by free trade and the off-shoring of the American manufacturing base.<sup>7</sup> When goods and services are created off shore and then brought back to America to be sold, they increase the trade deficit. Satisfaction of that deficit inevitably results in a transfer of ownership from U.S. assets to foreign hands. Because the trade deficit is financed by foreigners, this means that profits,

dividends, capital gains, interest, rents, and tolls leave American pockets for foreign accounts. The American economy has gone away, Roberts insists, and is not coming back until we free ourselves of the free trade myth.

Roberts's exclusion from what he calls "corporate media" is understandable given his assessment of its reliability. In the farewell column cited above he wrote: "Americans who rely on the totally corrupt corporate media have no idea what is happening anywhere on earth, much less at home." He is convinced that with the present administration, mainstream media have become a propaganda ministry for the U.S. government. A harsh assessment perhaps, but others have been saying much the same thing. ✕

## Social Justice

by Jude P. Dougherty  
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The first modern use of the term "social justice" is attributed to the Italian Jesuit Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio (1793–1862), Rector of the Collegio Romano when the future Leo XIII was a student there. The term, as used by Taparelli, was a near synonym for the Thomistic concept of the "common good." Taparelli was at the forefront of a fledgling Thomistic movement, later endorsed by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. It is likely that Taparelli influenced the drafting of *Rerum Novarum*, although Leo XIII does not use the term "social justice" in that encyclical. (Pius XI, however, does use the term social justice many times in *Quadragesimo anno*) Taparelli is also associated with the Thomistic-inspired principle of subsidiarity. In fact he worked out an elaborate illustration and defense of that principle that is today widely identified with Catholic social teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Taparelli wrote at a time when Europe was first experiencing the social upheaval and labor unrest that followed the industrial revolution. He was not alone in calling attention to the sometimes ill effects of industrialization. Charles Dickens described the abuse of the working class in the England of his day in *Hard Times* (1854). Twenty years earlier Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* had called upon the working class to revolt. What was true of Britain was not necessarily true of conditions on the Continent. Wilhelm Emmanuel von Kettler (1811–

## ENDNOTES

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- 3 Venice, Zenit.org, May 21, 2011.
- 4 *Washington Times*, December 25, 2003.
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- 6 Paul Craig Roberts, Lawrence M. Stratton, *The New Color Line: How Quotas and Privilege Destroy Democracy* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995).
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1877), Bishop of Mainz, had a different concern. Von Kettler was convinced that the Catholic businessmen of the Rhineland provided good working conditions and paid a fair wage; that was not an issue for him. He was more concerned about the moral ambience of city life, with its many temptations for the inexperienced youth drawn to factory work in the city where they were removed from ties of kindred and village life. Both Taparelli and von Kettler in addressing social issues drew upon the moral philosophy of Aquinas and its undergirding metaphysics.

The common good for Aquinas is grounded in the recognition that man is a social animal and can flourish only within a rationally structured society. In any community law must be directed to the common good, for it is only when civil society is rightly directed can the individual flourish. "Law is an ordinance of reason for the common good," wrote Thomas, "promulgated by him who has care of the community."<sup>2</sup> Government, he believed may undertake those labors which surpass the reach of individual abilities, but in doing so it must never fail to secure for every man his natural liberty and the good that is his due. Perhaps no one has brought this out more forcefully than Jacques Maritain in his work *The Person and the Common Good*.<sup>3</sup> Maritain insists that the state in working for the general economic welfare must also recognize the spiritual end of man, and he even speaks of an intellectual good insofar as law should aim to make men good.

Taparelli was writing during the period of the Risorgimento, a political and social movement that divided Italy into right and left. Even so, in the Italy of that day an

appeal to the common good still had some value, given the bond of an inherited culture. But in the absence of a common cultural outlook, can one appeal to the common good as a normative principle? The situation in North America was just that when John Courtney Murray, S.J., was forced to address the question in the mid-decades of the past century.<sup>4</sup> Murray understood that an appeal to the common good or to social justice presupposes a cohesive view of human nature and of man's natural end. He recognized that if there was once an American consensus, that if the Founding Fathers knew what they meant by "liberty," by "law," and by "God," that consensus no longer prevailed. "The ethic," he wrote, "which launched Western constitutionalism and endured long enough in the popular heritage to give essential form to the American system of government has now ceased to sustain the structure and direct the action of the constitutional commonwealth."<sup>5</sup> Murray hoped that the grounds for such a consensus may yet exist, at least ideally, in the natural law philosophy of Aristotle, the Stoics, and Aquinas, a tradition that informed the writings of Richard Hooker and John Locke, both influential at the time of the American Founding.

Murray became a participant in a more-or-less public discussion of the truths we hold as an American people that included notable figures such as Sidney Hook, John Dewey, Will Herberg, Mortimer Adler, and Walter Lippmann. Murray's approach contrasted sharply with that entertained by John Dewey, who addressed the issue from the perspective of Thomas Hobbes. From the point of view of Hobbes, society is not one entity but a collection of action groups each pressing for advantage.<sup>6</sup> The source of government is thus the consent of the governed taken one by one. The individual is the sole source of the right or of the good and as an autonomous agent is subject neither to given norms nor to a naturally determined end. Hobbes makes no attempt to subordinate the individual act of self-aggrandizement to the public good. Self-interest, he holds, is not only the dominant motive in politics, but enlightened self-interest is the proper remedy for social ills. Men, he believes, are constituted differently in biography, temperament, and intelligence, and consequently identify the good in radically different ways. Self-interest is not to be taken as evidence of moral defect but as evidence of disparate personality. In the absence of a common good, separate from and superior to the private goods of individual men, the function of government thus becomes conflict management. Given the fact that litigious subjects are likely to press for privileges and exemptions for themselves, bargaining and negotiating are natural features of public life. The sovereign is not the representative of the common will; he is the common

object of separate wills. In the exercise of his authority, the sovereign is restrained by the diverse purposes of his subjects. The sovereign assists his subjects in the pursuit of happiness not by defining the goals that members of society ought collectively to pursue, but by removing obstacles to happiness, privately defined. Public order thus has its sources in negotiations between individually situated political actors.

In a Hobbesian world, the concept "social justice" is but a slogan that can be used to advance the political objectives of an aggrieved class. The severest critic of the term as used in public discourse is von Hayek, who in several works has denounced it as "empty and meaningless," as a "fatal presumption," and as a "mirage."<sup>7</sup> Obviously, it is a term that can be employed only in the Western world where there are still remnants of an inherited morality. Although all communities recognize the need for justice, the concept "social" as modifying "justice" would have little significance among nomadic or tribal peoples or in many geographic areas. It presupposes both a stable and just government and a prosperous economy. As employed in American political speech it is usually invoked to obtain yet another handout on the part of government to a dependent class. It lacks meaning since it does not identify the party that is responsible for a supposedly unfair state of affairs.

Common sense recognizes that the socialist drive to make men equal flies in the face of nature. No one can deny that variations in genetic quality exist among population groups and individuals. Nature has not made men equal in intelligence, health, or beauty; nor has it created land equally fertile, rich in vegetation, mineral wealth, or water resources. Nature is inegalitarian. Not everyone has the same start in life. If a government attempts to compensate the less fortunate by the redistribution of wealth, it can no longer remain impartial; of necessity it must choose, and there will be winners and losers. When legislation is no longer governed by a rule of law applicable to all, decision making on the part of government runs the risk of becoming arbitrary and subjective. In the United States a daily newspaper can provide numerous examples of favoritism on the part of government from set-asides, quotas, and subprime mortgages, to redistricting. Yet many of good will thoughtlessly employ the term "social justice" without regard for the philosophy underlying it. Seemingly innocent calls for social justice may in effect be calls for injustice, insofar as the redistribution of wealth is likely to place a burden on the working middle class.

Clearly as this is being written, the United States is rent in the intellectual order by a cultural war between those who hold to its founding principles and a political

faction that would impose a socialist future. A half-century ago, Murray put to himself the question, “Can we or can we not achieve a successful conduct of our affairs in the absence of a consensus that will set our purposes, furnish a standard of judgment on policies and establish the proper condition for political dialogue?” Murray’s answer was, “no” and remains such. The intellectual turf, of course, is the university where ideas are contested. But the playing field is not level. The universities are dominated by a left-leaning professoriate with few proponents of the liberal education that nourished the nation’s Founding Fathers. In spite of Murray’s judgment that the United States was doing badly—he used the words “insecure” and “politically bankrupt”—he still held out hope that the common sense of the American people would prevail. “We (still) hold in common a concept of the nature of law and its relationship to reason and will and to social fact and to political purpose. We understand the complex relationship between law and freedom.” And he adds, “We grasp the

notion of law as a force for orderly change as well as social stability.”<sup>8</sup> ❧

## ENDNOTES

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- 4 John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960).
- 5 Murray, 9.
- 6 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, (1651).
- 7 Friedrich A. von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), and *The Mirage of Social Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
- 8 Murray, 81.

# William James and Religion

by Msgr. George P. Graham

In a recent *FCS Quarterly* (Spring 2011), Professor D. Q. McNerny says of William James, “He 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Professor McNerny points out that James’s interest in religion is based on his philosophical position called radical empiricism. McNerny draws from James the explanation that for a radical empiricist all verification must be based on the personal experience of the person. All forms of monism are thus excluded.

An excellent work on William James is *The Thought and Character of William James* by Ralph Barton Perry.<sup>2</sup> Perry points out that “[i]n the 90s, feeling that the period of his psychological fertility was closed, he turned to moral, social and religious questions: delivering popular addresses, riding in the wave of growing fame, and then, after an illness which threatened to terminate his career altogether, gathering and consolidating his spiritual

resources in the *Varieties of Religious Experience*.”

An important philosophical work on James’s radical empiricism is the work of Yale professor John Wild.<sup>3</sup> John Wild began his study of James with a detailed study of James’s book *Principles of Psychology*. James was dissatisfied with abstract traditional systems of thought. He wanted to keep his thought in contact with the facts of experience.

John Wild was impressed by the fact that an American philosopher began to think in an existential manner, and make contributions to the phenomenological movement.

While James was a true scientist, he did not think of the objects of religious thought as limited to things that were measurable. James’s focus on religious experience as a way of learning truth does not mean that there is no higher world outside the personal experience of the individual. Is his belief in this higher world well founded? Wild replies that there is an unseen region whose presence we feel in the experience of prayer. Since this region produces effects in this world, it is not merely an ideal. Since this unseen world produces effects within

another reality, it must be a reality itself. Therefore, we have no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal.

With regard to William James's religion, the affirmative answer which James gives to the question of the reality of the unseen world is not based on theoretical arguments or causal inferences. It is based on the direct experience of prayer or "prayerful communion."

James holds that individuals may deal with their religious experiences by developing their own "over-belief." There is a "more" which really exists, that acts as well as exists, and that something really is affected for the better when you throw your life into its hands.

James deals with religious experiences through what he calls a "reconciling hypothesis." In James's reconciling hypothesis there is a sense of union with the power beyond us, a sense of something not merely apparently but literally true.

James describes his position as a hypothesis. This implies that he does not attempt to be coercive in his arguments. He says, "The most I can do is, accordingly, to offer something that may fit the facts so easily that your scientific logic will find no plausible pretext for vetoing your impulse to welcome it as true." The belief of the religious man is that he is moved by an external power. His experience is drawn from the subconscious region, but these feelings take on objective appearances. Nevertheless, the sense of union with the power beyond us is a sense of something not merely apparently but literally true.

James, for the moment disregarding the over-beliefs, sees that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self. This gives a positive content to religious experience which is true as far as it goes. James then sees the necessity of offering his own over-belief. James writes:

The farther limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely "understandable" world. Name it the mystical region or the super-natural, whichever you choose. So far as our ideal purposes originate in this region (And most of them do originate in it for we find them possessing us in a way for which we cannot articulately account.), we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality,

for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. . . .

God is the natural appellation for us Christians at least, for the supreme reality, so I will call this higher part of the universe by the name of God. . . . For I only translate into schematic language what I may call the instinctive beliefs of mankind: God is real since he produces real effects<sup>4</sup>.

For James, philosophical and theological formulas are secondary to religious experience. He does not see that thought is based on philosophical principles. He holds, therefore, that the speculations of philosophers must be classed as "over-beliefs." He approaches the thought of philosophers not as the development of systematic principles but as over-beliefs based on religious experiences. As a result, he cannot see a place for metaphysics and metaphysical certitudes, but he stakes his case on probable truths, reasonable probability, and converging evidence.

In April 1909, Bertrand Russell held that skepticism is embodied in pragmatism. Russell wrote: "Skepticism of the very essence of the pragmatic philosophy."<sup>5</sup>

There is nothing in James's work to indicate that he held, as Russell stated, that all beliefs are absurd. James's entire life is unintelligible if it is not seen as a quest for truth, especially in religion. He looked for evidence of the reality of God, and the evidence he discovered led him to a moral certitude of the reality of God, a kind of moral certitude based on converging probabilities. The various types of religious experience in the *Varieties* provided for James evidence for his so-called reconciling hypothesis.

Far from being a skeptic, therefore, James considered himself to be developing a new science of religions. Moved by the converging probabilities he explores in the *Varieties*, he carefully formed his reconciling hypothesis. James's religion is a living faith and involves a life of moral heroism. The evidence in *Varieties* helped James to form his own over-belief. In his words, over-beliefs are "buildings-out performed by the intellect into directions of which feeling originally supplied the hint."<sup>6</sup>

James was not a metaphysician, but he was a religious person who based his life on his conviction of the reality of God and the ethical life demanded by that belief. He was not a Thomist, but I think that many Thomists could find a place for him in their Thomistic philosophies.

As Ralph Barton Perry quotes William James, "Let

empiricism once become associated with religion, as hitherto, through some strange misunderstanding, it has been associated with irreligion, and I believe that a new era of religion as well of philosophy will be ready to begin.”<sup>7</sup>

Jacques Maritain has said a philosopher is one who demonstrates. William James could not demonstrate, in his radical empiricism, but he may offer another path to religion. ✕

## ENDNOTES

- 1 *FCS Quarterly* (Spring 2011): p11
- 2 Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1935).
- 3 John Wild, *The Radical Empiricism of William James* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company Inc., Anchor Books, 1970).
- 4 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt et al., *The Works of William James*, vol. 15 (1902; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 405–407.
- 5 Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1966), 105.
- 6 *Varieties*, 341.
- 7 Perry, 462.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Finis Vitae: Is “Brain Death” True Death?* ed. by Roberto de Mattei, rev. ed. by Paul A. Byrne, M.D. Oregon, Ohio: Life Guardian Foundation, 2009 [2006].

Reviewed by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.  
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This new edition of *Finis Vitae* adds two clinically based essays by Dr. Cicero Galli Coimbra of Brazil to a collection of essays from scholars around the world on the question of the appropriateness of regarding “brain death” as a suitable way of ascertaining the death of a person. In addition, some of the other essays, originally presented at a conference held in Vatican City under the auspices of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 2005, have been revised and updated by their authors.

At issue here is a problem that has often been overlooked or even deliberately ignored in the rush to improve the availability of viable organs for donation and transplantation. Put simply, the problem is that one cannot transplant a dead organ. But to obtain larger numbers of suitable organs, it becomes necessary to take the organs

(a practice usually called “harvesting the organs” by its practitioners) before the effects of death and corruption have damaged them or rendered them useless for transplantation.

The use of traditional criteria (e.g., evidence of *rigor mortis*, the cessation of breathing or heartbeat or other vital signs for a certain period of time, with no restoration of function possible) as a way to determine that death has occurred has generally meant waiting so long that the organs will be unusable. Those eager to see organ transplantations increase in numbers and in success rates have thus been prominent in promoting the change to brain-based criteria for the determination of death. The theoretical justification for the re-definition is entirely pragmatic. Unless the criteria for the determination of the moment of death can be changed, the desired organs will not be available for these surgeries. But, it is urged, the need for replacement organs is great and the technology is increasingly available. So, a pragmatic assessment of the likelihood of meaningful life for the donor will allow those “as good as dead” to be regarded as legally dead, and in this way their organs may be “harvested.”

But the steady advance of the campaign to win legal as well as popular acceptance for the idea that brain death is the true measure of death has now begun to face somewhat more organized opposition, such as that advanced by the authors of the papers in this volume. Some of the papers collected here recount stories from actual clinical practice (e.g., “Has Killing Become a Virtue?” by Walt Franklin Weaver, M.D., and “Personal Testimony” by Joseph C. Evers, M.D.). The experience of these physicians, while still working on transplantation teams, so unnerved them as to reverse their previous acceptance of the brain death idea. A number of the other papers in this volume argue not from direct experience but from philosophical and from scientific perspectives (e.g., “Is Brain Death the Death of the Human Being?” by Robert Spaemann).

What is particularly important about a volume like this is the way in which it raises the very question of the moral permissibility of transplanting unpaired organs. The situation is significantly different from the case in which a person makes the choice to give one of a set of paired organs. In the cases that involve the removal of

unpaired organs, if the donor is not already dead, the harvesting of the organ will certainly bring about the death of the donor. Even in the highly charitable act of giving a paired organ (e.g., a kidney), there is admittedly still some risk to the donor, but the act of removing the organ is morally permissible only because it does not bring about the donor's death.

The essays in this book aim to question the central presupposition that is required for the massive program of organ transplantation taking place today, namely, that it is valid to re-define death in such a way that the human person may legitimately be called "dead" even though having sufficient bodily life to keep organs fresh and suitable for transplantation. For the essays gathered here, the many recent technical advances in organ transplantation surgery do not yet decide the question of the moral permissibility of the practice.

Many of the other books and articles available on this topic simply fail to ask the question of the moral permissibility of the practice. Often the questions that do get raised in contemporary bioethical literature take the moral issue to consist in such questions as the fair distribution of scarce resources or the undue pressure likely to be placed on the poor to sell organs to willing buyers. It is not that these questions are inappropriate, but simply that asking them already presumes that the general practice is morally acceptable.

The medical literature tends to focus on the fact that for the successful transplantation of any organ, the organ still needs to be living and healthy, not dead or damaged, and hence they tend to argue for legal remedies so as to keep transplant surgeons out of trouble with the law. Some of the literature deals with the many technical difficulties that remain even when the organs are still living and healthy—e.g., tissue matching, graft vs. host problems, the best means to prevent the rejection

of foreign tissues, the best ways to test the ability of the receiver to make good use of the organs that are implanted, and so on.

Now, while it is certainly prudent to ask questions about the risks undertaken by the receiving patient (this would be true even in the case of paired organ donations), the prominence of these concerns in the literature should not blind us to the fact that a person who is dying is not yet dead. Further, the legal re-definition of the criteria by which death is determined does not make a living person who is at some point in the process of dying actually dead, nor does it morally entitle physicians who want to use the organs of such a person for the care of other patients to do so if the removal of those organs will in fact bring about the death of the donor. Of particular value here is the essay by one of the leading authorities in this entire field, "Body-Brain Disconnection: Implications for the Theoretical Basis of Brain Death" by D. Alan Shewmon, M.D.

This volume also contains a set of papers that review the state of the law in the U.S., Britain, and various other countries. Many states in the U.S. use some version of the definition of death suggested by the 1968 report of the *Ad hoc* Committee of Harvard Medical School, published in *JAMA* 205 (1968): 337-40, that defines death to have occurred when there is "irreversible cessation of total brain function."

As the essays gathered here show, the literature favoring this definition tends to claim for this definition an empirical and measurable character, for the desire is to have reliable ways to test and measure for functions (especially brain functions) associated with consciousness and with what is regarded as "life worth living." Yet even apart from the moral questions, it is not at all clear that the Harvard criteria are as fully empirical as claimed. There are, of course, questions about just how long the various

types of brain function must have ceased in order to satisfy the criteria. Further, the term "irreversible" is not empirically measurable in any direct way, for technological advances continue to push back the frontier of resuscitation. If the biochemical structure of the brain is still intact, one cannot easily say that cessation is "irreversible," for some possibility of resuscitation remains, as the practice of reversing metamphetamine overdoses shows, not to mention the occasional cases of children who have been resuscitated after spending as much as half an hour, say, under ice.

The more philosophical essays in this volume remind us that there are also a number of other questions of a different order entirely that need to be addressed. Is presence or absence of brain activity really the proper thing to measure in trying to ascertain whether death has occurred? There are many good reasons for taking the human being to be the unity of body and soul as one person, and on this ground there is reason to object to treating the destruction of one part of the body (however important the brain is for human functioning) as if it were the death of the whole. These philosophical questions find resonance in the comparable questions raised by some of the physicians, such as these: Is it valid to regard a "brain dead patient" as a cadaver while the heart is still beating and while respiration is still occurring (with or without assistance by a ventilator)? Or, how should we properly address cases such as that of brain-dead women who have given birth, e.g., the case discussed in *British Medical Journal* 332 (2006): 1468 and other such cases raised by one of the new essays by Dr. Coimbra ("Are Brain Dead Patients Neurologically Recoverable?")?

This book is a valuable resource for the moral discussion that needs to take place. Unfortunately, the interest in organ-harvesting for transplantation purposes seems to involve the legal declaration of death for some

individuals who may indeed be dying but are not yet dead. The moral question that needs to be raised begins with the broad issue of identifying the right ethical standards. Is the utilitarianism that is often invoked in questions of public policy sufficient for the protection of human life? There is good reason to think that its frequent use in public debates on this question simply begs the question about getting the right moral standard. For these debates, *Finis Vitae* will be a trustworthy support.

**Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine** by J. Brian Benestad.

Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011. 500 pages.

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

In the introduction to his fine new book, J. Brian Benestad points out that its “leitmotif” is the need for personal conversion as the necessary prelude and accompaniment to reforming society. This theme is central not only to Benestad’s book but to the Church’s social doctrine itself. It could hardly be otherwise, since the evil and injustice in the world have their ultimate origin and support in the sinful attitudes and acts of individuals: the heart of darkness, as Joseph Conrad memorably reminds us, is the human heart, and it is there finally that the project of bringing about justice in the world must stand or fail.

*Church, State, and Society* is a wise and comprehensive book in which the resources of scholarship are skillfully deployed in the service of faith. Benestad, a professor of theology at the University of Scranton and editor of this journal, takes a searching look

at the principles of Catholic social doctrine—human dignity, rights and obligations, natural law, the common good, and the rest—and in their light examines a remarkably wide range of current concerns: the family, same-sex marriage, abortion and other life issues, the economy, work, the environment, the international community, war, and much else.

The treatment is informed, balanced, judicious, and good-humored. The result is a volume to be read and studied with pleasure, then kept close at hand for frequent reference.

Benestad’s approach is deeply grounded in the Catholic tradition. His text and bibliography reflect broad familiarity with recent literature, but the names most often recurring in these pages are Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, along with Leo XIII, Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. But even though *Church, State, and Society* is first and foremost an exposition of Magisterial teaching, Benestad also is engaged here in a running argument about the meaning and functional implications of this body of doctrine with the justice-and-peace activists found on many Catholic university campuses and in Church bureaucracies today.

These people commonly suppose that the Church’s emphasis in promoting social justice should be on changing social structures by collective action on behalf of their own utopian preferences. As Benestad remarks, in place of the “laborious struggle” it would take to know what would truly serve the common good, “the program of the Democratic Party is often used as a substitute” (p. 158).

In the United States, the interpretation of social doctrine was strongly shaped by the late Father William Ferree, S.M. (1905–1985), who published several influential books on the subject. But Ferree’s account, Benestad contends, is “incomplete . . . erroneous in parts.” Collective action to

reform social structures is part of the story of Catholic social doctrine, but only part.

Benestad’s exhaustive study of Magisterial sources shows that Church teaching is informed by a twofold vision encompassing both structural reform and individual reform—with individual reform necessarily first. What he says of environmental concerns could equally well be said of much else: “Legislation . . . is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by positive changes in the way people think and act on their own. . . . [T]here is no effective solution . . . unless individuals practice virtue in their daily lives” (p. 360).

Guided by activists, however, the American bishops for years have concentrated on advocacy of political action directed to structural change in preference to conscience formation aimed at changing minds and hearts. Time and again, statements on justice and peace issues from the episcopal conference have gone beyond declarations of moral principle, on which the bishops could speak as representatives of the Magisterium, and supported (or opposed) particular policy positions on the basis of prudential judgments. Of this the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., remarked: “The impression is given that the bishops are more at ease in criticizing the performance of secular governments than in shouldering their own responsibilities in the Church.”

Fortunately, with another election year at hand, the tide may now be running the other way among the bishops. But whether it is or isn’t, there is no indication of serious interest, among the bishops or anyone else, in addressing the deeper question of who, if anyone, ought to speak for the Church on concrete, contingent political matters.

An important theme running through *Church, State, and Society* is the serious and lasting injury being done to the Church in America by the assimilation of Catholics into a



secular culture shaped by a Rawlsian understanding of liberal democracy. Benestad cites the political theorist Stephen Macedo, who observes with satisfaction that American democracy's liberalizing impact on the Church has made the Church "a positive and in many instances decisive force for the liberalization" of Catholicism elsewhere. The "indirect, educative effects" of American-style liberal democracy, Macedo writes, may have changed "not only beliefs of American Catholics but also the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church itself, and thereby the beliefs of Catholics around the world" (Macedo, quoted by Benestad, p. 435).

This of course is not entirely bad news. Yet the question remains: Exactly what is this Rawlsian liberal democracy into which American Catholicism has been assimilated and which it is now helping spread to Catholicism elsewhere in the world? Benestad describes it like this:

In sum, liberalism tends to promote individualism, the separation of rights from duties, the loosening of commitments in families and at work, undue sympathy for the principle of autonomy and "the culture of death," more deference to reigning opinions than to Church authority, the reception of revealed religion as opinion, and understanding morality more in terms of rights and values than virtues (p. 336).

Can the Church in America truly afford to be part of this? And if not, what strategy of counter-assimilation can American Catholics conceivably devise at this late date to resist further erosion?

One significant omission from this admirable book is any reference to liberation theology. Does the author consider it so far removed from the mainstream of the Catholic tradition that it has no place in a serious discussion of that tradition? That could be. Yet liberation theology was the

subject of two important critiques published in 1984 and 1986 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith under Cardinal Ratzinger that deserve examination in a comprehensive study of social doctrine beyond the brief and partial treatment that only one of them, the second, receives here; moreover, it seems likely that liberation theology was a formative influence on many, perhaps most, of today's justice-and-peace activists. Is this a topic for discussion in the next edition?

***New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*** by Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D. Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K. : William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010, 319 pages.

*Reviewed by D. Q. McNerny,  
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There is a long and illustrious tradition in Western philosophy of formulating arguments intending to prove the existence of God. Like so many other things of philosophical moment that have come out of the West, it would seem that it all began with Plato, who, in book 10 of the *Laus*, starting with the ubiquitous fact of motion, concludes to the existence of a self-generating motion, which he identifies with Soul, and which he cites as the cause of all motion. Aristotle was to follow up on the work of his mentor, and also using motion as his point of departure, developed two versions of an argument, one in the *Metaphysics*, the other in the *Physics* (the latter being the more telling), in which, advancing metaphysically beyond Plato, he concludes to the existence, not of a self-moving mover, but to an unmoved mover. In the early pages of the *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas

Aquinas gave succinct expression to what was essentially the Aristotelian argument, in the form of the first of his classic Five Ways, but he had earlier presented a more elaborate statement of the argument in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In the seventeenth century René Descartes, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, offered two proofs for the existence of God, both of which were more developed versions of the famed Ontological Argument which St. Anselm had incorporated into his *Proslogion* some four centuries before. Not long after Descartes published his arguments, Gottfried Leibniz, in his *Theodicy*, offered a loosely constructed rendition of the argument from design, an argument which was to be given its most developed expression by the eighteenth-century English divine, William Paley, in his *Natural Theology*. In the twentieth century, C. S. Lewis, in *Miracles*, offered what he thought to be a worthy proof of God's existence, based on man's capacity for reasoning, but Elizabeth Anscombe, among others, found the argument to be seriously flawed. Jacques Maritain published an argument in his *Approaches to God* which, though considerably more sophisticated, had some similarities to Lewis's. He confidently called it a Sixth Way; it is subtle and provocative, but in the end falls short of being really demonstrative. For someone like Mortimer Adler, that would not have been a deficiency, for he was of the mind that the existence of God was not demonstrable. The best one could do was to offer an argument whose conclusion was probable, which he did in *How to Think About God*, with, however, questionable success.

It is against that background, of which the above is but a rough sketch, that Father Robert J. Spitzer offers us *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*, and in doing so has made a significant addition to the tradition. The book is divided into three parts. Part One is devoted

to the development of an extensive and detailed argument which relies on evidence provided by Big Bang cosmology—which is to say, in sum, on the findings of the physical sciences over the past seventy years—and builds to the conclusion that (1) the universe was created and that (2) it everywhere displays evidence of supernatural design. Part Two presents three philosophical arguments for the existence of God: the first, bearing some resemblance to St. Thomas's Second Way, argues for the existence of a unique "unconditioned reality"; the second argument seeks to provide an ontological foundation for an argument, formulated by Father Bernard Lonergan, which was mainly epistemological in orientation; the third argument, drawing on the work of the mathematician David Hilbert, concludes to a Creator of past time. The second part of the book is rounded out with a chapter which deals with various methodological considerations and shows the impossibility of disproving the existence of God.

The first chapter of Part Three of the book is devoted to a discussion of five transcendental concepts, "the desire for ultimate Home, ultimate Truth, ultimate Love, ultimate Goodness, and ultimate Beauty" (240). In the following chapter Father Spitzer expands upon these five concepts, and develops a number of what can fittingly be described as moral arguments for the existence of God, that is, arguments which may not be demonstrative in the strict sense (i.e., their conclusions do not follow necessarily), but which nonetheless carry considerable compelling force. The book's Conclusion treats penetratingly of five questions having to do with the unconditional love of God.

Convinced that I could not do full justice to this book within the scope of a single review, I decided that the best approach, in order to give at least a fair sense of its contents and spirit, was to focus attention on two of its

principal arguments, the argument based on Big Bang Cosmology, which occupies the whole of Part One, and the "Metaphysical Argument for God's Existence," which, of the several arguments to be found in Part Two, strikes me as being the sturdiest and most persuasive.

The notion that the universe began with what has come to be known as the Big Bang (the term was originally used with derisory intent) is commonly attributed to the Belgian priest-physicist George Lemaître, who saw, as a logical conclusion to the astronomer Edwin Hubble's discovery that distant galaxies appeared to be rapidly moving away from the earth, that the universe had begun—some 13.7 billion years ago according to the latest estimates—with a small concentration of matter of amazing density, which then exploded with incalculable force. All the matter which composes the universe in which we now reside is the result of that explosion. "In the Standard Big Bang Model," Father Spitzer writes, "the big bang was actually the beginning of the universe in a very strong sense: it was the beginning of time itself (and of space too)" (19). The Big Bang has been defined by physicists as a "singularity," which, as the name indicates, refers to a unique event, but, more significantly from a scientific point of view, it refers to one which cannot be explained as the effect of a natural process which preceded it. To put it another way, the laws of physics cannot give a coherent account of a singularity; at this point, as some cosmologists have put it, the laws of physics break down. The reality of the Big Bang, regarded as a unique, inaugurating event, would seem to be corroborated by the second law of thermodynamics, which calls our attention to entropy, the fact that, as a physical system becomes more disordered and consequently able to do less work, its energy is dissipated in the form of heat. Now, if we were to look at the universe itself

as a huge physical system, which is a perfectly logical thing to do, its expansion would seem to coincide with a uniform distribution of its heat energy. In other words, the steadily increasing entropy in the universe is presumably best explained by the accelerating distribution of its matter from its originating source—the Big Bang. Father Spitzer states the conclusion that can be drawn at this stage of the argument: "The discussion in the foregoing sections shows that the preponderance of cosmological evidence favors a beginning of the universe (prior to which there was no physical reality whatsoever)" (43). If Big Bang cosmology points to a unique event for the source of which the laws of physics can offer no explanation, then one is led to look for an explanation elsewhere. That is, if no natural explanation can be offered for the origin of the universe, then the only reasonable alternative would be a supernatural explanation.

But this line of reasoning was one which many cosmologists were not eager to pursue, or, for that matter, even to entertain. And that is because they had no sympathy for the metaphysical conclusion at which it arrived. So they set to work devising alternative theories, theories which, by and large, had the general effect of stripping the Big Bang of its status as a unique, inaugurating event. There was proposed, for example, the notion of a "bouncing universe," which proposes that the Big Bang was not in fact unique, but simply the most recent of what is possibly an infinite series of such events. We thus have proposed a universe which, interestingly, in a basic way is similar to those envisioned by pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus and Empedocles. Another proposal argued for "eternal inflation," the idea that our universe is but an island in a much larger, and unobservable, complex. Yet another theory has it that there are in fact multiple universes, perhaps infinite in number.

However, all of these attempts to replace the uniqueness of the Big Bang have been shown to be burdened with serious, if indeed not insuperable, problems. For example, the calculations of the British mathematician Roger Penrose show it to be well nigh impossible that the universe could have come about by chance. A theorem formulated by three theorists, Borde, Vilenkin, and Guth, concludes “that past-eternal inflation without a beginning is impossible” (35). As to the idea that there are multiple universes, this seems to be, as Father Spitzer aptly describes it, just so much loose talk, and he pointedly remarks that to invoke “an infinity of other universes just to explain one is surely carrying excess baggage to cosmic extremes” (69). To this one might add that the theory does extreme violence to the law of parsimony. In all, these alternate proposals display a kind of theoretical recklessness, for they treat the need for empirical verification, a mainstay of responsible science, as if it were an irrelevancy that can be ignored with impunity. I see a comparison between what is going on in certain circles of theoretical physics with what has been happening in literary studies over the past few decades, where theory becomes so imperiously dominant a factor, in relation to the “text” it purports to study, that the latter, which should be regarded as an entity with an identity and integrity all its own, becomes but an object of whimsical and often wanton manipulation.

We then reach a point in the argument where the following conclusion can be stated: “(1) If there is a reasonable likelihood of a beginning of the universe (prior to which there was no physical reality whatsoever), and (2) if it is a priori true that ‘from nothing, only nothing comes,’ then it is reasonably likely that the universe came from *something* which is *not* physical reality” (45).

In the next step of the argument, Father Spitzer presents an abundance

of evidence, provided to us by modern science, to show that there are strong indications of supernatural design in the universe. The more we learn of the physical universe, the more evident to us are the marvelously minute ways in which it is organized. Specifically, we find ourselves in a universe which is marked by any number of fixed constants—that is, unvarying regularities—which bespeak the highest and most comprehensive kind of order. Among the many fixed constants that can be cited, there are: a minimum space and a minimum time, which have been precisely calculated; a minimum unit of energy emission; the maximum speed of light. There are energy constants such as those for gravitational attraction, as well as for the weak force and the strong force. There are individuating constants, which govern the rest mass of protons, the rest mass of electrons, and the unit charge of electrons and protons. And then there are eight large-scale and fine-structured constants that can be cited. The trenchant implication of all this, for us personally, is that any “slight variation in the actual values of the universal constants would have given rise to a universe incapable of sustaining *any* life form” (65). So, we find ourselves in a universe which has been meticulously ordered, precisely fine-tuned to an eminent degree, and apparently for no other purpose than to make human life possible. Hence the “anthropic principle,” the idea, as expressed by Stephen Hawking, “that we can draw conclusions about the apparent laws of physics based on the fact that we exist.”

In sum, the universe we inhabit is marked, deeply and ubiquitously, by order. Now, order implies an ordering cause, for it is contradictory to suppose that order could ever come about by chance; and, because order itself is by definition intelligible, that ordering cause must be intelligent. Accepting the phenomenon of the Big Bang, then, with all that it im-

plies, and given the exquisite order which is everywhere on display in the universe, we have rather commanding evidence which argues for the existence of God, a God who brought the material universe into being and invested it with its marvelous order.

This argument, as Father Spitzer makes quite clear, is not demonstratively conclusive; it does not prove in the strict sense. The argument is founded upon the dicta of science, and “science, unlike philosophy and metaphysics, cannot *deductively* prove a creation or God.” And he goes on to note that science “cannot be certain that it has considered all possible data that would be relevant to a complete explanation of particular physical phenomena or the universe itself” (73). There is, then, a certain inescapable tentativeness to arguments of this kind, given the very nature of the foundations upon which they are built. It is unquestionable true, as Father Spitzer points out, that the Big Bang is widely accepted today by theoretical physicists and cosmologists, and is regarded by some to be virtually a matter of fact. But if the history of science teaches us anything, it is that with fair frequency it has happened over the years that what was once considered to be a firmly fixed explanatory theory is eventually, and sometimes rather rapidly, replaced by a new theory, and sometimes of a quite contrary kind. But such is the way of empirical science. It is not a little paradoxical that our knowledge of the physical world, to which we have direct access through our senses, can often be so uncertain. Matter, for all our close intimacy with it, tends to be rather reluctant to reveal itself to us unqualifiedly.

As for the Big Bang in particular, though to be sure it is the dominant theory of the moment, there are some theorists—and I do not refer here to those who offer alternative theories simply because they do not like the philosophical implications allowed for by the Big Bang—who

have posed serious questions relating to the interpretation of the data at hand. To cite but one example: It was the red shifting of light, coming from distant galaxies, discovered by Hubble, which led to the theory of an expanding universe, which in turn led to the theory of the Big Bang. However, certain physicists have wondered out loud whether the standard way of interpreting the red shifting of light—that is, it indicates an expanding universe—is the only defensible interpretation that can be given to it. Now, let us suppose that a viable alternative interpretation of the red shifting of light is offered, which is not a preposterous possibility. This would call into question the theory of an expanding universe, and if that were to happen, then the theory of the Big Bang itself would be open to serious reexamination.

The second of Father Spitzer's arguments which I will consider here composes Chapter Three, in Part Two of the book, and is identified as a metaphysical argument for the existence of God. The argument, which I take to be conclusive, contains five steps. Step One offers proof of the existence of at least one "unconditioned reality," which can be interpreted as referring to what is identified in traditional scholastic parlance as an uncaused cause. In other words, we are speaking here of an entity, a being, which is self-explanatory, which has nothing beyond itself to which it can be referred by way of accounting for its existence. Now, there is either such an unconditioned reality, or there is not; the two possibilities are mutually exclusive, and there is no third alternative. Given how these two possibilities—the existence or the nonexistence of an unconditioned reality—relate to one another, then, if one can be shown to be false, then the other must be true. But the denial of an unconditioned reality can be shown to be false. How so? Let us suppose that there are only conditioned realities; to

put it differently, let us suppose that there is nothing in the universe but caused causes—real existents whose existence is not self-explanatory. There are only two ways in which the existence of such entities could be explained: (1) they depend on a finite number of conditions (i.e., explanations for their existence); (2) they depend on an infinite number of conditions. Examining each of those possibilities, we discover that both lead to conclusions which are incoherent. Thus we have the conclusion to Step One of the argument: "There must exist at least one unconditioned reality in all reality" (119).

Step Two of the argument goes on to make the case for the unconditioned reality being the simplest of all realities. Absolute simplicity, which would be the kind of simplicity displayed by the simplest of all realities, means that such a reality is without "intrinsic and extrinsic boundaries, finitude, restriction in reality" (122). Such an absolutely simple being could be considered to be absolutely inclusive, under the assumption that the more simple reality embraces and unifies less simple realities. To better see this, we might think in terms of how the first principles (the foundational truths) of any science relate to all of the specific truths pertaining to the science, in that the specific truths flow forth from the first principles. The first principles are very simple, and yet all of the less simple truths of the science are included in them. Because an absolutely simple reality is unrestricted, has nothing external to it which can in any way confine it, it is pure power—omnipotent, in other words. And because it is the simplest possible reality, thus embracing and unifying all less simple realities (i.e., conditional realities), it is the foundational explanation for all conditional realities.

Step Three of the argument successfully shows that the unconditioned reality is absolutely unique. It has to be, for given what has already

been established about the nature of the unconditioned reality, to suppose that there could be two such realities describable as the "most simple" would ensnarl us in contradiction.

In Step Four proof is provided for the thesis that the "unconditioned reality itself is unrestricted"; this is to say that, just as the unconditioned reality is in no way restricted with respect to anything external to itself, neither is it hampered by any internal or intrinsic restrictions. If we were to assume otherwise, we would once again find ourselves having to deal with a contradictory state of affairs. We may therefore confidently conclude, following the *modus tollens* pattern of conditional argumentation, that the unconditioned reality is free of any intrinsic restrictions.

At this point we can pause and summarize the conclusions of the first four steps of the argument: (1) at least one unconditioned reality exists; (2) the unconditioned reality is compatible with all reality; (3) there can be only one unconditioned reality; (4) the unconditioned reality is unrestricted in power.

Step Five of the argument results in the culminating conclusion that the unconditioned reality is the Unconditioned Reality, God, the Creator of all that is. With respect to a key distinction that has run throughout the course of the argument, between the conditioned and the unconditioned, when we attribute "creation" to the Unconditioned Reality, all we mean is that God is "the ultimate fulfillment of a conditioned reality's conditions." The "conditions" of a conditioned reality are simply the fundamental explanations for its very existence. And by identifying God as "creator" we mean that He is "the source (power or act) which ultimately fulfills a conditioned reality's conditions" (140). Now, everything in reality, except of course the Unconditioned Reality, is a conditioned reality, or, we might say, a contingent being, a

being which is not the explanation for its own existence. This means that conditioned realities cannot have their conditions fulfilled by conditioned realities. (To suppose otherwise would put one on the road to nowhere—infinite regress.) Therefore, the Unconditioned Reality must be the “Creator (the source of all ultimate fulfillment of conditions) of all that is real” (141).

Though, as one would expect, the metaphysical arguments in this book are stronger than the one which is based on Big Bang cosmology, the latter is nonetheless quite impressive, and Father Spitzer is to be commended for taking on a challenge which few philosophers have been willing to attempt. From time to time in recent decades we have heard claims to the effect that modern science provides us with evidence which can be used to support certain longstanding metaphysical or psychological truths. For example, there was once a flutter of excitement evinced by some philosophers over quantum mechanics, specifically the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, for they thought that they had there scientific “proof” for the reality of free will. But no one, to the best of my knowledge, ever made the effort to spell out a serious philosophical argument in support of that claim. It is one thing to say that the findings of modern science can provide us with knowledge that will serve as the premises for serious philosophical arguments, it is quite another thing to roll up one’s sleeves and produce those arguments. Father Spitzer has done just that in this book, and the results deserve our close and studied attention. Anyone interested in philosophy and in science, and in how sparkling a fashion the two can interact, will want to read *New Proofs for the Existence of God* and become familiar with its arguments.

***Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East.*** Bernard Lewis. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. pp. xxi + 208.

Reviewed by *Jude P. Dougherty, the Catholic University of America*

Although the book has the appearance of a monograph, it is a collection of essays, unpublished lectures, and excerpts from Lewis’s other writings. *Faith and Power* is reminiscent of Hilaire Belloc’s *Europe and the Faith* (1920). Both Belloc and Lewis in much of their work may be regarded as public intellectuals. Both bring to their topics extensive historical knowledge in their effort to take the measure of the present in the light of the past: Belloc addressed the unifying element of what was then commonly identified as Christendom; Lewis focuses on the common Islamic faith of today’s Middle East.

In passing, Lewis reviews fourteen centuries of conflict between Islam and Christianity, “rival faiths,” he calls them, “with alternate messages to mankind.” For most the Middle Ages, Islam represented a mortal danger to Europe. That changed with the West’s successful defense of Vienna and the French occupation of Egypt under Napoleon in 1798. It was the French conquest of Egypt that initially brought Western influence to the very center of the Middle East. From the Islamic point of view, the Christian enemy had somehow managed to establish a transitory military supremacy. Eventually the heartlands of Islam became subject to the influence, dominance, and, at times, direct rule of Europe’s imperial powers, Britain, France, and Russia, who deprived most of the Islamic world of sovereignty. Foreign rule was seen as tyranny, and the overriding political aim of the Islamic states of the Middle East was to end it, to regain independence.

Islamic *polity*, Lewis reminds his reader, defines itself by religion, that

is, as a society in which identity and allegiance are determined by the acceptance of a common faith. The distinction between church and state, spiritual and temporal, ecclesiastical and lay, is a Christian concept that has had no analogue in Islamic history. Muslims typically are very conscious of their identity. They know who they are and what they want, and, Lewis adds, “a quality that many in the West seem to a very large extent to have lost.” In an Islamic state there is in principle no law other than Shari’a, the holy law of Islam. In the traditional order, the only lawgivers were of the ulema, doctors of the holy law who were at once jurists and theologians. The Prophet Muhammad, as head of state, not only promulgated the law but also applied and enforced it. His successors did the same.

Lewis makes a distinction between Islamic fundamentalism and Islam itself and makes the point that most Muslims are not fundamentalists, and further, that most fundamentalists are not terrorists. “At no point,” he writes, “do the basic texts of Islam enjoin terrorism and murder. At no point do they ever consider the random slaughter of uninvolved bystanders.” Yet, no one can deny that Islamic terrorism is a reality. Lewis is forced to acknowledge calls to violence on the part of Muslim authorities. The 1998 “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for the Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” was supposedly signed by Osama bin Laden and leaders of militant Islamist groups in Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The document holds that “To kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able, in any country where this is possible.” Even so, Lewis explains, “The fundamentalist aim is to end the corruption of Islamic society and restore the God-given holy law of Islam.” That, of course, is not characteristic of Islam as a whole. In Lewis’s account, two main ideas compete at present in the Middle East region, with two diagnoses

of the sickness of the society and two prescriptions for its cure. One of them is the modernist, usually secularist approach, the idea that it is possible and necessary for the Islamic lands to become part of modern civilization; or put frankly, the region is backward and impoverished because it clings to outmoded ideas and institutions. The remedy for the modernist is that of Kemel Ataturk in Turkey. The other solution, governed by a revulsion against Western civilization, is that of the fundamentalist who holds that what is wrong in the Muslim world is that Muslims have not been faithful to their inherited traditions. The remedy is to return to the roots of authentic Islam.

Where does Europe stand now, Lewis asks. "From the first irruption of Muslim Arabs in the seventh century to the second Turkish Muslim siege of Vienna in 1683, the pattern of relationship between [European Christendom and Middle Eastern Islam] was one of Muslim advance and Christian retreat, and the issue of the struggle was the possession of Europe." For the greater part of their history, Muslims had been accustomed to a position of supremacy and dominance. Muslims had ruled, unbelievers had submitted, and the leaders of the infidels, both at home and abroad, had recognized the supremacy of Islam. In the broad realms of the Islamic empires, the Christian populations had either embraced Islam or accepted a position of tolerated subordination.

Will Islam be successful in its third attempt to take over Europe? It is not impossible, Lewis believes. Muslims have certain clear advantages. The growth of Western self-doubt and self-criticism provides fertile ground. Muslims have fervor and conviction, which in most Western countries is weak or lacking. They have loyalty and discipline, but most of all they have demography on their side. The combination of natural population increases and uncontrolled immigra-

tion have produced major population changes which could lead in the foreseeable future to significant Islamic majorities in some European nations with corresponding political power. While their political impact is limited at present, the children of the newcomers will be native-born. It will not be possible in the long run to deny them citizenship. The consequence of a population many millions strong of Muslims born and educated in Western Europe will have immense and unpredictable consequences for Europe. Christianity itself poses no threat to Islam. "While Christian power," Lewis writes, "might at times have seemed a threat, Christian religion was never, and the very idea was an absurdity. How could a Muslim be attracted to an earlier, abrogated version of his own religion, and moreover one professed by subject peoples whom he had conquered and over whom he held sway?"

*Faith and Power* is suffused with Lewis's broad historical knowledge and the insight that comes from years of reflection. Given Lewis's somewhat romantic interpretation of its past, Islam could not want a more steadfast apologist. Lewis is convinced that once the dictators of the Middle East are eliminated, there can be a rapprochement between Islam and the West or at least a constructive engagement. "Let's talk to them, let's get together to see what we can do." After all Islam has a certain appeal to the left-wing, anti-American element in Europe. In this and in his more technical treatises, Lewis's work cannot be discounted. Yet Ignaz Goldhizer's *Introduction to Islamic Theology* (1905) remains a valuable source for anyone interested in the origin and development of Islamic thought over the centuries, a book available in English translation from Princeton University Press (1981).

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

Reviewed by Stephen J. Kovacs, Graduate Student of Systematic Theology, Graduate School of Theology, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Overbrook, Pennsylvania

Man, in his fallen nature, has always had to struggle to maintain his faith in God so as to enjoy communion with Him. In His infinite goodness and mercy, God has provided us with all the means necessary for us to have that communion by sending us His only Son to suffer and die for us and instituting the Church so as to unite all mankind into His Mystical Body. Even so, in our weakness we still fail to put our total faith in God. Yet, throughout the centuries the Church has been witness to countless miraculous occurrences through which God continues to make Himself known to us in unique and mysterious ways. Through these phenomena He offers us His mercy, reveals truths, guides us when we go astray, and ultimately leads us to greater faith. Unfortunately in our present times many people, Catholics included, are unfamiliar with these marvelous supernatural happenings which, even if they occurred centuries ago, can bear great and lasting fruit in our own lives today. But first, we must be made aware of them!

Elizabeth Ficocelli, Catholic speaker and author of numerous books on the Faith for adults and children, provides a thorough introduction to the various miraculous occurrences that have taken place throughout the long history of the Church in her book *Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone: True Stories of Divine Wonders, Miracles and Messages*. In the preface she explains that her purpose is simply to inform others, particularly Catholics, of these

great wonders, of which many have never been informed. Ficocelli writes in a style geared toward young adults (particularly by explaining Catholic terms and concepts that are perhaps unfamiliar to many); yet, mature adults too can benefit tremendously from reading this book. While this book is a Catholic work with Catholics as the main audience, non-Catholics can also gain much from reading it because of its accessible style and the nature of the subject matter.

*Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone* tells the true stories of many of the various forms in which miracles have taken place in the Church, such as the bread and wine at the consecration of the Mass transforming visibly into human flesh and blood; holy men and women surviving years strictly on the nourishment of the Eucharist; and statues and icons that mysteriously weep tears, blood, and oil. Each type of miracle is presented within its own chapter and offers a broad selection of stories that are arranged chronologically, showing that miracles not only took place in ages long ago but still take place in our modern times. Ficocelli tells stories that are well known to many Catholics, such as the Marian apparitions at Guadalupe and Fatima and the levitations of St. Joseph of Cupertino. She also tells stories of miracles that are less known perhaps even to the most devout, such as that of an Austrian knight in the year 1384 who sunk through the stone floor of the church when he demanded the priest give him the largest Host at Mass, and a present-day Syrian woman, believed to undergo suffering for the sake of unity between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, who suffers the stigmata on Holy Thursdays whenever it falls on the same day in both the Catholic and Orthodox calendars.

Throughout the book, Ficocelli demonstrates commonsense piety. While acknowledging the astounding character of some of the more unusual miracles, like a monk being heard chanting the Divine Office along with his fellow monks even after he was dead, she doesn't tell these stories for shock value or for pure entertainment. At the beginning of each chapter, Ficocelli offers a pertinent Scripture quotation to set a proper perspective for reading the miracle stories in that particular chapter. She also concludes each chapter by highlighting some important lessons to be learned from the miracles, contextualizing them within the broader scope of the Faith, and offering responses to some of the obvious questions that the stories in that chapter are likely to raise. Ficocelli makes note of the fact that Satan, a great imitator, is known to perform works that appear to be of divine origin so as to deceive and draw people away from God. The battle we all must fight for our souls is a real one, and is not glossed over in this book. She is unwavering in her fidelity to the Magisterium and guides the reader as to how to approach certain inexplicable occurrences, appearing to be acts of God, that, as of yet, have not been officially recognized by the Church.

God always works miracles for a purpose, and much can be drawn from them not only for those who were the immediate recipients or eyewitnesses, but to all of us who are privileged to know of these wonders. The stories found in *Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone* on Eucharistic miracles, for example, can do much to increase our faith in Christ's Real Presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament. How could one read the story of a village on the island of Martinique, which in 1902 was miraculously spared

destruction from the eruption of Mount Pelée when villagers gathered in prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and not be awed into greater reverence and faith in the Eucharist? Likewise, stories of how the bodies of saints have been perfectly preserved from corruption even centuries after their death and poor burial conditions can do much to form in us a greater respect and understanding of the sanctity of the human body. And few could read of the warnings of the Blessed Mother delivered through various apparitions and not take their sins more seriously. In the early 1980s, Our Lady appeared to several children in Rwanda and gave them a message that warned of a terrible tragedy that would come to pass should the people fail to turn back to God; but her merciful message fell on deaf ears. Ten years later an infamous civil war of horrific proportions erupted in Rwanda that led to the slaughter of nearly one million people. We need to hear stories like this; not so as to despair but to accept the great mercy of God and amend our ways before it is too late.

Ficocelli concludes the book with a thoughtful chapter discussing how we are to make sense of all that has been told in the preceding chapters in light of our faith and the unique mission we share as Catholics. She also provides an excellent list of sources for further reading on the subject of miracles for those who are so intrigued as to want to learn more about these divine wonders. In sum, in *Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone*, Elizabeth Ficocelli successfully accomplishes her mission of informing us of some of the many miraculous ways in which God reveals Himself to us and directs us toward our supernatural destiny.

*The following are published columns by William Saunders  
Senior Vice-President and Senior  
Counsel at Americans United for Life*

## Sour Taste on a Great Day: Don't Forget the Nuba

July 11, 2011

I sat in my hotel room in Vienna, amazed. There on the TV, on the German and English networks, was General Bashir of Sudan—a man indicted for war crimes in Darfur, an engineer of genocide—standing in the capital of a new country, one formed by splitting Sudan in two. That new country is South Sudan, whose people voted all but unanimously to split from the north, pursuant to a peace deal brokered by President Bush early in his administration.

In 1989, the National Islamic Front, driven by the ferociously racist and anti-Christian ideology of radical Islam, seized power in a military coup led by General Bashir. The NIF proceeded to unleash a whirlwind of hatred against their fellow citizens in the south. Millions—note, millions—died, and this was long before the atrocities in Darfur. The war against the innocent, defended by the SPLM army, raged until the Bush-led peace deal in 2003.

So to see General Bashir in the capital of the new Sudan as part of the celebration was, well, both moving and puzzling.

Certainly the birth of South Sudan is the occasion for genuine celebration. The southerners, though still at risk from a revived war at the hands of the notoriously duplicitous Bashir, are free, free at long last.

But there is a sour taste along with the champagne. What about the Nuba? And what fate for the forgotten southerners of Abyei, on the disputed border between north and south?

Around the year 2000, along with some colleagues and a Catholic Sudanese bishop, I founded an organization whose purpose was to respond to the desperate plight of these Sudanese, to bring aid to them in-country, and to bring political assistance by working the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. This was at the height of the north's campaign against them, when they literally faced annihilation.

The proud warrior Dinka of Abyei were subjected to ruthless slave raids by northern tribesmen, armed by Bashir's regime. The slavers killed the men, repeatedly gang-raped the women, and abducted the women and children for a life of slavery, during which their Achilles tendons were deliberately cut and they were treated much worse than the animals they were forced to herd. It is no surprise that the northerners' term for the black Dinka is "fire-wood," i.e., the Dinka are not seen as human beings. That is brutal and ugly, and it led to devastating consequences for the Dinka. My colleagues documented this in extensive interviews with escaped slaves and survivors of the raids on Dinka villages, interviews compiled in a film and deposited in various human-rights archives.

But to a certain extent, the hatred of Bashir and his cronies is even more intense when it comes to the Nuba.

The Nuba have one of the most ancient cultures in Africa, as many anthropological studies and documentaries attest. They are ethnically African, and religiously, they are Christian, Muslim, and Animist. As they lived peacefully in this diversity, they drew the particular ire of the NIF, a regime committed to a unitary vision of Sudan, one of Arab cultural identity and (extreme fundamentalist) Muslim religion.

I have been to the Nuba Mountains. I saw the NIF's planes bomb defenseless civilians, including schools and churches, killing and maiming children and others. I have seen them bomb make-shift landing strips, landing strips used only by planes bringing supplies to a beleaguered people, people beleaguered because the NIF denied relief flights.

And then, in the 2003 peace deal, there was hope. But among the Nuba and Dinka and other Sudanese, there was also suspicion. Would Bashir abide by the terms of the peace deal and allow freedom for Abyei and the Nuba Mountains?

It is now clear Bashir and the regime he represents will not.

As the south moved toward independence, Bashir and the NIF initiated—and then increased—brutal attacks on civilians in both areas. Their geographical location makes them vulnerable—Abyei on the north/south border and the Nuba Mountains in the north, through a cruel twist of fate (to "permit" them to secede would fracture

the geographical unity of the north).

Thus, the wonderful, glorious celebrations of July 9 as independence day for South Sudan have no resonance in, or scarcely any meaning for, the Nuba of the mountains and the Dinka of Abyei. They face the same merciless enemy, who seemingly thinks independence for South Sudan will blind the world to the continuing, escalating atrocities in Abyei and the mountains (and in some other places as well).

Don't let it happen. Already, on July 9, Bashir called upon President Obama to lift sanctions. He must not do it. The world must keep relentless pressure on Bashir and his gang to end the brutality against the Nuba and the Dinka of Abyei. Otherwise, I am certain the genocide begun in 1989 will be pursued to its ruthless end.

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## Planned Parenthood's Lawless Policies

July 7, 2011

Planned Parenthood must account for its disregard for the law if it wishes to retain state funding.

In Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Texas, and other states, legislators have passed or are considering passing funding restrictions that would bar Planned Parenthood from receiving state and federal healthcare funds. Within hours of Indiana's Governor, Mitch Daniels, signing a funding restriction into law, Planned Parenthood filed suit and later received support from the Department of Justice for its cause.

On Friday, June 24, 2011, Planned Parenthood won a first-round victory in an Indiana federal district court, temporarily halting the implementation of the law. Indiana has appealed this decision, but more lawsuits, including one in Kansas, are already appearing. One important argument that Planned Parenthood is making in its defense centers around the claim that Planned Parenthood provides non-abortive healthcare. Thus Planned Parenthood CEO Cecile Richards claimed that Indiana's law would "take away health care from thousands of women in Indiana." However, phone calls made by Live Action



volunteers to sixteen Planned Parenthood clinics in Indiana revealed that all of the clinics admitted that women on Medicaid could receive healthcare elsewhere.

But why all the fuss from these state legislatures? Planned Parenthood defines itself as a protector of women's health and "rights." Furthermore, public perception of Planned Parenthood tends to be favorable; recent polls by CNN show that many Americans do not currently support defunding the organization.

In part, the abortion business of Planned Parenthood--the nation's largest abortion provider--is what the "fuss" is about. States simply do not want to subsidize the abortion industry with taxpayer dollars. This is certainly true in Indiana, where the funding restriction does not target Planned Parenthood by name, but prohibits the state from contracting with abortion providers.

An in-depth investigation of Planned Parenthood by Americans United for Life, the nation's first pro-life public-interest law and policy organization (where I serve as Senior Vice President and Senior Council), demonstrates that abortion is central to Planned Parenthood's business. The AUL Report, however, uncovers much, much more than just the importance of abortion to Planned Parenthood operations. It reveals Planned Parenthood practices that are irresponsible, dangerous, and fly in the face of the organization's claims of dedication to women in need of medical services.

AUL's Report pulls together in one place, for the first time, a litany of scandals associated with Planned Parenthood, demonstrating the breadth and persistence of the organization's abuses. The Report shows that the "fuss" about Planned Parenthood is currently, if anything, about far too little. What follows in this article are just a few examples of the many reasons, all documented by the Report, why state--and federal--legislatures are (and all Americans should be) rethinking their dedication to Planned Parenthood.

Planned Parenthood and its affiliates receive over \$363 million dollars in government grants and contracts. Medicaid, a program administered by the states and jointly funded by the federal government, contributes a large portion of these funds, and audit reports reveal that Planned Parenthood affiliates have over-billed Medicaid in at least New Jersey,

California, New York, and Washington. In California, for example, reports show that one Planned Parenthood affiliate in one fiscal year overbilled the government by over \$5 million. In this time of fiscal crisis, Planned Parenthood's failed stewardship of state and federal taxpayer dollars is appalling.

In addition to defrauding the government and the American taxpayer, it is questionable whether Planned Parenthood abides by state and federal laws restricting abortion funding. Abby Johnson, a former director at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Texas, has stated, "as clinic director, I saw how money received by Planned Parenthood affiliate clinics all went into one pot at the end of the day--it isn't divvied up and directed to specific services." If so, this procedure is a violation of federal laws, such as the Hyde Amendment, that specifically prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars for abortion.

More sinister than its misuse of public funding is how little Planned Parenthood cares for the safety of the young women who seek its medical care. The statistics on sexual abuse of girls under the age of eighteen in the United States are staggering. 75 percent of girls under fourteen who have engaged in sexual activity report having had a forced sexual experience; many of the men who engage in these abusive sexual relationships and father children are significantly older.

Even Planned Parenthood acknowledges in its "Fact Sheet" on "Reducing Teenage Pregnancy" that among women younger than 18, the pregnancy rate among those with a partner who is six or more years older is 3.7 times as high as the rate among those whose partner is no more than two years older. To help protect these young girls, all fifty states and the federal government have enacted mandatory reporting laws. These laws require that certain organizations, such as hospitals, report suspected cases of abuse or rape. Thirty-seven states also have parental involvement laws in place that involve the parents in a minor's decisions regarding abortion.

Given the statistics, most parents--indeed, most people--would expect that an organization like Planned Parenthood, which prides itself on the quality of its care, would be especially protective of young pregnant girls. However, the opposite is the case. In Arizona, Ohio, and Alabama, legal action has been initi-

ated against Planned Parenthood affiliates for failing to report sexual abuse or to obey abortion laws. Instead of providing protection for young victims of abuse, Planned Parenthood's practices--detailed in the AUL Report--enable the abusers to cover their crimes. For example, in Arizona, Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona was found liable after it failed to report the sexual abuse of a 13-year-old girl who was raped by her 23-year-old foster brother.

Planned Parenthood even appears willing to protect men who traffic girls as young as fourteen, allowing the continued exploitation of these children for commercial sex. Planned Parenthood clinic workers have been caught telling clients, claiming to be engaged in "sex work," how to avoid reporting and parental consent laws. It seems that Planned Parenthood is satisfied with providing cheap abortions and contraceptives to young victims of the sex trade and then simply sending these girls back into the arms of their abusers and pimps rather than reporting their terrible situation.

Planned Parenthood also refuses to abide by Food and Drug Administration standards, seeming to put its bottom line above women's health and safety. For example, Mifeprex/Mifepristone, a drug that has been approved in combination with Misoprostol (the RU-486 regimen) as an abortion-inducing drug, had been authorized by the FDA for use only up to the 49th day of pregnancy. After 49 days, there is a substantially increased risk of the drug's failure and complications for a woman's health and safety. However, Planned Parenthood prescribes the abortion drug through the 63rd day of pregnancy, two weeks later than approved by the FDA.

What is the consequence of this off-label use? On top of an increase in serious health risks (such as hemorrhaging), the RU-486 has a 23 percent failure rate at this stage in pregnancy. By providing women with a drug that fails nearly one in four times, Planned Parenthood can get women to pay for a second abortion. This second abortion must be performed surgically and is therefore more expensive. Planned Parenthood compounds its already hazardous use of RU-486 by distributing the drug through "telemedicine." Telemedicine entails an "online" visit with a doctor before RU-486 is prescribed, rather than

the in-person office visits required by the FDA. This violates FDA protocol and circumvents state laws designed to protect women's health.

Not only has Planned Parenthood violated existent laws protecting women, it has stood against lawmakers attempts to implement new and more effective safety measures. In 2001, the Governor of Texas, Rick Perry, signed legislation that strengthened mandatory reporting laws for sexual abuse of a woman under seventeen and Planned Parenthood vigorously opposed its implementation. In Illinois in 2011, Planned Parenthood lobbied against legislation to broaden a sexual abuse reporting law to require almost all employees and volunteers of organizations that provide or refer for reproductive healthcare or sex education to report child abuse or suspected

sexual abuse. They also have opposed laws in Nebraska increasing parental involvement by requiring notification or consent and bills in Illinois offering a pregnant woman who is seeking an abortion the opportunity to get an ultrasound. These are commonsense laws that would make the world a little safer for women. Planned Parenthood's opposition to what should be "common ground" shows how far the abortion organization is outside the mainstream.

Planned Parenthood claims to be a "trusted health care provider," but the AUL Report clearly shows that there is little to trust about Planned Parenthood. Even so, the Report only scratches the surface. Congress should use its power to investigate Planned Parenthood further and determine, once and for all, if it deserves our support, our

loyalty, and our money. Until Planned Parenthood answers for its behavior, the surprise is not that the people of Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, and Texas want to take away their funding, but that Planned Parenthood has not already been stripped of taxpayer dollars throughout the nation. Slowly but surely, Americans will become aware of how little Planned Parenthood deserves our trust, our respect, and our tax dollars. It is time to consider if you really know about Planned Parenthood.

If you would like to learn more and read the complete report published by AUL, please visit [www.aul.org](http://www.aul.org).

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## 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](mailto:osberger.1@nd.edu)*

***Battle-Scarred: Justice Can be Elusive.*** John F. Kippley. (2011), LaVergne, TN, 250pp, 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.

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

***An Ocean Full of Angels.*** Peter Kreeft. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, (2011), 375 pp., hardcover.

***The Pope's Soldiers: A Military History of the Modern Vatican.*** David Alvarez, University Press of Kansas, (2011), 429 pp., hardcover.

***Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook, 2nd Edition.*** Edited by Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, (2011) 443 pp., paper.

***Happiness, God & Man: "We Were Created to be happy."*** Christoph Cardinal Schönborn. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, (2010) 189 pp., paper.

***Fire of Love: A Historical Novel about Saint John of the Cross.*** José Luis Olaizola. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, (2011) 217 pp., paper.

***Holiness is Always In Season.*** Pope Benedict XVI. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, (2009) 333 pp., hardcover.

***Poetry, Beauty, and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain.*** John G. Trapani, Jr. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, (2011) 176pp., paper.

***The Desert Fathers: Saint Anthony and the Beginnings of Monasticism.*** Peter H. Görg. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, (2008), 131 pp., paper.

***Cicero: In Defence of the Republic.*** Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Siobhan McElduff. London: Penguin Books, (2011), 315 pp., paper.

***Abandonment to Divine Providence: With Letters of Father de Caussade on the Practice of Self-Abandonment.*** Father Jean-Pierre de Caussade, S.J. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, (2011), 453 pp., paper.

***The Ethics of Organ Transplantation.*** Ed by Steven J. Jensen. Washington, DC: CUA Press, (2011), 339 pp., paper.

## NOTICE

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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](mailto:koterski@fordham.edu)

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## Review of Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*

Sr. Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God* (New York, London: Continuum, 2007) aims to express an understanding of God that will more effectively promote justice, peace, and love in the world than traditional theologies of God, which she claims sometimes justified oppression of the poor and women. She is especially interested in the transformation of social structures that will establish justice for women and gradually establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Johnson further argues that "the practice of justice and peace actually mediates a profound experience of the mystery of God" (*Quest*, p. 86). She seems to mean that the right kind of political and social action gives knowledge of God. In another formulation she says, "Knowing God is impossible unless we enter into a life of love and communion with others" (*Quest*, p. 223). In other words, to come to a deep understanding of the faith, people have to live it in their daily lives. In making this kind of argument she sounds like a disciple of St. Augustine, but a closer look reveals that this is not the case. Other passages in the book seem to indicate that Johnson's theological approach is not even based on the true faith of the Church. That is the contention of the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), who issued a statement regarding *Quest for the Living God* on March 24, 2011.

In an open letter (June 6, 2011) to the U.S. bishops' committee Johnson claims that the committee is seriously mistaken to argue that she does not base her book on the faith of the Church: "Not only does *Quest for the Living God* begin with the faith of the Church, but it also ends there as well." She is confidently able to make this statement because, in her interpretation, Vatican Council II's *Lumen gentium* "positions the church as all the people of God. . . . Such is the understanding of the faith of the church that frames my book. It is the faith of the people of God" (*Letter*, section I, par. 1, 4). The key question is whether or not this is a correct interpretation of Vatican II and an adequate response to the Doctrine Committee's argument. Does Johnson simply have a theological approach different from that of the bishops' committee, or does she change the faith of the Church both by her manner of consulting the

People of God and her mode of doing theology? May she properly put more faith in what the People of God say today than in Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching authority of the Church?

The first thing to note is that the teaching of Vatican Council II does not allow for the interpretation of the Church merely as the "People of God." Vatican II documents use "Body of Christ" more often to describe the Church. *Lumen gentium* teaches that the Body of Christ is visibly and hierarchically organized.

Secondly, Johnson only makes contact with selected sectors of the People of God by attending to eight theologies emerging from the praxis and thought of these people. She names these theologies transcendental, political, liberation, feminist/womanist, black, Latino/Latina, interreligious, and ecological. Because Johnson understands them to be "the living Christian tradition in our day" and "deeply concerned with God's relationship to the world" (*Quest*, p. 47, 16), she deems it sufficient to consult these groups alone in order to know the mind and heart of the People of God. What about the views and theologies of other members of the People of God such as pro-life and pro-family organizations, the Knights of Columbus, Opus Dei, *Communio e Liberazione*, the Neo-Catechumenal Way, etc.?

Johnson ascribes normative character to the view of the faith espoused by her selected groups on the basis of their experience. She does not explicitly measure the praxis of these groups or their theologies against Scripture, Tradition, or the longstanding teaching of the Church's magisterium, although she claims that her book "does not deny, either explicitly or implicitly, any central doctrine of the church derived from scripture and creed" (*Letter*, Introduction, par. 7). She simply assumes that the "people's lived religiosity" is an expression of the *sensus fidelium*, which she defines as "the teaching that the body of the faithful as a whole, baptized, anointed, and moved by the Spirit, has an intuitive grasp of matters of belief that is ultimately reliable" (*Quest*, 140). Johnson makes no distinction between those people in her eight groups who adhere to the *sensus fidei* and those who pay no attention to it. She does not acknowledge that people's lived religiosity is only a

reliable indicator of the Church's teaching if it springs from the *sensus fidei*.

Johnson's mode of theologizing begins with praxis, lived religiosity, lived experience rather than doctrine. The praxis is primary and serves as norm for judging a religion's vitality. In Johnson's words, "the whole book is written . . . to present the knowledge of the living God arising from different insights and practices of the faith in the church, knowledge which I judge to be true" (*Letter*, section 5, par. 2). She, of course, is referring to the contemporary practices of her selected eight groups in the People of God. She does not first look for the knowledge of the living God in the *depositum fidei* preserved by the Catholic Church over the centuries. What really matters is what the contemporary People of God say, not the *sensus fidei* and the teaching of the Church from the time of Christ.

Still another way to get at the heart of her theological approach based on praxis is to look at what she says in her chapter on the "Liberating God of Life." "Liberation theology has long insisted on the priority of praxis for right thinking. Rather than starting with a correct principle, whether of reason or faith, you have to be walking as a disciple, placing your feet in the footsteps of Jesus and actively seeking to bring about the reign of God, in order for your thought to be true" (*Quest*, p. 83). Without the aid of doctrine, how would people recognize if they were really walking in the footsteps of Marx, and working to realize his vision, rather than the Kingdom of God?

In looking to the views of her selected sector of the people of God as her highest source of knowledge about God, Johnson, not surprisingly, finds Scripture and Church teaching deficient in significant respects. For example, with respect to Scripture she writes, "a profound challenge goes forth to the whole church: stop trivializing the scandalous statements that scripture makes about God" (*Quest*, pp. 80-81). She further slams a New Testament writer for his statements about women in I Tim 2:11-15,<sup>1</sup> claiming that this offensive passage "triggered an appalling tradition" of discrimination against women in the Church (*Quest*, p. 92).

With respect to Church teaching Johnson says, "In this wintry season, church statements about God are ordinarily too naive and too superficial to help believers, let alone convince unbelievers" (*Quest*, p. 30). She further adds that traditional teaching and doctrine have been neutral in the face of injustice (*Quest*, p. 80). In fact, traditional Christian doctrine has encouraged resignation to the suffering of the poor (*Quest*, p. 73).

The Church has also covered up the presence of the Spirit of God in all people because of her long polemic against nonbelievers. She claims the Church is wrong to teach that God is omnipotent or impassible. With Moltmann and Soelle, Johnson believes that God suffers in his divine nature. She further contends that Church teaching that refers to God as a person is useless. "We don't really understand what it means to attribute personhood to God" (*Quest*, p. 19). In addition, she argues that we "literally don't know what we are saying" (*Quest*, p. 19) when we call God good.

While discussing the experience of African-American women as a *locus theologicus*, she seems to take issue with the doctrine of the Redemption in reporting on black women's "experience of surrogacy": "Redemption can have nothing to do with a bloody act of one person being killed in place of another" (*Quest*, p. 129). This way of envisaging the Redemption causes the "repugnant slave-master image of God to loom large" (*Quest*, p. 130). She is critical of *Dominus Jesus*, the Church document that explained the unique salvific role of Christ while discussing the relation of Christianity to other religions. Believing that the Holy Spirit does unique things in the non-Christian religions, she affirms the following statement by Jacques Dupuis, "More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire course of God's dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian religion" (*Quest*, p. 163). For Johnson religious pluralism should be regarded as a "diving gift" (*Quest*, p. 178).

Let us come back to Johnson's skepticism about using words such as person and good to describe God. She also refuses to accept the Father-Son language as revelatory of God's reality. Without key words the content of faith cannot be intellectually expressed, and then believers cannot express to themselves or others what they really believe. Even more important, the Church cannot propose truths to which people can give the assent of faith. How could evangelization be possible if the faith of the Church cannot be expressed in intelligible, meaningful words? There has to be unity of faith in the Catholic Church, and that faith must be expressible in intelligible words. Otherwise, not only will contrary practices and divergent creeds arise, but also the very intelligibility of the created order is undermined. Faith becomes an irrational leap into darkness.

In her letter to the bishops' committee, Johnson denies rejecting the use of all words to talk about God: "Note that the book explicitly states that our words do affirm something of God" (*Letter*, section 5, par.

ro). Johnson accepts language coming from the People of God to describe their experience of God, but she definitely rejects key words deriving from the grand Catholic tradition.

In order to understand what stands behind Johnson's theological approach it is necessary to examine what Pope John Paul II has said about historicism: "The fundamental claim of historicism . . . is that the truth of a philosophy is determined on the basis of its appropriateness to a certain period and a certain historical purpose. At least implicitly, therefore, the enduring validity of truth is denied. What was true in one period, historicists claim, may not be true in another."<sup>2</sup> So what the Bible said in the past was true for its time period, but not for all time. Furthermore, historicist theologians claim that the teaching authority of the Church can never definitively settle any moral or doctrinal issue with authoritative teaching. This is because reality supposedly doesn't allow such a thing.

Johnson's manner of consulting the People of God reveals that the embrace of historical consciousness or historicism is, wittingly or unwittingly, the ultimate foundation of her theological approach, as it is for many contemporary moral theologians. Her eight groups – not Scripture or the magisterium – put us in contact with "the living tradition of the Church" which changes according to the demands of the historical situation. What this means in practice is that there can be no appeal to the longstanding faith of the Church to correct or guide the People of God. Church teaching, Johnson argues, has to adjust to "the changing history of human cultures. . . . When circumstances change, the experience of the divine undergoes a shift. Images, intellectual constructs, and rituals that mediated a sense of God in one age often do not make sense in the next with its change of perceptions, values, and lifestyles. The search must be undertaken anew if religious traditions are to remain vibrant and alive. . . . As this book aims to show, the fact that in our day multiple, rich Christian theologies have been seeking and finding the living God in ways coherent with our changing times testifies that this particular Way remains a vital, viable option" (*Quest*, p. 13, 23). These "rich Christian theologies" are, of course, those emerging from the praxis of the eight groups selected by Johnson as most likely to mediate a sense of God. Johnson is actually recommending that teaching about God cohere with the changing times and not vice versa, as the Catholic Church has taught from the beginning. She, of course, has faith that her People of God will discern the good from the bad in the changing times.

Johnson believes that her chosen People of God have embraced positions that will bring the kind of *aggiornamento* desired by Vatican Council II. In reading Johnson's account of the emerging theologies of the eight groups, one cannot help but notice that they all are on the same progressive wavelength. Her consultation of the People of God is so selective that there is no doubt as to the outcome: her People of God, tutored by theologians, now embrace the program of the religious and political left and have with their magisterial authority, bestowed by Vatican II, modified the perennial teaching of the Church and will continue to do so in the future according to the demands of the times.

As mentioned, Johnson expects the transformation of social structures to "usher in the reign of God" (*Quest*, p. 84) partially and gradually. This position reflects a major tenet of modern political philosophy: change of structures is more effective in bringing about reform than the practice of virtue or holiness. To speak the way Johnson does about the transformation of social structures is to imply, wittingly or unwittingly, that political action is more effective in working for the kingdom of God than evangelization or the worthy reception of the Eucharist. *Quest* does not even mention receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist is a special way to know and love God, and to generate love of one's neighbor,

To use Francis Bacon's revealing terminology, *Quest for the Living God* is a book that introduces "new modes and orders." By an erroneous interpretation of Vatican II's teaching on the People of God, Johnson removes the traditional foundations of the Catholic faith and places in jeopardy the realization of the love and justice that she ardently desires. ✕

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Translation used by Sr. Johnson: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived, and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing." A literal translation from the Greek could read: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to domineer over a man [or her husband]; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with self control." Johnson omitted the list of virtues necessary for salvation, mentioned in the second part of verse 15.
- 2 *Fides et ratio*, no. 87.

J. Brian Benestad  
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