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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

New Initiatives of the Fellowship

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

I am happy to be able to report to you on some exciting new initiatives that the Fellowship is undertaking at the present time.

As you may know, the officers of the Fellowship have been meeting each spring with members of the Doctrine Committee of the USCCB. Thanks to Father Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., a long-time member of the Fellowship and the secretary of the Doctrine Committee, this meeting has been a ready source of ideas for ways in which the Fellowship can be of service to the Church.

In response to a perceived need for additional resources to help priests and deacons to preach well and often about doctrinal topics, controversial questions, and such important matters as prayer and sacramental practice, the Fellowship has undertaken to publish a bi-monthly set of homily helps called *Teaching the Faith*. The Fellowship's board has appointed Elizabeth Shaw (the editor of our annual proceedings) as the editor of this new publication. It will be available both in print form and electronically.

Each issue will include an essay (when possible, written by a member of the Fellowship) that addresses the topic chosen for that issue, with appropriate references to the liturgical cycle of readings for a specific Sunday, as well as a set of helpful internet and print resources and a set of talking points that might be used to structure a homily. With the aid of a grant from The Our Sunday Visitor Institute, we have thus far distributed our new publication to the clergy of the Archdiocese of Washington and of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, CA. The responses received thus far to the two issues in a three-issue pilot program have been helpful and encouraging. The topics chosen for the first three issues are suggestive for where we hope to go in the future: the Church's authority to form consciences (essay by Russell Shaw), the challenges that science presents to religion (essay by Christian Brugger), and same-sex marriage (essay by Kenneth Whitehead). Suggestions about suitable topics and authors for future issues are most welcome.

Let me also call your attention to some important improvements that have been made in the Fellowship's website (www.catholicsscholars.org). FCS board member Max Bonil-

la has brought about a major upgrade of that part of the site that is devoted to archiving the *FCS Quarterly*. All the issues of the *Quarterly* are now searchable electronically! In a related development, there is a new feature of our website that allows members and other institutions to post information about conferences that may be of interest as well as notices about academic positions that have become available. Please take a moment to have a look at these features of our website, which also has the latest information about the splendid program on religious liberty that FCS board member Bill Saunders and his program committee have put together for our fall 2012 conference in Washington, D.C., on September 28-30, 2012.

Looking ahead, the Fellowship plans to devote its 2013 meeting in Philadelphia, PA, to the topic of freedom and the moral law. The conference will take place on September 27-29, 2013, at the Crowne Plaza Philadelphia West. Please mark your calendars!

The FCS board has been increasingly eager to see more younger scholars join our organization. In an effort to assist them with getting institutional support to come to our meetings as well as to help them prepare papers for publication in their professions, the 2012 convention will launch a new initiative spearheaded by Father John M. McDermott, S.J., an FCS board mem-

ber from Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. Our plan is to form research interest groups in numerous disciplines that will be able to be in communication electronically throughout the year as well as to meet in person at our conventions. A number of established scholars have volunteered to chair these groups and to select papers for discussion at a break-out session during the conference. For further details, please see the separate item on this topic elsewhere in this issue of the *Quarterly*.

With every passing week, the need for our Fellowship becomes yet more obvious. The attacks upon the Church increase, and our Catholic bishops need both our prayers and the support that we can offer by bringing to bear the intellectual resources of our disciplines for the defense of the Church. Please consider how you can help – including the submission of articles from your own disciplines for publication here in the Fellowship’s *Quarterly*. With the upcoming anniversaries of the documents of Vatican II, it would be wonderful to fill these pages with thoughtful essays about the proper understanding of these documents and their relevance for the life of the Church today. We also warmly welcome articles on other topics, of course, and we very much appreciate anything that our members can do to assist with the financial support of this organization. ✠

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the United States of America (Regions X–XIII) on their “Ad Limina” Visit

Saturday, 5 May 2012

Dear Brother Bishops,

I greet all of you with affection in the Lord and I offer you my prayerful good wishes for a grace-filled pilgrimage *ad limina Apostolorum*. In the course of our meetings I have been reflecting with you and your Brother Bishops on the intellectual and cultural challenges of the new evangelization in

the context of contemporary American society. In the present talk, I wish to address the question of religious education and the faith formation of the next generation of Catholics in your country.

Before all else, I would acknowledge the great progress that has been made in recent years in improving catechesis, reviewing texts and bringing them into conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Important efforts are also being made to preserve the great patrimony of America’s Catholic elementary

and high schools, which have been deeply affected by changing demographics and increased costs, while at the same time ensuring that the education they provide remains within the reach of all families, whatever their financial status. As has often been mentioned in our meetings, these schools remain an essential resource for the new evangelization, and the significant contribution that they make to American society as a whole ought to be better appreciated and more generously supported.

On the level of higher education, many of you have pointed to a growing recognition on the part of Catholic colleges and universities of the need to reaffirm their distinctive identity in fidelity to their founding ideals and the Church's mission in service of the Gospel. Yet much remains to be done, especially in such basic areas as compliance with the mandate laid down in Canon 812 for those who teach theological disciplines. The importance of this canonical norm as a tangible expression of ecclesial communion and solidarity in the Church's educational apostolate becomes all the more evident when we consider the confusion created by instances of apparent dissidence between some representatives of Catholic institutions and the Church's pastoral leadership: such discord harms the Church's witness and, as experience has shown, can easily be exploited to compromise her authority and her freedom.

It is no exaggeration to say that providing young people with a sound education in the faith represents the most urgent internal challenge facing the Catholic community in your country. The deposit of faith is a priceless treasure which each generation must pass on to the next by winning hearts to Jesus Christ and shaping minds in the knowledge, understanding and love of his Church. It is gratifying to realize that, in our day too, the Christian vision, presented in its breadth and integrity, proves immensely appealing to the imagination, idealism and aspirations of the young, who have a right to encounter the faith in all its beauty, its intellectual richness and its radical demands.

Here I would simply propose several points which I trust will prove helpful for your discernment in meeting this challenge.

First, as we know, the essential task of authentic education at every level is not simply that of passing on knowledge, essential as this is, but also of shaping hearts. There is a constant need to balance intellectual rigor in communicating effectively, attractively and integrally, the richness of the Church's faith with forming the young in the love of God, the praxis of the Christian

moral and sacramental life and, not least, the cultivation of personal and liturgical prayer.

It follows that the question of Catholic identity, not least at the university level, entails much more than the teaching of religion or the mere presence of a chaplaincy on campus. All too often, it seems, Catholic schools and colleges have failed to challenge students to reappropriate their faith as part of the exciting intellectual discoveries which mark the experience of higher education. The fact that so many new students find themselves dissociated from the family, school and community support systems that previously facilitated the transmission of the faith should continually spur Catholic institutions of learning to create new and effective networks of support. In every aspect of their education, students need to be encouraged to articulate a vision of the harmony of faith and reason capable of guiding a life-long pursuit of knowledge and virtue. As ever, an essential role in this process is played by teachers who inspire others by their evident love of Christ, their witness of sound devotion and their commitment to that *sapientia Christiana* which integrates faith and life, intellectual passion and reverence for the splendor of truth both human and divine.

In effect, faith by its very nature demands a constant and all-embracing conversion to the fullness of truth revealed in Christ. He is the creative Logos, in whom all things were made and in whom all reality "holds together" (*Col* 1:17); he is the new Adam who reveals the ultimate truth about man and the world in which we live. In a period of great cultural change and societal displacement not unlike our own, Augustine pointed to this intrinsic connection between faith and the human intellectual enterprise by appealing to Plato, who held, he says, that "to love wisdom is to love God" (*cf. De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 8). The Christian commitment to learning, which gave birth to the medieval universities, was based upon this conviction that the one God, as the source of all truth and goodness, is likewise the source of the intellect's passionate desire to know and the will's yearning for fulfilment in love.

Only in this light can we appreciate the distinctive contribution of Catholic education, which engages in a "diakonia of truth" inspired by an intellectual charity which knows that leading others to the truth is ultimately an act of love (*cf. Address to Catholic Educators*, Washington, 17 April 2008). Faith's recognition of the essential unity of all knowledge provides a bulwark against the alienation and fragmentation which occurs when the use of reason is detached from the pursuit of

truth and virtue; in this sense, Catholic institutions have a specific role to play in helping to overcome the crisis of universities today. Firmly grounded in this vision of the intrinsic interplay of faith, reason and the pursuit of human excellence, every Christian intellectual and all the Church's educational institutions must be convinced, and desirous of convincing others, that no aspect of reality remains alien to, or untouched by, the mystery of the redemption and the Risen Lord's dominion over all creation.

During my Pastoral Visit to the United States, I spoke of the need for the Church in America to cultivate "a mindset, an intellectual culture which is genuinely Catholic" (cf. *Homily at Nationals Stadium*, Washington, 17 April 2008). Taking up this task certainly involves a renewal of apologetics and an emphasis on Catholic distinctiveness; ultimately however it must be aimed at proclaiming the liberating truth of Christ and stimulating greater dialogue and cooperation in build-

ing a society ever more solidly grounded in an authentic humanism inspired by the Gospel and faithful to the highest values of America's civic and cultural heritage. At the present moment of your nation's history, this is the challenge and opportunity awaiting the entire Catholic community, and it is one which the Church's educational institutions should be the first to acknowledge and embrace.

In concluding these brief reflections, I wish to express once more my gratitude, and that of the whole Church, for the generous commitment, often accompanied by personal sacrifice, shown by so many teachers and administrators who work in the vast network of Catholic schools in your country. To you, dear Brothers, and to all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy and peace in the Risen Lord. ✠

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ARTICLES

The Audacity of Faith

by Gerard V. Bradley

Gerard Bradley is Professor of Law at Notre Dame Law School and a senior fellow of the Witherspoon Institute.

The views about faith and religion that President Obama expressed in his Commencement Address at Notre Dame pave the way for his HHS mandate. He would protect the state from the church, not by privatizing faith, but by redefining it.

Amidst great expectations, President Barack Obama delivered the commencement address at the University of Notre Dame on May 17, 2009. Despite the understandable excitement of hosting the nation's dynamic, young chief executive at its graduation ceremony, there was also dissension over the Catholic university's choice to confer an honorary doctorate on a man who so conspicuously promotes abortion. Yet, while everyone knows *that* the president gave the commencement address, it seems that almost nobody has noticed *what* he said.

President Obama's main theme in the address was religion and American democracy. From John Winthrop's

first introduction into political idiom of the shining "city upon a hill" trope to its revival by John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, America's Presidents have linked our political identity and fortunes to God's Providence and to the American people's faith. Some time shortly after World War II, however, the longstanding consensus that religion was essential to America's identity and prosperity began to totter. For the first time in American history, major political figures (starting with the Supreme Court), began to assert that *secularism* was the anchor of our political culture, and the presupposition of our government institutions.

At Notre Dame, President Obama took this project in a novel direction. His unprecedented contribution was not to give new meaning to secularism, but to redefine the meaning and nature of faith, *tout court*. This new departure explains a great deal about his Administration's narrow view of religious liberty as manifested, for example, in the HHS contraception, sterilization, and early abortion mandate. This important underpinning has been scarcely noticed.

The commencement address was full of musings

about religious faith, and its tone and substance were remarkably faith-friendly. The president spoke winsomely of his own faith journey, and credited “the church folks” with whom he worked in Chicago as a community organizer with showing him the way to religious faith. Throughout his speech, Obama showed how the Christian tradition supplies him with a vocabulary for describing and understanding realities that he previously glimpsed without the eyes of faith.

The faith of which he spoke was not, however, the faith of our fathers. Therein lies the novelty of Obama’s initiative. He would protect the state from the church, not by privatizing faith, but by redefining it. In a bold and unprecedented challenge to the churches, Obama told believers, not *what* they believe, but what it means for them to believe it.

Here (in italics) are the three key paragraphs of the president’s address, each one followed by my commentary.

In this world of competing claims about what is right and true, have confidence in the values with which you’ve been raised and educated. Be unafraid to speak your mind when those values are at stake. Hold firm to your faith and allow it to guide you on your journey. Stand as a lighthouse.

In these solicitous words the president affirmed a strong religious indifferentism and moral relativism. Obama endorsed all of his listeners’ “values” without qualification, and without reference to what those “values” might be. All those present should hold onto their “values,” defend them, and be guided by them in a world of moral disagreement. The same goes for “faith,” as well—whatever that faith might be. Faith *per se* is a reliable guide, a lighthouse.

Perhaps at Notre Dame the president was prescribing as well as describing. Perhaps he was exhorting his listeners to treat faith or religion as no more than a personal narrative arc (an earlier major speech on religion at a 2006 *Sojourners* conference is evidence that Obama conceives of faith in precisely these terms himself). Just to that extent, however, President Obama would be flatly instructing believers that, no matter what they presently think or what their Church teaches, they *should* think that their religion has no true propositional content. On this reading of his Notre Dame speech, President Obama would be guilty of breathtaking presumption. He would also be mistaken.

But remember too that the ultimate irony of faith is that it necessarily admits doubt. It’s the belief in things not seen. It’s beyond our capacity as human beings to know with

certainty what God has planned for us or what He asks of us. And those of us who believe must trust that His wisdom is greater than our own.

For President Obama, any conviction about, or grounded in, faith is a subjective assurance, which is indefensible against alternatives. That suggestion is confirmed by the president’s earlier advice to “hold firm” to an indiscriminate “faith.” Here, Obama conveyed the message that one cannot be practically certain about any conviction that is held by faith. He thus implicitly rejected many essential truths of the University of Notre Dame’s Catholic faith, including the truth that it is rationally defensible to assent with certitude to the tenets of the faith. There is no question either of “trust[ing]” that God’s “wisdom is greater than ours.” The existence of a Creator God can be known with certainty by reason alone. This God cannot be other than much wiser than us. There is no need for “trust” or faith that God is wiser than His creatures.

Obama seemed to dismiss without argument the whole possibility that unaided reason can know certain truths about divine realities, such as those truths upon which the founders founded this country: the existence of a creator God who providentially cares for humankind and whose moral law for the guidance of human affairs can be discerned by human persons without help from revelation. Obama also ignores the likelihood (which reason suggests) that such a God would engage humankind in further divine-human communication which such an omnipotent Being could surely make *effective*.

The second sentence of the excerpt above is clearly intended as a reference to *Hebrews 11:1*. Faith is indeed belief in things not seen. We know very little about divine realities. Those realities that we grasp by revelation exceed our comprehension. The things of faith are above the human intellect, Aquinas wrote. Now we see through a glass, darkly. But it is precisely in revelation that God connects us to these realities. Revelation involves the divine communication of genuine truths about these things. In revelation God *makes* the otherwise unknowable, known.

President Obama used the incomprehensibility of God as his basis for claiming that what we think we know about God is, and should be understood by us as, inherently doubtful. But the president’s reasoning is unsound, and his conclusion is false.

Obama was guilty in this part of his Notre Dame remarks of a failure to quantify, in the logician’s sense of distinguishing between *some* and *all*. There are many

things about God that we cannot know with certainty (such as what happens to unbaptized infants, or when Christ will come again). But there are some things that we can and do know with certainty. We can and do know for sure that God does not want us ever to intentionally kill an innocent person, and that we are never to commit adultery. We know that we can be saved if we seek the Kingdom, love God, and keep His commandments. We know, too, that being saved is very desirable, especially compared to the alternative.

And this doubt should not push us away from our faith. But it should humble us. It should temper our passions, cause us to be wary of too much self-righteousness. It should compel us to remain open and curious...

These sentences, together with the earlier excerpts, draw out the implications that seem to have been the president's key lessons for the graduates assembled before him. The message of this complex of ideas (passion, self-righteousness, and humility in the context of a "world of competing claims about [the] right and [the] true") is unmistakable. It is the familiar rationalistic argument that, only if believers internalize the relativism ("doubt") of which the President spoke at Notre Dame, can we avoid the intolerance, oppression, and even slaughter that history teaches are the perennial tendency of religion.

This doubt should remind us even as we cling to our faith to persuade through reason, through an appeal whenever we can to universal rather than parochial principles, and most of all through an abiding example of good works and charity and kindness and service that moves hearts and minds.

The contrast here between a doubt-addled "faith" to which we "cling" and which involves "parochial" principles on the one hand, and "universal" "reason" on the other, further suggests that, in its native form—*sans* infused "doubt"—religion is beyond the sphere of the rational.

The president did not come to Notre Dame to urge his Catholic audience to "doubt" transubstantiation. He came to Notre Dame to sow the seeds of doubt elsewhere. He mentioned abortion to illustrate a wider problem of political conflict rooted in diversity of thought, culture, and belief:

I do not suggest that the debate surrounding abortion can or should go away. Because no matter how much we may want to fudge it—indeed, while we know that the views of most Americans on the subject are complex and even contradictory—the fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps

are irreconcilable. Each side will continue to make its case to the public with passion and conviction. But surely we can do so without reducing those with differing views to caricature.

Other irreconcilable conflicts mentioned by the president included the opposing views of "the soldier and the lawyer" on matters of national defense, and of the "gay activist" and the "evangelical pastor," despite their common concern over the "ravages of HIV/AIDS."

But the convictions that persons begin at fertilization or that marriage is the union of a man and a woman do not depend upon faith. The former is a truth of philosophy, informed by uncontroversial facts of biological science. The latter is part of common morality ("common" in the sense of known by reason and, until very recently, "common" also in the sense that everybody believed it). The meaning and import of the president's Notre Dame speech depend upon denying these truths too. After all, the president of the United States did not travel to South Bend to engender "doubt" about transubstantiation or the Nicene Creed.

Obama thus doubled down on doubt, first by claiming these truths of reason *for* faith, and then by relativizing them *as* faith.

The possibility that AIDS activists and Planned Parenthood might be dogmatic, and need to be more "humble" of mind and heart, never crossed President Obama's lips at Notre Dame. The deeply partisan effect of his own remarks passed largely unnoticed.

The most arresting of the president's remarkable assertions at Notre Dame was that he presented his remarkable assertions about faith, not as implications of our political system, but as *true*. He did not say that, in a democracy, one should act *as if* one had "doubts." He did not suggest that those outside the household of faith should *view* religious belief as a set of hypotheses. He did not discuss the Constitution, and nowhere indicated that he was speaking from the legally constricted viewpoint of the judge. He spoke as an insider, as a man of faith, and he told his faith-filled auditors what their faith—and his faith—really amounted to.

Obama delivered the same message in 2006. His theme then, too, was "reconciling" "faith and democratic pluralism." The key conciliatory move was that which he proposed at Notre Dame. "Faith doesn't mean that you don't have doubts," he told his *Sojourners* audience. In 2006, then-Senator Obama expressly brought his dubiety to bear upon the matter of contraception. He used contraception as an example of a "culturally specific" and contingent Christian belief that "may be

modified to accommodate modern life.” Then he added: “The American people intuitively understand this, which is why the majority of Catholics practice birth control.”

The president never used the word “contraception” in his Notre Dame commencement address. Some people think otherwise. Some people think that the president promised at Notre Dame that he would back a “sensible conscience clause” on contraception, and that Obama reneged on that promise when he promulgated the HHS “contraception” mandate. Not so. In fact, the mandate *fulfills* his pledge at Notre Dame. He said: “Let’s work together to reduce the number of women seeking abortions by reducing unintended pregnancies.” And he said “let’s . . . make sure that all our health care policies are grounded in clear ethics and sound sci-

ence, as well as in respect for the equality of women.” No one then or now suspects that the president had in mind a partnership to promote abstinence programs. Anyone who did not understand Obama to be inviting his Catholic audience to a contraception party has been living in a dream world.

The president did back a “sensible conscience clause” at Notre Dame. But that had nothing to do with contraception. It was Obama’s way to (in his words) “honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion.” Anyone who is now surprised that the president considers the morning- and week-after pills to be “contraceptives,” and not abortifacients, has been living in a dream world, too. ✕

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What’s Behind the HHS Mandate?

by Gerard V. Bradley

Gerard Bradley is Professor of Law at Notre Dame Law School and a senior fellow of the Witherspoon Institute.

The HHS mandate illustrates three liberal ideological commitments that treat religious freedom as an afterthought.

What do the University of Notre Dame, EWTN, and the Archdiocese of New York have in common?

More than you probably think. Each is a Catholic institution, of course. Each is also suing the Obama Administration over the HHS “contraception” mandate. Each is going to be spared the Hobson’s choice between complying with the mandate and betraying its mission if any one of four possible scenarios comes to pass. Each nonetheless continues to stand in grave peril of institutional martyrdom.

The first scenario will play out by June 29, the last day of the current Supreme Court term. If the Court throws out the whole Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), the mandate will go with it. The reason is not that the pending decision is about contraception or religious liberty. It is that the mandate depends entirely for its force upon the survival of PPACA.

The second scenario will go down on November 6.

If Mitt Romney is then elected our next president, you can be sure that he will soon thereafter announce his intention to rescind the mandate.

The chances that one of these two scenarios will occur are pretty high. The chances that the Obama administration will fare poorly in the pending lawsuits (by Cardinal Dolan, et al.) are pretty high, too. When those dim prospects become apparent to the administration, it is likely—and this is the third scenario—to invite the complaining Catholic institutions to the bargaining table, to significantly expand the current wafer-thin exemption from the mandate. But if the administration imprudently digs in its heels, some time in 2014 the Supreme Court is likely to rule that the exemption must be expanded in order to comply with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. That would be scenario number four.

Because it is almost certain that at least one of these possibilities will come to be, the day of reckoning for Notre Dame, Mother Angelica, and Cardinal Dolan will be postponed.

I say “postponed,” and not “canceled,” advisedly. The ideological commitments that have emboldened the Obama administration about contraception are deeply held. They are held to be very important. They are resilient. They are not limited to the reproductive rights supposedly protected by access to contraception, even when

contraception is broadly defined to include abortifacient drugs. These deep convictions about liberty and equality and religion entail trouble for religious liberty, no matter which exit route the present mandate takes.

I say “entail” advisedly, too. Religious liberty in the new dispensation is derivative of these deeper moral and (as we shall see) epistemological commitments. Religious liberty is, from this point of view, an afterthought, a residue which is unfortunately too vaporous to protect Catholic institutions from existential crises.

What are these ideological commitments? There are three of special note.

The first is dedication to advancing the ideology of “equal sexual liberty.” This powerful complex of ideas comes in both straight and “gay” versions.

When President Obama announced his phony “compromise” about the mandate on February 10, he plainly stated what the mandate was for: “Every woman should be in control of the decisions which affect her health. Period.” Given the context of these remarks, Obama meant, specifically, what is usually called “reproductive health.” His overriding commitment to this reproductive health—evidenced by, for example, the “contraception” mandate—presupposes that women will and should have lots more sexual intercourse than they have interest in conceiving children. According to this widespread view, sexual license should never impede a woman’s lifestyle, at least no more than it does a man’s. Marking the most recent anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the President said that “our daughters must have the same opportunities as our sons.” Obama’s notion of equal opportunity extends to the bedroom as well as to the boardroom.

Catholic Charities in Boston and Washington, D.C., already have been martyred by the “gay” version of “equal sexual liberty.” They were obliged to abandon their adoption charities when public authority refused to accommodate their objections to same-sex “marriage.” Right now, Catholic schools in Ontario are being bullied by an “anti-bullying” law that compels parochial schools to set up “Gay-Straight Alliances.” These clubs would contradict the sexual morality that every Catholic institution is obliged before God and the Church to teach, by word and by deed. Were they to comply with this “bullying” law, Ontario’s Catholic schools could not give the perspicuous witness to the faith that is their *raison d’être*, just as America’s Catholic schools could not, were they to comply with the Obama Administration’s “contraception” mandate.

This far into the Age of Aquarius, no more needs

to be said about the meaning and seductive appeal of “equal sexual liberty.” It is the emerging public orthodoxy about where sexual satisfaction, expression, and identity fit into the good life, and about the government’s responsibilities to establish conditions that make this life achievable for all with ease. This orthodoxy commands the cultural heights and has achieved ascendancy in the academy. We are in the midst of a high-stakes fight over its grip on our law. The outcome of this battle is in doubt.

It is easy to see already that “equal sexual liberty” is a natural predator of Catholic institutions, which are standing contradictions of almost all that the new orthodoxy proposes. What is not so apparent, however, is why the new orthodoxy has so totally eclipsed considerations of conscience, tolerance, and liberty in the thinking of self-identifying liberals such as Barack Obama. It is scarcely surprising that he and other like-minded officials are beguiled by “equal sexual liberty.” It is nonetheless curious that they should so remorselessly subordinate religious liberty to the new ideological colossus. One would think that our cherished “first freedom” would have a bit more staying power.

Looking at what Obama and like-minded folks think about religion dispels the curiosity. I do not mean here to consider their opinion about the value of religion, which value Obama (for example) affirms to be very high. I refer instead to their understanding of religion’s relationship to certain strategic moral propositions, and to the truth-value of religious claims as such.

Hence, the second ideological commitment is to treat the moral propositions that undergird the conservative alternative to “equal sexual liberty” as *subjective religious beliefs* incapable of rational defense. These include the propositions that people begin at fertilization; that marriage is strictly limited to the union of man and woman; and that the norms of sexual morality are many and that they are rooted in the marital relation. These propositions combine to refute the emerging orthodoxy of “equal sexual liberty.” Being *propositions* about morality, moreover, they are asserted by their adherents as *truths of reason*, albeit truths that are confirmed by religious authorities and by revelation.

Promoters of the new orthodoxy nonetheless boldly declare these claims to be “religious beliefs,” *tout court*. They just as boldly declare that, because they are “religious beliefs,” these claims are rationally indefensible. They may be held by the faithful as if they are genuine truths. But in reality these putative truths are subjective projections, verbal formulae which may

function as the ligaments of a community, as so many fallible and revisable expressions of the ineffable depths of spiritual experience. They are badges of individual or religious communal identity. Because they are rationally indefensible, they are to be perceived and to be treated by outsiders as prejudice. Religious “doctrine” is thus a species of bias. So, the Church’s moral condemnation of sodomy and opposition to same-sex “marriage” amount to hallowed homophobia.

The third commitment is to identify the public value of institutional ministries, such as Catholic Charities and Saint-Somebody Hospital, entirely with the “secular” services they offer. Adherents of the new orthodoxy can and often do recognize the value of these organizations’ religious identity—to the religious people who staff them. Anyone can see that religion supplies added motivation, enthusiasm, and meaning to many of those working in these ministries. But these peculiar satisfactions are construed by the new orthodox to be private; they are personal delights that do not register as any sort of *public* good. The public value of these ministries is comprised of just so many hot lunches prepared, heart bypasses performed, and reading competency tests passed. Viewed from the public square, then, these organizations’ religious character is invisible. Being invisible, it cannot have measurable value. Having no detectable value, it cannot serve to justify any allowance that would impair the government’s provision of conditions conducive to “equal sexual liberty.” So,

exempting Catholic Charities from placing kids with a “gay” couple is a concession to private bias that is productive only of public mischief, insult, net loss.

An English Law Lord *recently expressed* this sum of the three orthodox commitments, in a case where he denied relief to a relationship counselor who could not in good conscience endorse the sexual activities of same-sex couples. Lord Justice Laws declared that any exemption would be “unprincipled,” for it would not “advance the general good on objective grounds, but ... give effect to the force of subjective opinion.” How so? Laws asserted that it “must be so, since in the eye of everyone save the believer religious faith is necessarily subjective, being incommunicable by any kind of proof or evidence. It may of course be *true*; but the ascertainment of such a truth lies beyond the means by which laws are made in a reasonable society.” Against the demands of “equal sexual liberty” for homosexuals and lesbians, solicitude for the opaque commitments of the religious subject count for nothing.

It is natural, and right, to say that the HHS mandate undermines religious liberty. But it is important to add that this argument about religious liberty is more about the adjective than it is the noun. It is chiefly an argument about whether religion is *about* reality, truth, the way the cosmos is really structured, or whether it is about the byways of an individual’s psyche. ✠

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The Ontological Argument Revisited, Again

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The argument that has come to be known, thanks principally to Immanuel Kant, as the ontological argument, which was published around the year 1070 by St. Anselm when he was prior at the Abbey of St. Mary of Bec, and which purports to demonstrate the existence of God, has to rate as one of the most famous discourses in the Western philosophical tradition. R. G. Collingwood has

described the argument as standing “in the forefront of metaphysical discussion for nearly nine hundred years.”¹ It was only shortly after its publication that it drew its first response, a rather spirited one, written by one Gaunilon, a contemporary of St. Anselm and, like him, a monk. It was a negative response, and it was to be followed, over the years, by many others of the same type. But the argument has not been without its defenders, and these, by and large, have tended to bring more passion to their position than those who find fault with the argument. Among the argument’s champions, few have given it more continuous and earnest attention

than the philosopher and theologian Charles Hartshorne, whose ideas I will be considering in this essay.

Particularly remarkable about the ontological argument is the captivating effect it has had on those who come into contact with it, however they might eventually come to estimate its worth. Its lure seems to be irresistible. There have been those, and I count myself among them, who, while convinced that the argument does not succeed in doing what it sets out to do, i.e., prove the existence of God, nonetheless continue to harbor a deep respect for it. As its history amply demonstrates, the argument does not allow itself to be easily dismissed; it demands to be taken seriously.

My treatment of the ontological argument in this essay will follow a somewhat round about way, in that, before addressing the argument directly, I will first reflect on two modern responses to the argument, those of Charles Hartshorne and Étienne Gilson. My principal purpose, when I come to address the argument directly, will be to show how it is that it lacks demonstrative force.

I. Charles Hartshorne on the Argument

It can be safely conjectured that no other thinker has dedicated as much time and energy to the study and spirited defense of the ontological argument than has Charles Hartshorne, as is witnessed by his book, *Anselm's Discovery* (1965). In this volume he gives us a collection of critical summaries of all the significant responses to the ontological argument, from the eleventh century to the twentieth. The chief complaint that Hartshorne lodges against these responses is that they are either reacting to an imperfect version of the argument, as supplied by St. Anselm himself, or are dealing with accounts of it which they have gotten second or third hand. He makes much of the difference between two versions of the argument, as found respectively in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of the *Proslogion*. The conclusion of the Chapter Two version is "that which exists in reality as well as in the mind is greater than that which exists in the mind alone."² This, Hartshorne maintains, does not reflect the principal point of the argument, which is clearly stated in the version found in Chapter Three, whose conclusion is "that whose nonexistence cannot be conceived is greater than that whose nonexistence can be conceived."³ The problem with the Chapter Two version is that it is too suggestive of the empirical, the a posteriori, whereas the a priori character of the Chapter Three version comes

across clearly. This is significant for Hartshorne because he believes that the only way the existence of God can be proved is a priori, which was the approach taken by St. Anselm, and this accounts for the sterling superiority of the ontological argument.

Hartshorne judged the argument to be entirely successful; it proves the existence of God. But did he correctly understand the argument? Up to a point, it can be said he did, as is reflected in the following description he gives of it: "Anselm starts from an abstract definition, not concrete experience or anything concrete, and deduces that no matter what else there may be, God as defined must really exist."⁴ Here he rightly recognizes the a priori character of the argument; its point of departure is thought, not being. But in dealing with the argument, what he does, in effect, is wrest it out of its proper context, i.e., the whole sweep of St. Anselm's philosophical and theological thought, and that is most unfortunate, for outside of that context the argument cannot be rightly understood. It was the lack of that larger vision on Hartshorne's part, a lack which was explained by serious deficiencies in his own thought, that prevented him from seeing, as he truly was, the great figure to whom he was, at least on one level, so earnestly devoted. Given this state of affairs, some of his interpretations of St. Anselm's thought tell us more about Hartshorne than they do about the saint. And what he chooses to identify as the faults of the saint's thought turn out to be no more than aspects of that thought which do not square with the peculiar theology of Charles Hartshorne.

It might be said that, philosophically, St. Anselm and Hartshorne shared at least a small plot of common ground, but as far as theology is concerned, they lived in entirely different worlds. In many respects Hartshorne is dealing with a St. Anselm of his own making, attributing to the saint propensities and points of view which were quite foreign to him. He was viewing an eleventh-century quintessentially Catholic thinker through the distorting lenses of twentieth-century philosophical idealism and intellectualized pantheism. The kindred spirit that he supposedly saw in the saint simply wasn't there.

St. Anselm's "momentous discovery," Hartshorne tells, was "that one existential question [i.e., the existence of God] is logical or a priori."⁵ This is to say that St. Anselm, in his argument, showed himself to be a bonafide idealist. He does not begin with things in the world, but with ideas in the mind, in this particular case, with the most weighty of ideas, the idea of God. St. Anselm's great virtue, according to Hartshorne, was

his commitment to the a priori mode of reasoning. To attempt to prove the existence of God by a posterior reasoning is to become involved in “empirical theism,” a form of theological thinking that relies on empirically verifiable facts. Such facts are simply irrelevant; they “do not determine conceivability, modal status is independent of them.”⁶ This means, simply, that facts are not ideas, and it is with ideas one must begin. “Modal status” is the status that is established by a purely formal logic, to which Hartshorne was totally dedicated; this is a logic that neatly cuts itself off from the world of real existents, concrete particulars.⁷

Hartshorne criticizes St. Anselm for his “Hellenism,” as well as for his “classical theism.” What is the nature of the charge? To be a Hellenist is to be too much allied with the perennial philosophy; to be a classical theist is simply to be an orthodox Catholic. Hartshorne considered himself to be a neoclassical theist, which meant that his theology, such as it was, owed much to the thought of figures like Spinoza and Hegel. It was apparently because of St. Anselm’s Hellenism and classicism that he “failed to furnish a valid reason supporting his own form of theism.”⁸ No one who is familiar with the *Monologion*, just to cite one of the saint’s great theological treatises, would be prepared to take that careless accusation seriously. But the deep import of a work like the *Monologion* would have been beyond the capacity of Hartshorne to fathom. St. Anselm’s “major error,” for Hartshorne, was his inability to see that necessary existence and contingent existence can be nicely intermingled, which, for Hartshorne, they are in the divine nature. Of course there was no error on St. Anselm’s part here, but simply a matter of his being informed by a sound metaphysics, that told him that those two modes of being are utterly incompatible. Hartshorne’s confusion on this score was not the only large problem with which his philosophy was burdened.

For example, he rejected the real distinction between essence and existence, believing such a distinction to be not only “inadequate,” but “simple-minded.” However, he posited an entirely specious distinction between “existence” and “actuality,” which he applies to God. Hartshorne’s acknowledgment of God as a necessary being must be received with great caution, because he tells us that the notion of necessity, as applied to God, must be regarded as a pure abstraction. When we call God a necessary being we are referring to his “bare existence,” which is to be distinguished from his “full actuality,” the latter necessarily involving contingency; “necessary existence cannot be the concrete or total

reality of God,”⁹ and thus he is “*somehow actualized* in a suitable (and contingent) reality.”¹⁰ So, God is at once a necessary being and a contingent being. The idea of the divine unity and simplicity is to be discarded, for “there must be a real duality in God, as in no other being, between necessary existence and contingent existence.”¹¹ God’s contingency would entail his being changeable, and that in turn would mean that passive potency and privation are part of the divine nature. The prospect of a deity that is composed of parts poses no problems for Hartshorne’s theology, for “[i]f there can be an eminent, necessary manner of existing, why not an eminent manner of having parts?”¹² The parts may be thought of in terms of accidents, and that fits comfortably into his thought; indeed, “the *admission of divine accidents* is obligatory.”¹³ God, for Hartshorne, was not an absolute being, nor was he an individual.¹⁴

Because Hartshorne considered metaphysics to be “essentially about ideas,”¹⁵ and roundly rejected analogical reasoning, he was not at all qualified to move about as freely and boldly as he did in the field of natural theology. Nor, given the general tenor of his philosophy and theology, was he the man who could do anything like justice to the thought of one who reasoned from premises radically different from his own. Hartshorne thought that St. Anselm had proved the existence of God; St. Anselm thought the same thing. But the God of Hartshorne was the God of the philosophers; the God of St. Anselm was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

II. Étienne Gilson on the Argument

We would expect Étienne Gilson to give us an entirely different reading of St. Anselm’s ontological argument from that given by Charles Hartshorne, and in that we would not be disappointed. In 1934 Gilson presented, at the Collège de France, a series of four lectures entitled “The Doctrine of St. Anselm,” in which he submits the ontological argument to a detailed and especially thought-provoking analysis.¹⁶ He notes that the “classic objection to the argument has been “that it makes existence come from thought.”¹⁷ But this objection carries weight, he contends, only if we believe that a valid proof for the existence of God must be a posteriori. For Gilson, the ontological argument, although it proceeds a priori, qualifies as a genuine demonstration, and “is then certainly a proof of the existence of God.”¹⁸

Unlike Hartshorne, Gilson is fully aware that the ontological argument can be rightly understood only when viewed within the context of St. Anselm's thought taken as a whole. The particular aspect of the saint's thought to which he gives special attention is his "doctrine of truth," the principal tenet of which is the notion that "the existence of truths always presupposes that of their objects."¹⁹ St. Anselm took it to be axiomatic that any given statement is true if that to which it refers, its object, is true. This attitude would simply seem to reflect the basic epistemological principle that ontological truth, the truth of being, founds logical truth. The "object" to which the ontological argument refers is a being "a greater than which cannot be conceived," which is of course a description of God. The existence of God is a necessary fact. It cannot possibly be otherwise. What are the implications of this? Gilson explains that the result of reflecting on the "immediate object" of St. Anselm's argument, a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, "is to force us to recognize the impossibility of thinking of God as not existing,"²⁰ and this is because what is entailed by such a being is necessary existence. Once we have come to see the impossibility of thinking of God as not existing, then we will see that it is impossible for God not to exist in fact. But is this not simply to move from thought to existence, a movement with which we would not expect someone like Gilson to be at all sympathetic?

Gilson does not think that this is the case. If we keep in mind St. Anselm's "doctrine of truth," he argues, we will be able to see that it is not our thinking about God in a certain way that grounds the actual existence of God; rather, it is the actual existence of God that justifies, that renders true, our thinking about God in a certain way, that is, as one who necessarily exists.²¹

Gilson accepts the ontological argument as demonstrating the existence of God, then. It is to be regarded as a genuine proof, and not merely as a theological explanation. But what are we to make of the fact, of which Gilson often reminds us, that faith provided St. Anselm "with the concept of God from which he draws his proof."²² We know that St. Anselm's motto, which was anything but an empty slogan for him, was *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, "Faith Seeking Understanding." If, in formulating his argument, St. Anselm presupposes knowledge which is provided to him by his faith,

would not that vitiate the force of the argument, considering the one to whom it is addressed, the fool who says in his heart that there is no God? Could one reasonably suppose that a committed atheist would be prepared to accept the idea of God which is being proposed to him, and which he must accept as the foundational premise on which the conclusion of the argument rests?

Interestingly, Gilson remarks that the fool denies the existence of God "because he does not think truly about what God is."²³ This is undoubtedly the case, but may it not be that he does not think truly about what God is because he lacks the privileged knowledge which is possessed by St. Anselm by reason of his faith? In delineating St. Anselm's "doctrine of truth" Gilson gives much emphasis to the point that "every true thought implies the reality of its subject."²⁴ What he seems to be saying here is that the relationship between thought and being is such that the first is the foundation for the second. If, in reflecting on ordinary affairs, I think something that I take to be the truth, then by that very act I can be assured of the truth of that which I think. In a situation such as that, Gilson sees no inferential move; in other words, I do not *infer* the truth of the object from the truth of my thought, but it is as if, presumably, the truth of thought and the truth of object are one and the same. But when it comes to the very special thought around which the ontological argument turns, inference is at work. If we harbor the idea of a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, then "we must infer the existence of the object [i.e., God] in the name of the truth [i.e., the idea we have of God as necessarily existing]."²⁵ Gilson explains that St. Anselm posits the existence of God "as necessary in itself, because it is so in thought, adding that it is because God's existence is necessary in itself that it is so for thought."²⁶ But is not the reasoning here circular?

Gilson puzzlingly maintains that the *Proslogion*, in which the ontological argument is to be found, because its object transcends reason, is "not philosophy at all,"²⁷ and yet it is "purely rational." But if the work is not philosophy, meaning, presumably, that it does not contain argumentative discourse appealing to reason, what possible effect could it have on the unbelieving fool, lacking as he does the faith-inspired foundation on which St. Anselm builds his argument? It would seem that the fool

could be effectively approached only through the medium of philosophy, and, without doubt, that is precisely the medium St. Anselm makes use of.

Though Gilson is confident that the ontological argument “escapes St. Thomas’s reproach,” i.e., that it moves from thought to existence, quite the opposite would seem to be the case. St. Thomas’s studied objection to the argument remains firmly in place.²⁸ The ontological argument does indeed attempt to establish existence on the basis of thought, a precarious approach to which Gilson elsewhere shows himself to be extremely sensitive.²⁹

III. The Argument as Presented by St. Anselm

The peculiar mindset of the fool to whom St. Anselm addresses his argument is to be found in the fact that, while he understands the idea of God as that than which a greater cannot be conceived, he fails to see that what he understands, the idea he holds in his mind, must necessarily have an extra-mental referent. The fool, according to St. Anselm, is thus in a state of contradiction, for if he admits that he understands “God” to mean a being than which a greater cannot be conceived, and yet maintains that what he understands exists only in his mind, he is making no sense, because a being that exists only in one’s mind cannot be rightly understood as a being a greater than which cannot be conceived. Such is the nub of the argument which is found in Chapter Two of the *Proslogion*.

When we move to Chapter Three of that work we find that the focus of the argument shifts, and emphasis is put on the idea of God as one who exists necessarily. Accordingly, the nature of the contradiction in which the fool is ensnarled takes on a different complexion. It can readily be seen that there is no congruity between the concept (a) of a being that cannot be conceived not to exist, and the concept (b) of a being that *can* be conceived not to exist. It must be one or the other; it cannot be both. But is it not apparent that the contradiction here is purely logical; that is to say, one which exists between concepts only, having no obvious existential implications? If that is granted, how then does this purely conceptual contradiction force the fool, or anyone else, to conclude that if the concept of a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is understood, then such a being actually exists, and necessarily? In fact, there is no warrant for such a conclusion.

St. Anselm writes: “No one who understands what

God is can conceive that God does not exist.”³⁰ This is incontrovertibly true, but the questions that immediately must be asked are: What does it mean to understand what God is? And, more importantly, how is it that we arrive at such understanding? From the central thrust of the ontological argument, it is clear that what St. Anselm has principally in mind with respect to an understanding of the divine nature is the fact that in God there is no real distinction between essence and existence; in Him nature and existence are one and the same. In sum, God exists necessarily; His non-existence is inconceivable. But again, how do we come to have so precise and penetrating an understanding of the divine nature, so that we know that in God essence and existence are one and that therefore He exists necessarily? There are only two ways we can have such knowledge, either through revelation (e.g., in the Book of Genesis God identifies Himself to Moses as “I Am Who Am”), or through valid argumentation, of the kind provided by St. Thomas Aquinas.³¹

Now, in his argument, St. Anselm makes no explicit reference to Sacred Scripture, nor does he offer us an argument in support of the truth that in God essence and existence are one and that therefore He exists necessarily; nonetheless, this truth is assumed by the argument.³² Clearly, it is through his faith that St. Anselm understands that it is the very nature of God to exist. But that raises a major difficulty for the argument, if it is to be accepted as one whose purpose is to prove, in the strictest sense, the existence of God, for an assumption of that sort cannot serve as the central premise of the argument. The reason for this has to do with the fact that the understanding that God is the being who necessarily exists clearly pertains to the *nature* of God, but if the whole purpose of an argument is to prove the existence of a being, one cannot assume beforehand anything about the nature of that being. The first task at hand is to address the question, *An sit Deus*, “Whether there is a God,” before one can logically address the question, *Quid est Deus*, “What is the nature of God?”

“That than which a greater cannot be conceived,” or equivalents thereof, is the oft-repeated phrase the argument employs to describe the concept of God, and it is certainly a poignant expression, but it is descriptive of a *concept*. Hartshorne, given his infatuation with modal logic, believed that somehow the argument took on true demonstrative force simply by reason of the fact that we are able to conceptualize God as a being who *necessarily* exists. But adding a qualification, even one of that import, does not make

the concept any less a concept, however noble and elevated it may be, and, just as a concept, then, it is not a fit foundation upon which to establish real existence. My ability to think of something as existing, even as necessarily existing, does not make it so.

The response to St. Anselm's argument by the monk Gaunilon, and St. Anselm's response to it, represent two documents which are especially valuable for the light they shed on a number of points that are at issue here. Gaunilon was, as far as we know, the first to state clearly what Gilson alluded to as the standard objection to the argument, i.e., that it offers conceptual existence as sufficient grounds for asserting real existence. With considerable cogency Gaunilon argues that the ontological argument has things in reverse order: before demonstrating real existence of a being, it assumes knowledge of the nature of that being. "For it should be proved first," he writes, "that this being itself really exists somewhere; and then, from the fact that it is greater than all, we shall not hesitate to infer that it subsists in itself."³³

St. Anselm's response to Gaunilon, as is true of everything he wrote, is clear, articulate, and carefully reasoned. He presents Gaunilon with a full restatement of the argument, which puts greater stress on several key points found in the original. He makes no bones about the fact that the argument begins with thought, and that it proceeds from thought to being. He writes: "I maintain positively: if that being can be conceived to be, it must exist in reality." Again: "Therefore, if such a being can be conceived to exist, necessarily it does exist." And again: "If it can be conceived at all, it must exist."³⁴ It is manifest that the logical move here is from thought to being. If I can conceive of X as existing, does this mean that X must necessarily exist? It would be a gross distortion of St. Anselm's thought to suppose that he is maintaining the simplistic and indefensible position that just any thought is somehow productive of real existence, that my thinking X is so, *whatever* X might be, makes it so.

St. Anselm takes pains to point out to Gaunilon that his example of the idea of a Blessed Isle misses entirely what he was attempting to say in the ontological argument. That one can conceptualize an ideal place provides no grounds for supposing such a place actually exists. But there is no reasonable comparison to be made between a concept of a Blessed Isle, on the one hand, and, on the other, the concept around which the ontological argument turns, of "a being than which a greater is inconceivable."³⁵ This phrase identi-

fies God as a being for whom essence and existence are one, for whom therefore nonexistence is inconceivable. What we have then is a concept which is in every way unique, which is like no other concept whatever. It is the highest and most noble concept the human mind is capable of entertaining.

All this can be readily acknowledged. There is no gainsaying the very special quality of the concept that St. Anselm makes the centerpiece of his argument, and yet, for all its specialness, for all its admitted nobility, it remains a concept, an idea in the mind, and so the pivotal question remains: Can we, on the basis of conceptual knowledge alone, conclude to real existence? Can an idea in the mind, albeit a most extraordinary idea, impel us to admit to an extra-mental reality which corresponds to that idea?

I will put the argument in the form of a hypothetical syllogism, *modus ponens*, employing in it St. Anselm's own words.

If one can conceive "a being than which a greater is inconceivable," then "it cannot be non-existent."

But one can conceive "a being than which a greater is inconceivable."

Therefore, such a being "cannot be non-existent."

The validity of an argument of this form rests entirely upon the fact that there is a necessary connection between the antecedent and the consequent of the major premise. But here there is no necessary connection between conceiving a greatest possible being, and the actual existence of such a being. Nor, as indicated earlier, are matters altered by adding the note of necessity to the basic concept. I may assert, "I can conceive of a being that exists necessarily," and then conclude from that "therefore such a being must exist," but I would be arguing in a circle. In one of the forms in which St. Anselm expresses his argument he draws attention to the flaw that lies at its very heart. He writes: "For if it [a being a greater than which is inconceivable] exists even in the understanding alone, can it not be conceived also to exist in reality?"³⁶ The straightforward answer to that question is, Yes, it can be *conceived* to exist in reality, but that cannot serve as *proof* that it does in fact exist in reality. St. Anselm asks: "Does it not follow, then, that if a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is in any understanding, it does not exist in the understanding alone?"³⁷ To which we can only respectfully respond, No, it does not follow. He goes on to say that "the non-existence, then, of that than which a greater cannot be conceived is

inconceivable.”³⁸ This can easily be granted, but does not this simply state something which is true by definition: that which cannot be conceived is inconceivable? We still find ourselves here entirely within the conceptual realm, and the nagging problem which remains, a problem for which the argument can offer no solution, is that we are not provided with a bridge by which we can move from the realm of conceptual being to the realm of real being.

“Of God alone,” St. Anselm writes, “it can be said that it is impossible to conceive of his nonexistence.”³⁹ This is true, but it states a truth that is known by faith. It is a truth *about* God, a truth respecting the divine nature, and therefore one which cannot be legitimately presupposed and incorporated into an argument whose purpose is to prove that God exists. Once again, the existence of a being must first be established before anything can be said about the nature of the being. It is quite clear from St. Anselm’s response to Gaunilon that, in developing his argument, he relied heavily on his faith for what he knew about the nature of God. In all of his reasoning he operates within the ambit of faith. Now, of course there is nothing at all untoward about this, but the point at issue here has to do with whether or not the ontological argument, given the premises upon which it is based, can be regarded as a genuine demonstration. Does it prove, in the strict sense, that God exists? Gilson believed that it does, and his is not an opinion that one would want to take lightly. In all deference to this great historian and philosopher, however, I think we would be better advised to follow the guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas in this matter, and to acknowledge that the ontological argument, for all its otherwise impressiveness, falls considerably short of achieving its intended purpose. It does not prove the existence of God.

It is not enough simply to claim that the ontological argument is not demonstrative. One must show cause. Why is it, then, that the argument is not a true demonstration? That question is best answered by first asking two more questions: What do we mean by demonstration? What are the salient features of a sound demonstrative argument? A sound demonstrative argument is one which culminates in a conclusion that follows necessarily from the premises, in such a way that, if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true. This means that if we acknowledge the premises to be true, and yet reject the conclusion, we would simply be acting irrationally. Now, the “premise” of the ontological argument is the concept of a being a greater

than which is inconceivable, and its conclusion is that such a being actually exists. In light of the reasons we have given above, it should be clear that the conclusion does not follow necessarily from the premise, and that is because there exists an unbridgeable gap between the conceptual being that is cited in the premise and the real being that is alluded to in the conclusion.

If we consider more closely the nature of that premise, we recognize that, precisely because of its purely conceptual nature, it lacks the self-evident quality which is necessary for it to serve as a premise in an argument. The only reason we ever feel obligated to prove anything is because it is not self-evident. If X were self-evident, it would of course require no proof. Proving something is a process by which we make evident what is not self-evident. In order successfully to prove the existence of God, which is not self-evident, we must begin with what is self-evident; that is, the premises with which we begin our argument must refer to what is in the public domain and readily accessible to all. So, when St. Thomas sets out to prove the existence of God, in his famous Five Ways, he begins with what is obvious and indisputable, for example, by calling our attention to the fact that things move, or that things have causes, or that things that exist could very well not exist. In contrast to this, the ontological argument begins with an idea, an arrestingly impressive idea to be sure, but, just as an idea, it dwells within the mind of the one who holds the idea. It is not in the public domain. Indeed, as an idea, it is among the most private of realities. An idea is not self-evident, for we can only know of its existence and of its contents if the one who holds the idea informs us of both through the medium of language.

Keeping in mind that the ontological argument is addressed to the fool who does not believe in the existence of God, and that the ostensible purpose of the argument is to convince him otherwise, we see that the argument begins badly because it chooses as its starting point something which is not self-evident. An atheist, if he thinks at all seriously about his atheism, must be guided by some kind of idea of God, for if that were not the case he would have no inkling of that whose existence he is denying. So, he would probably tell us something like this, that he denies the existence of a supreme being who created and guides the destinies of the universe. But the ontological argument presents the atheist with a rather sophisticated idea of God, of a being a greater than which it is not possible to conceive. This idea, as St. Thomas observes, is not one we would

expect the average person, much less the average atheist, readily to entertain. However that might be, the atheist with whom St. Anselm is dealing claims that he understands this idea. If he understands it in the sense that he sees its critical implication, that the idea refers to a being who exists necessarily, then St. Anselm is entirely justified in concluding that the atheist, by denying the real, extra-mental existence of such a being, is contradicting himself.

But as it turns out, the atheist with whom St. Anselm is dealing is altogether too accommodating, if we are to suppose him to be a genuine atheist. An earnest, foursquare atheist is not going to accept an idea of God as a necessarily existing being, for, after all, he has taken the position that there is no God. Why would he claim to understand an idea of God that supposedly entails real existence, when it is precisely real existence that he is denying? The very idea of God, for him, is no more than an idea; as far as he is concerned, it has no referent in the real world. Given the position that we should suppose any serious atheist to be taking, then, if we want to convince him of the erroneousness of that position, we must not attempt to meet him in the realm of ideas, but in the realm of real existents, in the objective order of things, which is common to us all.⁴⁰ ❧

Endnotes

- 1 R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), 124.
- 2 Charles Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Argument for God's Existence* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1965), 11.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., 244.
- 5 Ibid., 6.
- 6 Ibid., 93.
- 7 Hartshorne wrote: "When we have such a complete logic, or theory of the a priori, the idea of God, I argue, will be integral to it" (*Anselm's Discovery*, 44). Hartshorne held to a rigidly narrow view of logic, the final result of which was his committing himself to what was a seriously distorted view of that discipline, a view which was, however, understandable in terms of his decidedly idealist propensities. His was a logic which, taking it as he did as purely formal, is completely detached from the empirical. For him, logic is not to begin with facts in the external world, but with ideas in the mind, and its reasoning remains entirely within the realm of ideas. "Facts do not determine conceivability," he wrote; "modal status [i.e., purely formal status] is independent of them" (ibid., 93). Thus, as he understood things, a "complete logic" is entirely a priori, dispensing with everything extra-mental and dedicating itself exclusively to the mental. Given this severely delimited view of logic, it is no surprise that

he was as enamored as he was of the ontological argument, for he saw it, not without reason, as a scintillating example of a priori reasoning. But it is important to be very clear about the fact that his "idea of God" referred to above and which he saw as integral to a complete logic, has nothing to do with the God of St. Anselm.

- 8 *Anselm's Discovery*, 9.
- 9 Ibid., 52. Not only does Hartshorne have no qualms about assigning contingent qualities to God, he maintains that it would be a positive defect on the part of God were He to lack such qualities, and thus to be "wholly necessary" (ibid., 143). And he argues that "it is necessary that God be capable of contingent qualifications" (ibid., 209). Here we have expressed the most blatant of metaphysical contradictions: it is "necessary" that God be "contingent."
- 10 Ibid., 38. Emphasis in original.
- 11 Ibid., 134.
- 12 Ibid., 28.
- 13 Ibid., 106. Emphasis in original.
- 14 "And now we see that it is not quite correct to identify the divine essence with God as an individual. The divine essence is the individuality of God, but not God as an individual" (ibid., 290). Here Hartshorne's pantheistic proclivities are manifest.
- 15 Ibid., 24.
- 16 These lectures form part of collection of Gilson's writings, hitherto appearing only in periodicals, brought together by Jean-François Courtine under the title of *Medieval Essays*, trans. James Colbert (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2011).
- 17 *Medieval Essays*, 39.
- 18 Ibid., 56.
- 19 Ibid., 42.
- 20 Ibid., 40.
- 21 "St. Anselm thought that proving the rational necessity of affirming God's existence or the rational impossibility of not affirming it, is to have really proved his existence" (ibid., 42).
- 22 Ibid., 51.
- 23 Ibid., 47.
- 24 Ibid., 45.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., 50.
- 27 Ibid., 77.
- 28 The judgment of St. Thomas is succinctly expressed by him in Book I, Chapter 11, of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*: "Now, from the fact that that which is indicated by the name of God is conceived by the intellect, it does not follow that God exists anywhere else except in the intellect. Hence, that than which a greater cannot be conceived will likewise not have to exist anywhere else except in the intellect. From this it does not follow that there exists in reality something than which a greater cannot be conceived."
- 29 Some pertinent Gilson quotations: "To proceed from thought to being in any sense whatsoever is to follow an idealist philosophy." [And that was the last thing Gilson was prepared to suggest anyone should do.] (*Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986], 61). "If you start with thought alone, you will never get beyond it, but if you do not start with thought alone, you will not have to do anything further to grasp existing beings since you will

- already be in contact with them” (ibid., 126–27). “The first consequence of Cartesian mathematicism, and the one from which all the others flow, was the obligation it imposed on the philosopher of always defining being in terms of ideas or thought” (*Methodical Realism*, trans. Philip Trower [Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Press, 1990], 84).
- 30 *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), 10.
- 31 These arguments are to be found in the *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4.
- 32 Even had St. Anselm offered an argument that proved that in God essence and existence are one, of the kind formulated by St. Thomas, this would not have obviated the difficulty under discussion, for such an argument, because it pertains to the nature of God, would be germane only if the existence of God had already been proved, doubts about which is precisely what is at issue here. It is instructive that St. Thomas presents his arguments demonstrating that in God essence and existence are one only after he has gone through his Five Ways, proving God’s existence.
- 33 *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, 150.
- 34 Ibid., 154.
- 35 Ibid., 155.
- 36 Ibid., 157.
- 37 Ibid., 158.
- 38 Ibid., 159.
- 39 Ibid., 161.
- 40 In a recent issue of *The Review of Metaphysics* (September 2010) there was published an article entitled, “Anselm’s Argument Reconsidered,” by Lynne Rudder Baker and Gareth B. Matthews, in which the authors propose “a new version of the ontological argument” (33) which is distinguished for its “non-question-begging character” (47), and which results, in the authors’ view, in “a sound argument for the existence of God” (54). Although the argument presented in the article is very carefully crafted, and graced by any number of stimulating insights, it does not, in my opinion, succeed in extricating itself from just the kind of difficulties that beset the original, and which have been the focus of attention in this article. I take its central deficiency to be found in the fact that it is too much guided by presuppositions associated with philosophical idealism. Another point: the authors would seem to be assuming that the “non-question-begging character” of their argument—i.e., “the fact that the atheist and the theist can both refer to the same object of thought [God] without regard to whether or not it exists in reality” (47)—is something which is consonant with St. Anselm’s own thought. If I am correct in my surmise, I believe their assumption is unwarranted.

St. Thomas, Sr. Johnson, and the Quest for the True God

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Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” (Jn 18:37)

In her 2007 book *Quest for the Living God*, Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson undertakes to give modern readers a deeper understanding of God by handing on the riches of the Christian theological tradition in light of contemporary theological insights.¹ Yet, her thorough insistence that God infinitely transcends our every thought of him is likely to elicit doubts about the Christian faith from her post-Enlightenment readership, already disposed to question the possibility of knowing God.² She maintains that God, as the creator and source of all things, infinitely transcends creation,³ and that he

is so incomparable to the created things we know that he has absolutely no likeness to them,⁴ and thus remains utterly incomprehensible. So she says, “the incomprehensible mystery of God lies beyond all human control and understanding.”⁵

Nevertheless, Sr. Johnson aligns herself with the Christian theological tradition,⁶ and thus must maintain that truth about the transcendent God has been revealed in the sacred scriptures and therefore can be known. Indeed, after announcing in chapter one that God is a “mystery beyond all telling,”⁷ she proceeds to tell us about him for another nine chapters. This paradox is apparently never addressed in her book, leaving readers unarmed against the pitfalls of modern skepticism. The grounds to support her theological claims are never explained. She does, however, invoke St. Thomas Aquinas’s doctrine of divine names for what she calls the “rules of engagement,”⁸ and so, it is reasonable to suppose that she assumes his defense against the accusation that, if God is utterly transcendent, then any name of or claim about God can have no meaning.⁹

In this article I wish to examine St. Thomas’s

solution to this difficulty, for St. Thomas upholds God's transcendence, while also insisting that he can be known not only by faith, but also by the light of natural reason. Moreover, he provides the reader with what is left wanting in Sr. Johnson's book, namely, how it is that Christians can speak truths about God. My discussion is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will examine the main points of St. Thomas's view of God's transcendence and how it poses difficulties for knowing God. Then I will show St. Thomas's solution to these difficulties, by identifying the first grounds on which all true knowledge and speech about God are based. In the second part, we will return to Sr. Johnson's book to assess to what degree her theology is consonant with the Thomistic principles she claims to appropriate.

I

In her book Sr. Johnson sets forth a theology based on a view of God's transcendence that substantially agrees with the teaching of St. Thomas. Both theologians maintain that God is the creator and source of all things, and as such, that he encompasses all things, without himself being encompassed.¹⁰ So infinitely transcendent is his nature, they argue, that it differs from creatures not merely in degree but in kind.¹¹ Implicit in these claims, however, are three points of doctrine that suggest that God's transcendence renders knowing him humanly impossible.

First, they maintain that God, by reason of his infinity, cannot be reduced to our manner of understanding, and thus transcends all the categories of being. In particular, St. Thomas argues that "whatever is in a genus has a finite and determined nature, since nothing exceeds the boundary of its genus." So, because "God's nature is not determined but infinite," he concludes that God is in no way contained in a genus.¹² And so, the creator of all things, substantial and accidental, is himself contained in neither the category of substance, nor of quantity, nor of quality, nor of anything else with a determined and definable form. "Like the sea which cannot be drunk dry," says Sr. Johnson, "God surpasses whatever we can understand and account for in terms of our human categories."¹³

Second, pointing to the testimony of Isaiah, they hold that God has no likeness whatsoever to any creature: "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? . . . for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none

like me."¹⁴ Because God shares no genus with creatures, St. Thomas argues that God cannot have a likeness to them. For, as he explains, every likeness is based on a certain sameness or agreement in form, whether specific or generic.¹⁵ We find, for example, that one man is like another with regard to his specific nature, while man is like a stone in that they are both equally bodies. Still, something can be like another less perfectly, such as those things which share in the same form though unequally, as for example, the white and the off-white. But God can be like creatures in none of these ways since his nature shares nothing in common with creatures, either specifically or generically. Therefore St. Thomas concludes that "it should in no way be conceded that God is like a creature."¹⁶

Finally, God infinitely transcends created things not only in kind, but also in his mode of being. As the creator and source of all things, God stands in need of nothing. Receiving from none, he must have existence *per se*, that is, through his own essence and not as a perfection superadded.¹⁷ For this reason he cannot be subject to any form of composition: neither of soul and body, nor of quantitative parts, nor even of subject and accident. For everything whose existence depends upon some composition must depend upon another for the union of its parts.¹⁸ Thus, God infinitely exceeds every created mode of being; he is in every way one, indivisible, and simple. His transcendence compels us to say that existence is not merely a perfection God *has*, but one that God *is*. Likewise, if anything else may be said of God, it will signify a reality identical with the one divine essence.

Given his utter dissimilarity to creatures, both in kind and in mode, the transcendence of God would seem to preclude the possibility of knowing him from creation. For, as St. Thomas explains, all knowledge presupposes a certain likeness, or agreement, of the knower with the known.¹⁹ When I see a blade of grass, for example, it must be that I receive the sensible species of that green, and not some other; otherwise, I could not be said to see *that* grass.²⁰ Hence St. Thomas states that sensation is simply the reception of a sensible form without its matter.²¹ He applies the same principle to the intellect. We attain an understanding of something when we grasp its form and not only the form of this or that grass or tree, as in sensation, but of grass or tree in general. Thus, as St. Thomas says, we understand a thing by possessing its intelligible form: it is the same form, only held immaterially by the intellect.²² In this way all knowledge is based on a certain likeness, a form shared by the knower and the known.

It is for this reason that any knowledge of the divine nature seems simply beyond our grasp. How can such knowledge be reached if, as St. Thomas says, all knowledge is based on a certain likeness? In his transcendence, God has no likeness whatsoever, either in kind or mode of being, to the sensible order whence all our knowledge derives.²³

One could argue, however, that at least some knowledge may be reached on account of the things we know God is not. His transcendence already demands that we say God is “infinite,” “uncreated,” and “uncomposed,” three true statements about God. Indeed this goes some distance to explain St. Thomas’s statement that “we cannot know about God what he is, but what he is not.”²⁴ But if such predicates, while true, should signify nothing more than negations, just as when “simplicity” signifies merely absence of composition, and even if theology should succeed in compiling a comprehensive list of all the things that God is not, such a litany of negations would be impotent to justify the positive doctrinal content of sacred scripture. We could of course argue that we know God as a principle of creation, as “creator,” and as the “source” and “lord” of all things. Still, such names tell more about what God *does*, than what he *is*. Finally, nor is our faith in the gospel itself a sufficient grounds for overcoming this difficulty and for reaching a true knowledge about God in himself. For the scriptural writers have handed on the word of God in human language, drawing on human experience, and thus in a manner proportionate to the human understanding. If creation could reveal nothing beyond itself, then the words of scripture could not reveal God.

But if this is true, are we forced to concede that the very Word of God, who has become man and speaks through the scriptures, is powerless to reveal himself to us? St. Thomas has indeed a response to these difficulties, and, as one would expect, it hinges on a simple distinction: although God is unlike creatures, the impossibility of knowing God from them only follows if, conversely, creatures are also unlike God.²⁵ But as St. Thomas notes, this inference is invalid, and moreover, false. For some likenesses are unreciprocal. For example, Socrates is not a likeness of his statue, though his statue is a likeness of him. Again, in a syllogism the conclusion has a likeness to its premises, being derived from them, though this relation is not reciprocated. Likewise, this is also the case in creation, argues St. Thomas.²⁶ Creatures are derived from God and thus have a likeness to him, though God being himself underived has no likeness

to them. It is this likeness of creature to creator that we shall now see, according to St. Thomas, is the first grounds on which all true knowledge and speech about God rests.

One might reasonably argue, however, that no creature, being of its nature finite, could have any likeness to an infinite reality. For every likeness, we said, is based on some agreement in form, while God, exceeding every genus, does not share a generic or specific form with any creature. But, the error of such reasoning is exposed when viewing creation theologically. The question is not whether such a creature is possible, given God’s transcendence; the question is whether anything could be unlike God, given that he is the creator. St. Thomas points out that every agent as such makes another like itself. Man begets man; fire begets fire or, at least, something hot like fire. And so even, as in this latter case, when the effect falls short of the agent’s specific nature, it will retain at least some likeness to the agent, even if that agent happens to possess the given form in a superior way.²⁷ For nothing can give what it does not already have, and so every perfection in an effect must in some way already exist in its cause, lest something come to be from nothing.²⁸ Fire can only heat because it itself is hot; the geometer can teach the student because he first knows the science himself. And so if this is true of all causes, it must be true of the first cause. Since his causality is universal, creating all things *ex nihilo*, it follows that every created form, substantial or accidental, must already exist in God himself.

The likeness of creatures to God, then, is based neither on specific nor generic agreement since they fall infinitely short of the form of the agent, but, being thus remote, their likeness is more akin to that which a house has to its form in the architect’s mind. Yet these forms do not exist in God as accidents, but rather, since he is simple, as we said, every form and every perfection in the creature, exists in an infinitely higher way in God *as God*, as identical with his essence. Although he cannot communicate his nature to creatures perfectly, he does so imperfectly, which is to say, God bestows on each creature a participated form, or a “finite version,” if you will, of what in God is the divine nature; so that the substantial form of each thing is nothing other than the divine nature, participated in some finite way.²⁹

So consequently, once God chose to create, it was not only fitting but necessary that he should make everything like himself, with the liberty only to choose *how much* like to make each thing, in accord with his wisdom.³⁰ Whence arises the distinction among all

things.³¹ For indeed the rock and the tree, the dolphin and the man, though all divine likenesses, each may be called more perfect, and even more divine, the more it approaches its creator. It follows therefore that between any two creatures substantially distinct, one will be necessarily more perfect and godlike than the other.³² This conclusion, however, might seem premature. For do not some likenesses relate differently than by more and less, so that one thing is more like in one respect, and another in another respect, just as one statue may better represent Socrates' stature, while another his nose, and so on? Nevertheless, this is only possible when the exemplar is itself composed of parts; but unlike Socrates, God is wholly simple. So whatever should represent him must represent him wholly, and so, two likenesses to the same simple thing, if they truly differ, will differ only by inequality. It is for this reason that St. Thomas defines the entire order of creation, attested in Genesis 1, as a hierarchy in which, as we can see, the plants are surpassed by the animals, and the animals by us, and we by the angels who are yet more divine, so that the divine nature is reflected by every creature, each more or less imperfectly according to its natural perfection.³³ In this way, then, not only does each creature have a likeness to God, but in fact, so integral to its nature is that likeness that, for St. Thomas, it is impossible for the theologian to affirm any real distinction between creatures substantially distinct without also judging one to be more godlike than another.³⁴

It is these created perfections, which we experience and know, that can afford us true knowledge about God, their exemplar, just as any true representation can about its original. It is in this way, for example, that we can learn something about a person from his or her photograph. Yet, obviously in this case, the knowledge afforded by created perfections is far less perfect. They cannot tell us what God is, because, being finite, they are unequal to God. And, moreover, without seeing the divine essence they imitate, we are not even positioned to see created perfections *as* likenesses. So, unlike a photograph, we cannot compare the copies of God with their original and see wherein they fall short and certainly, not everything of the created nature is like the divine nature. But we do know that they are likenesses in virtue of the perfections they possess. For though the world is shot through with many perfections, all of them in some way represent the divine nature, who is most perfect;³⁵ thus, those perfections we know to be more perfect, will represent God to us more perfectly. This is why St. Paul exhorts the Philippians, "whatever

is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure . . . if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things,"³⁶ for it is in the most excellent things that God most reveals himself.

While in the world we find perfections of many kinds, some better than others, not all of them represent God in the same way. For the invisible God, who is neither a body nor depends upon matter for his existence,³⁷ is represented least by those perfections which are perfections of bodies. For example, health, which is an eminent perfection for man, is nevertheless not a perfection that can be said properly of God, since it is a perfection proper to man as bodily. There are other perfections, however, whose proper subjects are immaterial. This is perhaps clearest in the case of wisdom and justice and, generally, those perfections we possess only immaterially, that is, the perfections of our intellect. There are other such perfections which, though found in sensible things, can however admit of an immaterial mode, such as the perfection of existence, which is common to all things, visible and invisible.³⁸ These perfections, being better representations of the immaterial God, can afford us not only a better, but also a true conception of his nature in itself.

These perfections, says St. Thomas, have in themselves such a likeness to the divine essence that they are even properly said of God.³⁹ Thus, we say, "God is," "God is alive," "God is wise," "God is good," and the like. For, according to St. Thomas, there is no defect or imperfection implied in the very signification of these names: for example, nothing about the perfection of "existence" demands that what exist be a body, or that it be changeable. The same may be said for wisdom and justice; while they presuppose an intellectual subject, nothing in what they are precludes existence in some other more elevated intellect than ours. Thus, St. Thomas argues that the statements, "God exists," or "God is wise," are indeed not only true, but also properly said of him, which is to say, we intend the very account of the name "wisdom," as we know it from creatures.⁴⁰

Still, to say "God is wise" in this way raises an obvious difficulty. For, on the one hand, wisdom as we know it from creatures is an accident, while in God there is no accident since all that he has is one with his essence. Thus when we call God "wise," it would seem false lest we impute an accident to God. If, on the other hand, "wisdom" in God means something altogether different, we lose all content to our words and the statement is meaningless. To lack an account or conception of wisdom that truly corresponds to God is to know

nothing at all about his wisdom.⁴¹

St. Thomas, however, locates the solution as a certain middle between these two extremes. When he says “God is wise” he means something different, though not altogether different. If Aristotle is right that wisdom is knowledge of first causes,⁴² like all other human knowledge it is an accident of our understanding, and is distinguished by being of first causes. Accordingly, St. Thomas notes there are two parts of the definition: where the genus denotes the mode of existence, it is an accident, while the difference specifies how it is perfective of the subject, or, if you will, the perfection itself as distinct from other perfections.⁴³ So too here, “accident” designates mode of existence, whereas “knowledge of first causes,” the perfection itself.

When we say “Socrates is wise,” the entire definition is signified, genus and difference. But when I say “God is wise,” we retain only the difference, the perfection itself, “knowledge of first causes,” dropping the genus, or its mode of existence, “accident.” By doing so, we achieve just what we set out to do: we affirm a perfection we know is in God, without attributing to him what accrues to it when it exists in creatures. Nor does the remaining “knowledge of first causes” imply for its part any imperfection or limitation. There is nothing about the unspecified “knowledge” that implies that it not be infinite or uncreated; it neither affirms nor denies it. It simply does not say. So the name “wisdom” as said of God and of us is not univocal, nor altogether equivocal, but, as St. Thomas says, it is said according to an analogy because in both cases the most formal part of the definition, the perfection itself, is retained, thereby maintaining meaning in the name.⁴⁴

The fuller meaning of St. Thomas’s claim that we can only know about God “what he is not,” can now be understood rightly not as a declaration against the truth of all affirmations about God. Rather, it means that the truth of such affirmations rests upon recognizing in a clear-sighted way what our understanding of the perfections said of God includes and excludes. Further, the conception corresponding to this statement “God is wise” is like Polus’ definition in Plato’s *Gorgias* that rhetoric is “the noblest of arts.”⁴⁵ Even if this is true and known to be true, it still does not tell us what rhetoric is because we do not see wherein the greater nobility lies. The same is true of the divine names. When we say God is “wise,” we do not know what it is in God because through it we do not see wherein God’s greater wisdom lies. For this can be attained only through a vision of his essence which we have not. We neither see

God, nor his wisdom, nor even how this exists in him. We only see *that* he must be wise, and that to contradict it is false, and, as far as our understanding is concerned, that is not nothing. In this way the theologian can arrive at a true and meaningful conception of God while remaining mindful of the limitations of his own understanding of divine wisdom.

Just as we say God is “wise,” so also can we say that he “exists” and is “alive” and each of these predicates signifies something true about God; each of these perfections really exists in him as his essence. All of them signify the same thing in God, his one essence, yet this does not imply any contradiction; nothing in wisdom excludes being alive, nor does it include it. As we see even in creatures, Socrates can exist and be alive and be wise all at once, though he cannot stand and sit simultaneously. Moreover, God’s names are not synonymous, for they signify the same through different accounts. The one signifies God’s essence insofar as it is a principle of existing, the other insofar as it is a principle of life, and so on. For though God is simple in himself, we grasp him through created things in which these perfections exist imperfectly, as many and multifarious.⁴⁶

We said above that all creatures have a certain likeness to God and that some perfections, implying no defect, can be said properly, or analogically, of God. Yet even those perfections which imply matter may be said of God, though metaphorically, as is customary in sacred scripture. In the Psalms, when saying God is a “rock,” clearly the author does not mean that God is an inanimate chunk of earth. There are certain natural perfections unique to the rock, such as its permanence or strength, which undoubtedly the author intends to signify in God by calling him a rock. As St. Thomas explains, in figurative speech, the literal sense of the words is not the figure itself, but what is figured by the words.⁴⁷ So in this case, the meaning of the words is that God is permanent and strong. So although a different mode is used to signify something true in God, the sense of the words is reducible to proper or analogical signification.

St. Thomas shows us then, that God’s revelation to us, in sacred scripture and in the natural order, is rendered possible by the likeness of creature to creator. The creaturely likeness to God is so fundamental to the Faith that without it all knowledge or speech about God would be meaningless. The crucial importance of this teaching is further brought into relief by an examination of three consequences that immediately follow from its denial:

(1) If no creature were like God, then *a fortiori*, no creature would be more godlike, or divine, than any other. Thus, all created things by their nature could claim equal dignity as creatures, since, in fact, all of them would equally represent the work of the divine.

(2) As St. Thomas notes, God could in no way be known through creatures,⁴⁸ since, we said, all things are known through their likeness. And so, knowledge of creatures could not lead to knowledge of God.

(3) Finally, if no creature were like God, it would follow that no name for God would be better than any other name.⁴⁹ For, as we have seen, in created things it is precisely those perfections which bear a surpassing likeness to God whose names qualify for signifying the divine nature properly.

Therefore, the importance of maintaining that creatures have indeed a real and natural likeness to their creator can hardly be overstated. As the precondition for all true knowledge and speech about God, it is also the first foundation for any true theology.

II

Having examined with St. Thomas the foundations of our knowledge and speech about God, we turn now to Sr. Johnson's book to determine whether, given her appropriation of St. Thomas, a defense might be made for her apophatic assertions. We have already noted the substantial agreement between their respective accounts of divine transcendence. Also, given that Sr. Johnson invokes St. Thomas's teaching on divine naming, but does not explicitly provide the grounds on which her own claims rest, we have supposed that she may be assuming his explanation. Accordingly, we would expect her to affirm with him that creatures are like God, since, we have seen, for St. Thomas this is the foundation for all theology.

I would like to argue that, on the contrary, she leaves herself no grounds for saying anything true about God, because she has effectively constructed her theology around a conception of creation without any real likeness to him.

This is already reflected by the conspicuous omission of any assertion of a likeness. Nowhere in her over 200-page book is this truth explicitly affirmed. Indeed the only exception would appear to be a few isolated instances where she describes men and women as each being an "image and likeness" of God, clearly echo-

ing Genesis 1:26.⁵⁰ But for her, the significance of the statement extends little beyond its use in affirming the equal dignity of men and women. It never functions as a principle for distinguishing what may or may not be said of God. The omission of this use of likeness is particularly conspicuous in chapter one. Here she lays down the theological principles or what she calls "rules of engagement," which define, according to her, the parameters of our understanding of God, and the principles governing her account of naming him. But here, precisely where we expect to find some affirmation that creatures have a likeness to God, we find seemingly the opposite claim: "there is no similarity between creatures and God but the dissimilarity is 'always ever greater,'"⁵¹ where the "between" here suggests that the dissimilarity is reciprocal. What is left unstated and implicit is nevertheless corroborated by what she does say.

Even if Sr. Johnson maintains in word that creatures have a likeness to God, in the remainder of the article I will show that she effectively denies this truth, because her theology falls into the three errors that we have seen follow from rejecting it.

The first and most fundamental consequence, we said, is that every creature would have equal dignity, insofar as each would be an equal manifestation of God's power and presence, and thus no creature could claim to be of greater worth than any other. On this view, the magnificence of St. Thomas's hierarchical conception of the universe is replaced with a thoroughly lateral view of creation that seeks to recast all natural inequality as mere variation. On this view, men and woman could no longer claim, as creatures, any more inherent dignity than any other creatures. Thus, from an ethical standpoint, all should be treated with equal respect; the life of a mere beast or a plant should be treated with the same care as that of a fellow human being. Accordingly, this is what Sr. Johnson advocates. She says, "Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself extends to include all members of the life community. 'Who is my neighbor?' asks Brian Patrick, 'the Samaritan? . . . Yes, yes, of course. But it is also the whale, the dolphin, and the rain forest. Our neighbor is the entire community of life, the entire universe. We must love it all as our very self.'"⁵² Nor is an offense against vegetative life less severe, on her view, than one against human life: "'Save the rain forest' becomes a concrete moral application of the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill.'"⁵³ Her desire to eliminate all inequality permeates her view of the kingdom of God as well, and in general God's salvific plan of redemption: "The redemptive reign of God

*excludes every kind of subordination among persons.*⁵⁴

The second consequence of denying all creaturely likeness to God is one directly contrary to Magisterial teaching⁵⁵ and the testimony of St. Paul in Romans 1:20, namely, that nothing at all could be known about God through created things. Accordingly, Sr. Johnson expressly holds that it is impossible to prove objectively the existence of God,⁵⁶ and accordingly, calls God both “unknown”⁵⁷ and “unknowable.”⁵⁸ In places she does say that God is “mediated” by creatures,⁵⁹ yet here, she seems simply to reaffirm her oft repeated claim that God is intimately present to all things by his creative power and presence; there is no clear indication that his presence is rendered intelligible.

From this, we can see that her theology succumbs to the third consequence of denying the creaturely likeness to God, namely, that no name for God would be better than another. Without making recourse to the relative inequality among created perfections, she lacks a principle by which to judge the relative suitability of some names over others. She just as readily predicates of God either or both contraries in a given genus, simultaneously saying, for example, that God is both “unmanipulable”⁶⁰ and “vulnerable,”⁶¹ and that he is “male” and “female,” and neither.⁶² Likewise, from the category of substance, she says God is both “water” and “fire,” and again, a “rock” and a “bear.”⁶³ In all these cases then, Sr. Johnson seems to show no preference for calling God by one contrary or another.

Perhaps, however, she is operating under the assumption that some statements are said metaphorically of God, since if both contraries were properly affirmed, they would imply contradiction. Let us turn, then, to her explanation of what she calls analogical speech to find whether it provides any basis for distinguishing modes of predication, and thus, a principle for distinguishing between names.

Sr. Johnson recognizes, of course, that no name can be said of creatures and God univocally. Following St. Thomas, she notes that God’s mode of existence infinitely transcends whatever we know and say. So, if anything should be said of God, it cannot mean the same thing when said of him as when said of creatures. So, very much like St. Thomas, she proposes that when any name, such as “wise” or “good,” is said of God, it must, as she puts it, go through “a threefold wringer.” She illustrates her logic with the example of “good.” From our experience of good things in the world, she explains,

we derive a concept of goodness that we then *affirm*

of God who created all these good things. But God is infinite, so we need to remove anything that smacks of restriction. Thus we *negate* the finite way goodness exists in the world, shot through with limitation. But still we think God is good, so we *negate that particular negation* and judge that God is good in a supremely excellent way that surpasses all understanding.⁶⁴

Thus analogy, she concludes, puts “words about God through a threefold wringer: it affirms, negates, and then negates that negation itself.”⁶⁵

She is right to omit everything the “smacks of imperfection.” But her so-called threefold wringer wrings *all* the meaning out of the name, effectively negating *everything* in its definition and not merely its finite mode. Rather than distinguishing parts in the definition, as St. Thomas does, she confounds the mode of existence, denoted by the genus, and the perfection itself, denoted by the difference. Indeed, she shows no awareness of these parts. Nor in her last step, does her effort succeed in reintroducing any content to the meaning by “negating the negation itself.” For, as St. Thomas notes, “the understanding of a negation is always founded on some affirmation: whence it is clear that every negation is proven through an affirmation.”⁶⁶ Nor is her reason for persisting in calling him good, namely “still we think God is good,” an adequate basis, given that God’s goodness is precisely the matter in question. Recognizing herself that all content has been lost, she concludes that when we speak of God, “We literally do not understand what we are saying.”⁶⁷

Accordingly, she does not distinguish, as St. Thomas does, between metaphorical speech, on the one hand, and proper or analogical speech, on the other, but on her view there is no reason to since in all statements about God, “no word really makes sense.”⁶⁸ She praises the “creative tension” between the “is” and “is not,” holding that we say what we do not mean every time we speak of God.⁶⁹ He “is good,” but he “is not good” by anything we understand by that term. And so, she claims that God is “king” and “lord” metaphorically: he both is and is not.⁷⁰ We say he is, but we mean he is not: because, as she says, we negate what we mean of creaturely things. Hence she concludes that God “transcends both assertion and negation,”⁷¹ so that, simply speaking, no true statement can be made about God, which is to say, no statement without contradiction. Therefore, on her terms, it would be no more true to say “God exists” than “God does not exist.”

If every true teaching rests upon true statements, and in turn, every true statement upon a subject joined with a true predicate, then simply on the basis of her theological principles, Sr. Johnson's theology collapses under the weakness of her principles. Suffering from the three consequent errors, she effectively denies all creaturely likeness to God. Thus, her book, *Quest for the Living God*, forfeits the grounds on which, according to St. Thomas, all theological claims are based, invalidating its entire content. Such an account gives modern skeptics and atheists only further reason to accept the charge that the God in whom Christians believe is a mere human projection, "a representation," St. Paul says, "by the art and imagination of man."⁷²

What purpose, then, has the gospel, according to Sr. Johnson, if such language has not the purpose of conveying truth? In her chapter on the Trinity, she claims words are not intended as literal; they are not to inform us about God;⁷³ they are rather, as she says earlier on, "to shock and surprise,"⁷⁴ and "[to startle their listener] into a new and paradoxical awareness,"⁷⁵ which is why she advocates—and indeed, at the possible expense of doctrinal consistency—that, once such words "[lose] their affective power in changing cultural situations,"⁷⁶ the very language we use to speak about God should be changed. Thus, although the language the Church uses to speak about the Triune God is derived from the gospel, she claims, nevertheless, that the doctrine "has no fixed vocabulary of its own but through the centuries enlists forms of speech characteristic of the discourse of peoples, tribes, and nations and gives them a new imprint in the service of the gospel."⁷⁷ It is here, perhaps, that we see most clearly her departure from the Christian tradition. St. Thomas, following the apostolic tradition before him, firmly maintains that theology is a revealed doctrine, containing the truth about God, whose "word is truth,"⁷⁸ and the "truth will make you free."⁷⁹

In her effort to teach what so many theologians have handed on before her, Sr. Johnson hands over the word of God to moderns, stripped of its original meaning, its content wrung beyond semblance, and subjected to a new service, namely, to shock and astonish us toward cultural and political change. Those sincerely searching for the true God by such misdirection may easily be lead astray, so that a quest which begins in hope ends in a theology "full of sound and fury, / signifying nothing."⁸⁰ ✠

Endnotes

- 1 Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York/London: Continuum, 2007).
- 2 For Johnson's view of post-Enlightenment culture and its negative influences on the Christian understanding of God, see especially *Quest for the Living God*, 14–16.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 8–9.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 161.
- 6 While her book primarily examines what Sr. Johnson considers to be the newest insights into God afforded by contemporary Christian studies, she states that her theology is based on principles or "rules of engagement" consonant with the Church's "early Christian and medieval theology" (17), whose sources she draws on extensively throughout the book.
- 7 *Quest for the Living God*, 17.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 21–22.
- 9 For instance, one finds in David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1980) a clear example of the kind of argument modern skeptics may invoke. At the beginning of Part Four, Cleanthes says to Demea:
It seems strange to me . . . that you, Demea, who are so sincere in the cause of religion should still maintain the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the Deity, and should insist so strenuously that he has no manner of likeness or resemblance to human creatures. The Deity, I can readily allow, possesses many powers and attributes, of which we can have no comprehension. But if our ideas, so far as they go, be not just and adequate, and correspondent to his real nature, I know not what there is in this subject worth insisting on. Is the name, without any meaning, of such mighty importance? (28)
- 10 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 16, 188; St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 7 c: "Cum igitur Deus sit extra totum ordinem creaturae, et omnes creaturae ordinentur ad ipsum, et non e converso, manifestum est quod creaturae realiter referuntur ad ipsum Deum; sed in Deo non est aliqua realis relatio eius ad creaturas, sed secundum rationem tantum, in quantum creaturae referuntur ad ipsum."
- 11 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 16; St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4.
- 12 St. Thomas, *Lectura romana in primum Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, ed. Leonard E. Boyle and John F. Boyle (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2006), d. 8, q. 3, a. 3 c (translation mine).
- 13 *Quest for the Living God*, 17.
- 14 Is 46:5, 9 (RSV/CE), quoted by Johnson in *Quest for the Living God*, 22. Cf. Is 40:18, cited by St. Thomas in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 3 obj. 4.
- 15 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 3 c.
- 16 *Ibid.*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 4.
- 17 *Ibid.*, q. 3, a. 4.
- 18 *Ibid.*, q. 3, a. 7 c.
- 19 See *Sententia in Aristotelis librum De anima*, ed. Angeli M. Pirotta (Rome: Marietti, 1959), I, iv, n. 43: "Veritas autem est, quod cognitio fit per similitudinem rei cognitae in cognoscente: oportet enim quod res cognita aliquo modo sit in cognoscente."
- 20 The green in the sense and the green in the grass are not the same in number, of course—for otherwise I would be the grass I see—but the same specifically.
- 21 See *Sententia in librum De anima*, II, xxiv, nn. 551–557.
- 22 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 84, a. 2.
- 23 *Ibid.*, q. 12, a. 4 c.
- 24 *Ibid.*, q. 3 proem.
- 25 *Ibid.*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 4.
- 26 *Ibid.*, q. 4, a. 3 c.

- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid., q. 4, a. 2 c.
- 29 *Summa contra Gentiles* III, cap. 97.
- 30 Of course, for St. Thomas this “liberty” is not absolute in any voluntaristic sense of the term. As he explains in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 47, a. 2, ad 1, all creation is measured by the divine wisdom, which looks not only to the good of each individual, but also and above all to the good of the whole universe, to which all things are duly proportioned and architectonically ordered as so many parts within one, harmonious, divinely ordered whole.
- 31 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 47, a. 2 c.
- 32 See *Summa contra Gentiles* III, cap. 97.
- 33 See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 47, a. 2 c.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., q. 4, a. 2.
- 36 Phil 4:8.
- 37 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 1 c.
- 38 Ibid., q. 4, a. 3 c.
- 39 Ibid., q. 13, aa. 2–3.
- 40 Ibid., q. 13, a. 5.
- 41 For St. Thomas’s explanation of this point, see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5 c; cf. also *De veritate, Quaestiones disputatae*, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1949), q. 2, a. 11 c. Nor can one circumvent the problem by redefining “wisdom” by a proportion, as when I say, “God is to his wisdom as Socrates is to his wisdom.” This is tantamount to saying that wisdom exists in God and in us according to different modes and one needs to respect this. The proportion is not sufficient because by itself it does not manifest what “wisdom” means when said of God, and until this meaning is shown, one could argue that the term “wisdom”—even as it (first) appears in the above proportion—remains nonsense and, logically speaking, functions only as a placeholder for a concept still devoid of content.
- 42 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1.981a24–982b10.
- 43 *Lectura romana*, d. 8, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2.
- 44 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, aa. 5–6.
- 45 Plato, *Gorgias* 448c.
- 46 *Lectura romana*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1 c.
- 47 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 3.
- 48 *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11 c.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 See, e.g., *Quest for the Living God*, 82, 90, 109.
- 51 Ibid., 18. Nor does this assertion accurately represent the doctrinal statement it purports to paraphrase from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The Council does not say there is “no similarity” between God and creatures, but instead states: “the likeness between creator and creature cannot be so great that the unlikeness between them is not greater—*Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*” (Denz. 432). For clearly, the Council does not deny that creatures are like God, but supposing they should be, it merely affirms that such a likeness cannot surpass their unlikeness.
- 52 *Quest for the Living God*, 198.
- 53 Ibid., 198.
- 54 Ibid., 209 (emphasis mine).
- 55 The First Vatican Council teaches: “If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason, let him be anathema” (Denz. 1806).
- 56 *Quest for the Living God*, 35; cf. 15.
- 57 Ibid., 20.
- 58 Ibid., 16.
- 59 E.g., *ibid.*, 8.
- 60 Ibid., 81.
- 61 Ibid., 226.
- 62 Ibid., 100.
- 63 Ibid., 19.
- 64 Ibid., 18.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 *De potentia Dei, Quaestiones disputatae*, ed. Pauli M. Pession (Rome: Marietti, 1949), q. 7, a. 5 c (translation mine).
- 67 *Quest for the Living God*, 19.
- 68 Ibid., 212.
- 69 Ibid., 211, 20.
- 70 Ibid., 128.
- 71 Ibid., 18.
- 72 Acts 17:19.
- 73 *Quest for the Living God*, 209.
- 74 Ibid., 20.
- 75 Ibid., 19.
- 76 Ibid., 20.
- 77 Ibid., 219.
- 78 Jn 17:17.
- 79 Jn 8:32.
- 80 *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5, 27–28.



Spousal Love in Conjugal Spirituality

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Our Catholic faith is lived through an array of spiritual traditions. While each observes the same theological truths, the Church is enriched by the different emphases within each tradition. The same is true of conjugal spirituality. Married couples, who give rise to the domestic church, are as varied as the schools of spirituality. While Catholic marriages are built upon a common theological foundation, each couple's spirituality may emphasize certain aspects of their vocation to which they are particularly drawn and which they can live quite well. This paper explores perspectives of conjugal spirituality that cultivate reverence for and understanding of spousal love. First, a masculine perspective is presented, through which husbands are tutored in spousal love as they contemplate Christ the Divine Bridegroom, whose *agape* is poured out from the cross. A feminine perspective approaches Mary's *fiat* as a model for wives, who are called to image the Church as they receive and respond to spousal love. Next, a liturgical analogy is presented as a means for fostering reverence for what is sacred in conjugal union. Finally, contraception is critiqued as an antithesis to conjugal spirituality, while conceiving new life through the chaste practice of natural family planning is lauded as a noble fulfillment of it.

Christ's *Agape* Tutors Husbands in Spousal Love

“Precisely because Christ's divine love is the love of a Bridegroom, it is the model and pattern of all human love, men's love in particular.”¹ Both the crucifixion and conjugal union consist in pouring out love for the bride; therefore, husbands can be invited to place themselves contemplatively at the foot of the cross in order to learn the meaning of spousal love.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI invites us to reflect on the pierced side of Christ as a starting point for contemplating love. He writes,

His death on the Cross is the culmination of that

turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand . . . “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.²

The beauty of the crucifixion is that it communicates the total outpouring of Christ's love for his Bride. On the “marriage bed” of the cross,³ Jesus exclaims, “it is consummated” (Jn 19:30). Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the papal household, describes the union of Christ and the Church as coming about not in a “bed of pleasures” but “in blood, on the cross.”⁴ The consummate love of the Divine Bridegroom is not satisfied in stopping short of death, of suffering, or of withholding anything; rather, Christ is completely poured out as a libation. The Gospel of John recounts, “when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out” (Jn 19:33–34). As we stand beneath the crucified Christ and “look upon him whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37), we are bathed in the blood and water that pours forth from his wounded side.

Water carries rich symbolism in our Christian faith. It “signifies the Holy Spirit's action in Baptism, since after the invocation of the Holy Spirit it becomes the efficacious sacramental sign of new birth.”⁵ The “living water” that wells up from Christ crucified purifies the soul, unites us in the Spirit, renews baptismal faith, and leads us to eternal life.

Similarly, blood symbolizes life. In the sacrificial liturgies of the Old Testament, blood had a central role. In Leviticus the Lord explains, “Since the life of a living body is in its blood, I have made you put it on the altar, so that atonement may thereby be made for your own lives, because it is the blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement” (Lev 17:11). The Israelites believed life was in blood, so it contained a force that opposed death, a force which had its origins in God. Therefore, blood was used in their liturgies to oppose sin and any forces that were

hostile to salvation. Blood was also used to consecrate persons and things to signify that they were removed from the sphere of the profane. Consecration, through a sprinkling of blood, conveyed holiness and nearness to God.⁶ Furthermore, in salvation history, Christ redeems His Bride through his own blood, thereby establishing a new covenant and offering salvation through the forgiveness of sins. The blood and water from Christ remove us from the sphere of the profane, cleanse us, and draw us into communion with God.

When a husband enters into this sacred mystery he will find himself as a recipient of the grace that is bursting forth from the side of Christ. He will also discover the perfect love of the Bridegroom that he is called to emulate. St. Paul teaches,

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. . . . This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. (Eph 5:25-32)

This passage, together with the blood and water that pours forth from the Pierced One, presents us with a beautiful image of *agape*. *Agape* may be considered a “descending love.” From its origin in God, this love is completely poured out, spills into the heart of the Bride, sanctifies and cleanses her, and then draws her into a more intimate communion with God. *Agape* moves the Divine Bridegroom to go in search of His beloved, in order to lead her back into the sanctuary of His own heart. In Pauline theology, the love between spouses must embody this mystery. Every husband’s gift of himself to his bride, consummated in spousal union, finds its spiritual source in the mystery of the crucifixion. If he desires to be a source of love, he must first receive love as a gift from God. A husband’s love, in order to be an efficacious source of grace, needs to be a *participation in Christ’s outpouring of love*. The human heart is a vessel, which needs to be filled, stretched, and poured out for others. “Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. Jn 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. Jn 19:34).”⁷ In other words, the *agape* of Christ *must flow through the husband*. This becomes pos-

sible when the husband repeatedly returns to Christ as his own source of love and then gives his whole self to his bride out of reverence for Christ.

Sexual union sacramentally expresses this outpouring of love and efficaciously communicates this love to the bride, as long as the profession made in the body is indeed intimately connected to the spiritual life.⁸ The language of his body should speak of the deepest truths of the husband’s heart and radiate the call to love as God loves in a life-giving communion. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI teaches, spousal love

is total, that is to say, it is a very special form of personal friendship, in which husband and wife generously share everything, without undue reservations or selfish calculations. Whoever truly loves his marriage partner loves not only for what he receives, but for the partner’s self, rejoicing that he can enrich his partner with the gift of himself.⁹

Through the complete gift of his body the husband professes that he also gives his whole heart, soul, and mind to his bride out of reverence for Christ.

In sum, the husband is poured out in love. He works tirelessly for his bride’s sanctification, protecting her from what is profane. His desire is that she “might be holy and without blemish,” so that she may be drawn into eternal communion with God. Practically speaking, husbands are invited to die to themselves daily through all the ordinariness of marriage and family life, by serving, working, listening, consoling, helping around the house, caring for children, running errands, and so on. Indeed, the vast majority of married life is spent in living out the symbolic meaning of marital union.

Mary’s *Fiat* Tutors Wives in Spousal Love¹⁰

While the essential role of a bridegroom is to be poured out in love for his beloved, the subordinate stance of the bride is to receive and reciprocate the bridegroom’s generous gift of love. Paul tells us, “As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands” (Eph 5:24). In the general audiences that comprise the *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II expounds this statement beautifully by stating, “*the husband* is above all *the one who loves* and the wife, by contrast, is *the one who is loved*. One might even venture the idea that the wife’s ‘submission’ to the husband,

understood in the context of the whole of Ephesians 5:22–23, means above all ‘the experiencing of love.’”¹¹ When a wife offers herself in a stance of humble receptivity, she at once discovers herself as a recipient of the outpouring love of Christ flowing through her husband. Indeed, she welcomes the love of the Divine Bridegroom spilling from the vessel of her husband’s heart and beckoning a response from her.

When Mary pronounced her *fiat* at the Annunciation, she became the example *par excellence* of receptivity and response to the gift of God. The angel Gabriel announces to the young Virgin, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus” (Lk 1:30–31). In awe of this mystery—that God is inviting her to be the mother of His Son—Mary asks, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:34–35). In the divine plan, God desired to stoop down to our humanity, overshadow Mary, and unite Himself with her in a life-giving communion. She may not have comprehended the mystery of how she would conceive, but she recognized that if the Holy Spirit desired to enter her deeply then she should allow Him to do so. Actively taking part in this relationship with God, she emptied herself and became spiritually poor. In essence, she died to herself so that the Holy Spirit could fill her and she would live for her Beloved One. Mary’s response is the only fitting response to the gift of God—a complete gift of self.

At the Annunciation, Mary chooses to become vulnerable, exposed, and spiritually naked before the Living God. She welcomes the pronouncement of the angel and, of greater import, she receives the Holy Spirit into herself as she assents, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). The Lord sees her as she is, in all simplicity, and He surely smiles upon her beauty. Mary consents to the Incarnation and accepts her vocation as the Mother of God. She understands “her own motherhood as a total gift of self, a gift of her person to the service of the saving plans of the Most High.”¹² Therefore, in “putting herself at God’s service, she also put herself at the service of others: a *service of love*.”¹³

Mary serves as a beautiful icon of the Church. Therefore, each wife can enter the spousal analogy described in Ephesians 5 by befriending Mary as her

model. The wife *participates in the mystery of redemption* as she becomes vulnerable, exposed, and spiritually naked before her husband. With humble submission she welcomes the total love professed by her husband, both in body and spirit. She rejoices as her bridegroom sees her as she truly is and loves her unfailingly, for she too is beautiful. The wife is not simply passive in this “experiencing of love.” Rather, as she receives her husband’s outpouring of love, her heart becomes filled to the brim, and she responds in kind by being poured out in love for her husband. Out of reverence for Christ, she serves him in daily life with the same fidelity and zeal as the Church exudes when serving the Redeemer.

A Liturgical Analogy

Let us make use of a liturgical analogy as a means of exploring the significance of spousal union within conjugal spirituality. The liturgical analogy consists of three parts. First, as has already been presented, the Church recognizes that Christ’s gift of self in the crucifixion is the consummation of love between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church, the Bride. The outpouring of blood and water reveals the depths of *agape* and sets the standard for spousal love.

Second, let us look to the Eucharist, which “is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.”¹⁴ During Mass, the Church gathers together, repents of her sins, listens to and then reflects on the Word of God proclaimed. In unity of heart, she offers petitions to the Lord. Through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Christ’s gift of self on the cross is made present again and received by the Church. The Church relives Calvary and receives the body and blood of her Divine Bridegroom. “God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God’s own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us.”¹⁵ The Church has described our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice as “the source and summit of the Christian life.”¹⁶ As a “summit” the Eucharist is the highest expression of prayer that the Church can offer. As a “source” it strengthens us and spurs us forward, to go beyond ourselves, in order to share the saving message of Christ. This is precisely why the Church is sent forth in the Concluding Rites: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”

The third part of this liturgical analogy relates

spousal union to Calvary and the Eucharist.¹⁷ John Paul II teaches the “language of the body” can become “the *language of the liturgy*, because it is on its basis, on its foundation, that the sacramental sign of marriage is built.”¹⁸ Conjugal life is sacramental because it reveals the mystery of God’s love. John Paul II continues, “On this road, conjugal life in some sense becomes liturgy.”¹⁹ In other words, conjugal life in its totality, as well as spousal union in particular, become means of participating in the work of God. This understanding allows us to recognize that “[a]uthentic married love is caught up into divine love and is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ.”²⁰ The mutual exchange of conjugal love, which demands indissolubility, fidelity, and openness to fertility,²¹ welcomes the grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony. Through grace the couple’s love is perfected and their unity strengthened.²² This should not be understood in an oversimplified way, as if conjugal union *per se* sanctifies spouses. Rather, when baptized spouses welcome the grace that is properly theirs, and unite themselves with the mystery of Christ’s redemptive power on the cross and the salvific action of the Church,²³ then their total self-giving in *chaste conjugal union becomes a participation in the work of God*. As spouses contemplate the significance of their “one flesh,” they discover the depth of love that they are called to live—the Eucharistic reality and the mystery of the cross: in sum, the Paschal mystery. John Paul II says, “This seems to be *the integral meaning of the sacramental sign* of marriage. In this way, through the ‘language of the body,’ man and woman encounter the great ‘*mysterium*’ in order to transfer the light of this mystery, a light of truth and of beauty expressed in liturgical language, into the ‘language of the body.’”²⁴

This threefold liturgical analogy offers spouses a deep reverence for sexual intimacy.²⁵ Their bedroom can be seen as a sanctuary of love, where they deepen their communion. As sacred space, the bedroom should be a place of peace, intimate sharing from the heart, repentance for offenses against one another, and prayer offered in one spirit. The marital bed may be likened to an altar upon which they offer their bodies and selves “as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” and to each other (Rom 12:1). The act of lying down on the bed together becomes a symbol of Christ’s lying down on the cross. After all, *eros* is meant to express the language of *agape*, by means of a healthy integration of body and soul. The “language of the body” must be aligned with the inner truth of their hearts. Spousal union is sacra-

mental because it makes visible the invisible reality of God’s spousal love for his people. Furthermore, this is an expression of *eucharistia* because conjugal union is meant to be a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving. Spouses give thanks to God for the gift of each other and, through the outpouring of their love, they show gratitude for all they receive. The conjugal act may also be considered a “source and summit” of marital love. As a summit it is the fullest expression of self-giving union; and as a source, it energizes and renews the couple in their marital commitment. From this expression of love flow forth their other acts of self-giving and sacrificial love. In a sense, they are sent forth in peace to love and serve each other out of reverence for Christ. And so they renew their commitment to working, cooking, cleaning, caring in sickness, and so on.

Contraception: the Antithesis

The magisterium has repeatedly taught there is an “inseparable connection . . . between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning.”²⁶ If a couple has recourse to contraceptives then it inevitably contracepts the rich spiritual significance of their union. John Paul II asserts, “anti-conceptive practices and mentality” constitute “the antithesis of conjugal spirituality.”²⁷

Within the masculine perspective, contraception bears the spiritual significance of placing an impenetrable barrier between Christ and the Church. Symbolically, the Divine Bridegroom’s consummation of love on the cross becomes sterile, because the blood and water does not pour forth from the Bridegroom or because it is stifled from reaching the spiritual womb of the Bride where it would conceive new life in her. When spouses contracept the conjugal act, the husband ceases to reflect the divine mystery described in Ephesians 5. He cannot realize the demands of his vocation to love his wife “even as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). Rather than washing his bride clean, they become stained by sin; rather than cultivating reverence for what is sacred, they remain in the sphere of the profane; and rather than being drawn into communion, they stand isolated.

Within the feminine perspective, contraception turns the wife’s Marian receptivity into a rejection of love. If Mary had rejected the love of God by somehow preventing conception in her womb, her lauded

fiat would have lost its integrity and become a lie. The words she proclaimed from her lips would have been contradicted by a striking dissent in her body and a lack of openness to the Divine Will. Of course the real interchange between Mary and her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, was an interchange made in truth and love by which she received the total gift of God and conceived new life in her womb. *Mulierum Dignitatem* teaches that Mary's assent to the will of God—"May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38)—signifies every woman's "readiness for the gift of self and her readiness to accept a new life."²⁸ By contrast, using contraception restricts wives from entering the mystery of the Annunciation and identifying with Mary. The beautiful *fiat* of the bride cannot be lovingly spoken in truth to her husband or to God.

By withholding their fertility, spouses do not become complete gifts to each other, nor do they fully receive their beloved. *Familiaris Consortio* summarizes it this way:

Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love.²⁹

Natural family planning, on the other hand, which never places an artificial barrier between spouses' self-giving love, allows them to retain the rich spiritual significance of their intimacy. While recognizing that this discipline demands ongoing effort, Paul VI upholds that married couples are blessed with invaluable benefits, including the full development of their personalities and enrichment with spiritual values.³⁰ John Paul II also propagates the spiritual significance of natural family planning. He teaches, "The whole *practice of the honorable regulation of fertility*, which is so strictly tied to responsible fatherhood and motherhood, *is part of Christian conjugal and familial spirituality*."³¹ Indeed, when spousal union is chaste, it deepens the couple's capacity to live what their union signifies.³² Husbands more clearly reflect the outpouring *agape* of Christ revealed on the cross and in the Eucharist. Likewise, wives more fully receive and respond to their husband's love as Mary received the Holy Spirit and the Church her Savior.

Conceiving New Life

Mary's *fiat* welcomed the conception of new life in her womb, allowing the Incarnation of the Christ child. Thirty-three years later, Christ's consummate love on the cross was received into the spiritual womb of His Bride, who has continued to conceive new life for two thousand years. Through Baptism, adopted children of God are the spiritual fruit of this redemptive, spousal love.

While not all married couples are blessed with the gift of children, a chaste conjugal life remains ordered to the twofold end of marriage: the good of spouses and the transmission of life.³³ Therefore, as spouses share in the mystery of redemption, it is necessary for them to remain open to conceiving new life through the practice of natural family planning. For those who do conceive, parenthood brings about a unique fulfillment in their conjugal spirituality. They are invited to draw near to Christ, who offers them strength for their noble role as fathers and mothers.³⁴ By staying close to Calvary and the Eucharist, and by living out their conjugal spirituality, parents model for their children Christ's *agape* and Mary's *fiat*, and their children, in turn, learn how to receive the redemptive love of God and share it with others.

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Endnotes

- 1 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §25.
- 2 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §12.
- 3 "In the Church's ascetical and mystical tradition the cross has often been defined as the 'marriage bed' in which the soul is joined to its divine Spouse. Blessed Angela of Foligno used to say to Christ: 'On Your cross I have made my bed.'" Raniero Cantalamessa, *Virginity*, trans. Charles Sérignat (Staten Island, N.Y.: St. Paul, 1995), 38.
- 4 Cantalamessa, 39.
- 5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §694. (hereafter, CCC)
- 6 Louis F. Hartman, "Blood," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), 255-258.
- 7 *Deus Caritas Est*, §7.
- 8 "Love not only unites the two subjects, but it allows them to penetrate each other so mutually, thereby belonging spiritually to each other, that the author of Ephesians can affirm, 'The one who loves his wife loves himself' (Eph 5:28)." John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A*

Theology of the Body, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, PA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), §117:4 (hereafter, TOB).

- 9 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §9.
- 10 I am especially indebted to my wife, Sarah, for this feminine perspective. At the Institute for Priestly Formation in July of 2010 we gave an initial presentation on the spiritual significance of NFP. As she prayerfully prepared for the talk she was drawn to Mary's *fiat* as the primary source of her own inspiration as a wife and daughter of God.
- 11 TOB, §92:6.
- 12 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, §39.
- 13 *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, §10.
- 14 *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §26.
- 15 *Deus Caritas Est*, §14.
- 16 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §11, in *Vatican Council II, Volume 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., new rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1992).
- 17 The intention here is not to diminish the sacred mysteries, but to deepen our reverence for conjugal union through our understanding of Calvary and the Eucharist.
- 18 TOB, §117:5.
- 19 *Ibid.*, §117b:6.
- 20 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, §48, in *Vatican Council II, Vol-*

ume 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., new rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1992).

- 21 CCC, §1643.
- 22 *Ibid.*, §1641.
- 23 *Gaudium et spes*, §48.
- 24 TOB, §117b:6.
- 25 Spouses who prayerfully cultivate a gift of reverence for what is sacred may press more deeply into this liturgical analogy. It is a gradual journey, similar to how catechesis and prayer allow our understanding of Mass to mature over time. The clergy can foster appreciation for the spiritual significance of spousal union by providing catechesis on the Sacrament of Matrimony and prayerfully leading couples into the mysteries of Christ's *agape* and Mary's *fiat*.
- 26 *Humanae Vitae*, §12.
- 27 TOB, §132:2.
- 28 *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §18.
- 29 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, §32.
- 30 *Humanae Vitae*, §21.
- 31 TOB, §131:6.
- 32 *Gaudium et spes*, §49.
- 33 CCC, §2362.
- 34 *Gaudium et spes*, §48.

Poetry: The Revelatory Act

by Jude P. Dougherty
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“Poet – lawyer – planter, and former soldier” is the description Walker Percy gives to his uncle, William Alexander Percy in the introduction to *Lanterns on the Levee*.¹ Poetic witness comes in degrees of veracity, but in its depths it is revelatory in ways that eludes the pedestrian prose of historians, biographers, and philosophers. Like the metaphysician, the poet's object is being, the *existent*, but the *existent* in its universality. Thus the ancient Greek poets from Aeschylus on can tell us much about nature and human nature as we identify truth in their time-transcending perspective. In re-reading William Percy I was reminded of Theognis of Megara who in his portrayal of aristocratic life in archaic Greece depicted that life, warts and all, displaying its flaws as well as its virtues. William Percy does the same for a period of American life that begs to be understood.

This is not to say that in reading poets we should leave our critical faculties behind. Plato taught us to be wary of poets for the damage they can inflict on the impressionable. Aristotle, on the other hand,

divorced poetry from larger matters of morality, politics and philosophical standards of truth. And yet he thought that poetry in some sense should rise above mundane life and elevate the human spirit. The poetic plot, he held, should show no trace of the unintelligible or irrational. Still poetry, from his perspective, should not be subjected to simple and direct evaluation. Following the outline of Aristotle's doctrine in the *Poetics*, I will speak to the truth value of poetry from an ontological perspective. Jacques Maritain says flatly, “Poetry is ontology.”²

Walker Percy, in his introduction to *Lanterns on the Levee*, relates the awesomeness he felt as teenager in the house of a poet, a decorated infantry officer home from the Great War. “The fact that he was also a lawyer and a planter didn't cut much ice—after all the South was full of lawyer-planters. But how many people did you know who were war heroes and wrote books of poetry? One had heard of Rupert Brooke and Joyce Kilmer, but they were dead.” Clearly, Walker Percy's own prophetic voice, expressed in nearly all of his fiction, finds its roots in his early education in the home of the poet, his Uncle Will.

If this essay has a thesis, it is an affirmation of the close relationship between metaphysics and artistic production. As Aristotle himself put it: “The distinction between historian and poet is not the one writing prose and the other verse; it consists in this: that the one describes the thing that has been, the other the kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history since its statements are of the nature of universals whereas those of history are singular.” One could put Herodotus into verse but it would still be a species of history.

One will not find in Aristotle’s *Poetics* a fully developed theory of art. He will, reviewing the poetic forms he has known, speak to what it is the poet should aim at, of what is to be sought and what is to be avoided in constructing plots. He has much to say about the forms of tragedy, the uses of fear and pity in the construction of a plot, but his emphasis is always on the universal aspect of the narrative. “By a universal statement I mean one as to what such and such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do – which is the proper aim of poetry – though it affixes proper names to the characters.”³ One does not have to be of advanced age to appreciate some of the memorable lines T.S. Eliot assigns to Prufrock in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. “Do I dare – descend the stair with a bald spot in the middle of my hair” or understand his lament, “I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, and I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat and snicker.” Those lines speak to the universal character of human nature. With Aristotle, two things to note here, respect for the natural order and its *telos* and respect for the elevating aim of poetry. Shakespeare, in his own day, will have paid homage to this inherited theme. The poet/playwright in *Hamlet* (Act 3, Scene 2) is cautioned not to overstep the modesty of nature, “for anything overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at first and now, was and is, to hold us ‘twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and every age and body of time his form and presence.” What is said of poetry is analogously applicable to other forms of fine art.

The close relationship between metaphysics and artistic production has been noted since antiquity.

Umberto Eco in his *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* provides from an historical point of view a succinct statement of the dependency.⁴ “Medieval aesthetics began with a heritage received more-or-less uncritically from the Classical age—a heritage infused, all the same, by a spirit altogether new. Gradually there developed a metaphysics and epistemology of the beautiful and eventually an idea of beauty as an organic value. This was the period of its greatest maturity.”⁵ When, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, Aristotelian metaphysics began to lose its following, the rationale of art and poetry became less and less systematic. The foundation was laid for the Mannerist doctrine of genius and imagination. When the artifact conceived as essentially a matter of order, a rendering of the *splendor formae* in the language of Aquinas, was lost, so too was lost the notion that artistic production has something to do with beauty. This loss is reflected in the very architecture of museums that came to be or were altered in the last half of the twentieth century.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the creation of the great museums of art that today span the United States from New England to the west coast. Private collections amassed by industrial leaders were offered for public appreciation in structures deemed appropriate for their viewing. Kress, Carnegie, Mellon, Frick, and Clark are names associated with some of the greatest collections of European masters. The favored architecture of the newly endowed museums tended to be neoclassical Greek, with a few museums opting for the Italian Renaissance style. Museum-goers were no doubt unconsciously led to identify the art museum with expansive stairs leading to massive portals fronted by Doric or other Greek-inspired columns that blended into the building as a whole. A stranger arriving in the city would instinctively identify such a structure as an art museum. The interior matched the promise of the building’s façade, expansive corridors, elegant staircases, alabaster fountains, Renaissance courtyards, a delight to the eye promoting a feeling of grandeur. Upon entering the usually paneled picture galleries, one could view European masters from the early Italian Renaissance to the French Impressionists. Sculpture gardens and specialized collections of primitive American painting or oriental art might be found off

one of the many corridors. Collections were usually arranged chronologically unless the donor had mandated that his collection be displayed intact. Viewers were exposed to Botticelli, Raphael, Memling, Van Eyck, Rembrandt, El Greco, Van Gogh, Ingres, David, Corot, Manet, Renoir, and countless others from the thirteenth to the twentieth century.

As collections expanded, new spaces for viewing had to be added, but the art world of the late twentieth century was not that of the late nineteenth. Almost without exception the architecture of the new space deviated substantially from and often clashed with that of the original gallery. Rarely did the expansion reflect the beauty and grace of the original structure. The curve gave way to the straight line, adornment to the slab, and glass replaced marble and stone. One may say that the newly acquired paintings deserved no better. Bizarre architecture seemed suited to bizarre content. Ideological and fanciful organization replaced the chronological. New “isms” took hold: Fauvism substituted arbitrary colors for those of nature on the assumption that there is no reason esthetically for the sky to be blue or the grass to be green. Cubism flattened images and abolished depth. Kandinsky went even further, abolishing all traces of subject matter. Surrealism and Futurism became favorites of the new intelligentsia.

Museums often took upon themselves a pedagogical role and became classrooms in defense of the irrational. Curators apparently did not notice that patrons moved quickly through the new galleries, failing to linger as they might before the European masters. The movement to the irrational was no doubt encouraged, if not inspired by, the taste of Joseph Hirshhorn and Peggy and Solomon Guggenheim. Their fortunes enabled them to build independent museums to house their own collections, but their influence extended far beyond. The sea change in the art world tended to reflect the ideological shift of the patrons. The Wall Street fortunes that supported the new were those of financiers and stock manipulators, a different breed from the industrialists of the previous century. The influence of the academy could be detected in the narrative that often accompanied the exposition of the new. Viewers who could spontaneously appreciate a Raphael, a Rembrandt, or a Renoir had to be coached into an appreciation of a

Duchamp, a Pollock or a de Kooning. In the absence of beauty the viewer had to be told what the artist was trying to do, that the dripping of pigments in swirling rhythms or the allowing of paint to run unintended down the surface of a canvas, did indeed have some meaning. The explanation? Perhaps the artist wished to “stress the risk and unpredictability of life itself.”

Clearly, the academic philosophies of the Enlightenment, Anglo-French and German, had penetrated the art world. A Christian past had given way to an atheistic, materialistic modernism. To use the words of George Santayana, the shell of Christendom was broken. With its loss went a respect for classical antiquity and a respect for natural forms theretofore regarded as the handiwork of God. No longer was there a perceived purpose in nature or a moral order to be observed. The artist was emancipated from all restraint, free to express himself as he saw fit. Spontaneity and indecision were the order of the day. Incomprehensible dabbings replaced lovely landscapes, still lifes, and portraits. In their drive to create a new world of forms unrelated to the physical world in which we live, some commercially successful artists seem to take a diabolical pleasure in baffling the public. Absent the recognition of an ordered universe, freedom seems to be exercised in the name of freedom itself.

Every moviegoer of the past half-century will recognize the motto of a major motion picture studio, “*Ars gratia artis.*” The meaning and implications of that dictum may be debated, but it points to the fact that theories of art matter. Taking his lead from Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas, in discussing the nature of aesthetic experience, identifies three characteristics of the beautiful: integrity, harmony, and clarity or splendor of form (*splendor intellectus*). Just as truth satisfies the intellect and good satisfies the will, beauty satisfies both cognitive and appetitive faculties, that is, it satisfies both intellect and will. Aquinas further describes beauty as resplendence of the substantial form in an object whose parts are well proportioned. From a Thomistic point of view “resplendence” is an objective quality, an ontological quality, one that exists independently of the viewer. The nobility of the form instantiated reflects the nobility of the form as conceived and may tell us something at a deeper

level about the integrity of the artist himself. What may seem inspired is often the product of days of thought. Anyone who has had the opportunity to discuss the work of a painter or sculptor with the artist himself will recognize how much of the artist is transferred to the art work itself. The intellectual and spiritual formation of the artist guides his hand even where intractable matter has not yielded to the form as conceived in the mind of the artist.

It is clear that much of the contemporary art world has rejected the notion that beauty is or should be the aim of artistic production. Blatant ideology and commercial success have robbed much contemporary art of integrity as well as splendor. Ideology can subvert artistic production when it is made to serve ends that are not its own, e.g., the proletarian art of the Roosevelt and Stalinist periods. This is not to say that art necessarily loses its integrity when it assumes a pedagogical function. The didactic art of the early decades of the twentieth century insofar as it was designed to serve a socialist agenda may leave us unmoved because of its dehumanizing message. Art deco of the same period, like commercial art everywhere, may fail for other reasons. Art in the service of the temple is a different matter. The architecture, statuary, stained glass, and painting of a medieval cathedral succeeded in creating an ambience that led the viewer to a transcendent and ennobling order. Paintings and sculpture may be weak forms of communication compared with the printed word, but when presented and understood within the context of the theology that informed their creation, they can be overwhelming in their effect. In the service of the temple, the artist's vision is received by a like mind. His meditation understood. The viewer is drawn not just to the sensory qualities of the object but to the immanent qualities of the whole. Nobility of purpose does not, of course, redeem a badly executed work.

Of twentieth-century artists whose work illustrates the relationship of art to faith, one may be drawn to the stained glass of Chagall, to the paintings of Roualt, or to the massive sculptures of Ivan Meštrovi. The piety of Meštrovi is exemplified by his magnificent St. Jerome, currently found in front of the Croatian Embassy on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C. Like Jerome, Meštrovi has his roots in the Dalmatian coast and his faith in the very scrip-

tures that Jerome rendered into Latin.

Religious subjects themselves do not make a work of art religious. From a Catholic perspective, we live in a created universe where everything that exists is religious because it imitates God in its operations as well as its being. In a finite and analogical way, the artist participates in the divine creative act. In a Christian universe the artist is called to praise God by cooperating with His creative power, by increasing, to the extent that he can do so, the sum total of being and beauty in the world. To make things and to make them beautiful are one and the same thing. This calling is exemplified at the highest level when the work is destined for the temple. Thus understood, creative art is not limited to imitation but encompasses the creation of new forms. Yet what is created cannot help but reflect the personal imprint of the artist, the vision and harmony, or lack thereof, found within the depths of his soul.

Hamilton Reed Armstrong, a personal friend and arguably the foremost Catholic sculptor in North America, has executed a statue of Ibn Gabirol that graces a public square in Málaga, but it is neither Armstrong nor Ibn Gabirol that is likely to be identified with that city. Within the art world, Málaga is best known as the birthplace of Picasso. Like Armstrong, Picasso was baptized in the Catholic faith, and, like Armstrong, his early training made him an able draftsman. Picasso's "Altar Boy" is a pleasing illustration of both his faith and skill, but at the age of nineteen, Picasso left home for the bohemian life of Paris. The experience was formative in more ways than one. The personal and artistic freedom he found there led both to his loss of faith and to a rejection of the artistic tradition of the academy. The modern anarchism of Paris had claimed another adherent, leading his artist father, Don José Ruiz y Blasco, to decry "a shameful waste of talent." Picasso's art was to become agonized and shrill. His canvasses transformed everyday subjects into bizarre images in which he took almost perverse liberties with human anatomy. Enlisted in the cause of international communism, many of his works became grotesque symbols of brutality and darkness. From a commercial point of view, Picasso has to be considered the most successful artist of the twentieth century. Museum directors, art dealers, and wealthy connoisseurs vied

for his work. His paintings sold for the largest sums ever paid to a living artist. That success may also attest to a radical change in the intellectual, one could say, spiritual, climate of the century. One need not compare a Meštrović to a Picasso to illustrate that change. It is exemplified in the life work of Picasso himself. One can delight in his early work while eschewing his later bizarre works. The correlation between loss of faith and loss of perspective is a subject not often addressed by art historians.

I conclude with an insightful passage written more than a hundred years ago by Leo N. Tolstoy: “Christian art. . . should be catholic in the original meaning of the word, i.e., universal, and therefore it should unite all men. And only two kinds of feeling do unite all men: first, feelings flowing from the perception of our sonship to God and the brotherhood of man; and, next, the simple feelings of common life,

accessible to everyone without exception—such as the feeling of merriment, of pity, of cheerfulness, of tranquility, etc. Only these two kinds of feelings can supply material for art good in its subject matter.”⁶ ✕

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011, from a 1973 edition). William Percy's book is worth revisiting not simply for its observations and down-home wisdom, but because it attests once again to the value of poetic witness from antiquity to the present. What would life be like without Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Browning, and T.S. Eliot or other favorites?
- 2 Jacques Maritain. *Art and Scholasticism and The Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. vii.
- 3 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b.
- 4 Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, [originally, *Sviluppo dell'estetica medievale in Momenti e problemi di storia dell'estetica*, vol. 1, 1959], trans Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
- 6 Leo N. Tolstoy, *What is Art?* trans. from the Russian by Almyer Maude (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., The Liberal Arts Press, 1960), p. 183.

Anarchists Among Us

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Do we dare call them “anarchists”—environmentalists, federal regulators, whimsical judges, and other officials who seem to have abandoned the rule of law, if not reason itself? Without doubt the most serious form of anarchy is that perpetrated by the intellectuals. By definition an anarchist is one who disregards law and order, challenges inherited and cherished traditions, or, in the case of the intellectual, one who embraces a political or social ideology at the expense of reasoned and unbiased examination of cultural phenomena. That a state of cultural and political disorder exists within both the European Union and the United States is widely acknowledged and hardly needs illustration. Western nations on both sides of the Atlantic are confronted by massive immigrations of alien peoples who refuse assimilation within their adopted country and demand accommodation for the customs they bring. The host countries themselves find it difficult to agree with respect to what may be demanded of the newcomer. Confu-

sion abounds even with respect to what constitutes the national identity that the newcomer is encouraged to adopt. No one has asserted this more clearly than Pierre Manent in his book, *Democracy without Nations?: The Fate of Self-Government in Europe*.¹ Manent is convinced that Europe is on the verge of self-destruction. The democratic nation, he fears, has been lost in Europe, the very first place it appeared. “The European Union’s political contrivances,” he writes, “have become more and more artificial. With each day they recede further from the natural desires and movements of their citizens’ souls.”² A nation, he holds, is the same people living in the same place, observing the same customs, abiding by the same moral principles. In Manent’s judgment, Europe’s governing classes, without explicitly saying so, aspire to create a homogeneous and limitless human world. In fact, given its intellectual climate, what distinguishes Europeans from one another and others cannot be evaluated or even publicly discussed.

Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor, both Canadians, in a recent work claim that “One of the most important challenges facing contemporary societies is how to manage moral and religious diversity.”³ Taylor

and Maclure find that a broad consensus exists to the effect that “secularism is an essential component of any liberal democracy comprised of citizens who adhere to a plurality of conceptions of the world and of the good, whether these conceptions be religious, spiritual, or secular.”⁴ Secularism they define as “a political and legal system whose function is to establish a certain distance between the state and religion.”⁵ But as conceived by Taylor and Maclure, it is more than that. The state in their view must be neutral toward the multiple values, beliefs, and life plans of citizens within modern societies. The state must be the state of all citizens and not identify itself with one particular religion or worldview. And yet, “A liberal and democratic society cannot remain indifferent to certain core principles such as human dignity, basic human rights, and popular sovereignty.”⁶ Several questions are clearly begged. Is the human intellect so impoverished that it cannot discern what leads to personal freedom and social equanimity? How can there be a society unless there is a certain cultural unity among the people who presumably form it? The core principles alluded to are not universal or found in the culture of all who seek asylum in the West. Still, Taylor and Maclure maintain: “In showing itself to be agnostic on questions of the aims of human existence, the secular state recognizes the sovereignty of the person in his or her choice of conscience.”⁷ This amounts to an invitation to civil war, as like-minded individuals group for ascendancy. Even within a Muslim country, where Islam is proclaimed in common, Sunni and Shi’a vie for control.

A compelling response to Taylor and Maclure is to be found in a recent work by Marcello Pera, former president of the Italian Senate, now professor of political philosophy at the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome.⁸ Pera takes the title of his book, *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christians* from an essay by Benedetto Croce, a professed atheist who nevertheless said of *we Europeans*, “Why We Cannot but Call Ourselves Christian.” Croce, in spite of his materialism, was convinced that the objective and transcendent formulation of man’s dignity and freedom was to be found in Christianity. Pera is specific: “We should call ourselves Christian if we want to maintain our liberties and preserve our civilization. . . . If, as Thomas Jefferson claimed, our liberties must have, or must be felt as if they had, a religious foundation in order to bind the union together, then today’s secularized Europe, which rejects that foundation, can never

be politically united.”⁹ Pera continues, “Unlike Americans, Europeans cannot adopt a constitution beginning with the words *We the people* because ‘the people’ must exist as a moral and spiritual community before such a constitution could be conceived and asked for.”¹⁰ The version of the European Constitution that was finally adopted after being rejected in popular referendums by the French and the Dutch made no reference to God or to Christianity and amounted to no more than a treaty among nations.

In addressing the moral decline which he finds on both sides of the Atlantic, Pera writes: “Liberal civilization was born in defense of the negative liberties of man. When the positive liberties of citizens burgeoned forth, everything started changing. The liberal state first became democratic, next paternalistic, and finally entered the totalitarian phase of the dictatorship of the majority and the tyranny of absolute authorities. No aspect of life today, from cradle to the grave, has been left untouched by legislation, and most of all by the verdicts of judges or supreme courts, or by the decisions of supranational institutions.”¹¹ He fears that within democracies decisional authority is today being handed over to powerful interest groups and bureaucracies. Good and evil, he maintains, in the absence of an authoritative moral tradition tend to be determined by parliamentary vote.

Pera lauds Benedict XVI for his effort to awaken European intellectuals to the Christian roots of the order and freedoms they take for granted. The Holy Father himself has provided a foreword to this volume.

✠

Endnotes

- 1 Pierre Manent, *Democracy without Nations?: The Fate of Self-Government in Europe*, trans. Paul Seaton (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2007).
- 2 Ibid., 33.
- 3 Jocelyn Maclure, Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- 4 Ibid., 2.
- 5 Ibid., 3.
- 6 Ibid., 11.
- 7 Ibid., 21.
- 8 Marcello Pera, *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christians* (New York: Encounter Books, 2011).
- 9 Ibid., 8–9.
- 10 Ibid., 9.
- 11 Ibid.

The Idea of the Catholic Scholar

by Duane L.C.M. Galles, JD, JCD, PhD
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Five years ago, in 2007, the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars held its annual meeting in Washington with the theme of “The Idea of the Catholic University.” One of the sessions took up the phenomenon of “Catholic Studies,” a program of studies as an academic discipline which apparently had begun in the 1990s at the University of Saint Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota. One may wonder why one needs to pursue an expressly denominated course of Catholic studies at a putatively Catholic university? Nevertheless, such had been the declension of Catholicism in the last half century, even at Catholic universities, that by 2002 there was a felt need for such a program, and it had been called into existence at some thirty-two institutions. There is even a Catholic Studies honor society, Alpha Tau Omrikron Omega.¹

A previous paper at an earlier session of the same meeting was entitled “Measuring Catholic Claims.” It had even suggested that actual participation rates in such Catholic Studies programs could be the start of a useful study designed to measure the impact of such programs on participants. The study could also help in measuring the Catholic claims of Catholic universities.² The quantitative measurement of such claims could begin even before the commencement of university studies with the administration of a “Catholic knowledge” advanced placement test. Such testing would be useful, inasmuch as it would permit Catholic university theology (and other) departments to gauge the level of Catholic knowledge of incoming students and adjust their introductory courses accordingly. The presence of such Catholic knowledge testing would in itself signal to incoming students the importance of such studies and, once it were known how well its students were doing or not doing in such placement testing, it would give to Catholic secondary schools an incentive to prepare their students more intensively in such studies. New university students doing well on such placement tests might also “test out” of introductory Catholic knowledge courses, freeing up time for profounder Catholic studies.

University students pursuing at a satisfactory level

a course of Catholic studies might have their degrees endorsed “Catholic Scholar” to evidence that they had attained a certain level of objective knowledge in that field. While qualitative measures would be needed as well, reports of the performance of a university’s incoming students on such advanced placement testing, the rate of participation of students in Catholic studies, and the percentage of students achieving the standard of “Catholic Scholar” might provide some objective basis for measuring Catholic claims of Catholic universities. The paper states,³

Admittedly, the SAT and ACT do not offer such a [n advanced placement] test. However, it would not be difficult for a theology department at a Catholic university, either by itself or working jointly with several other Catholic institutions, to devise such an exam. It is truly curious that Catholic colleges and universities have so far not considered it important to determine the range of “Catholic knowledge” among entering students.

Curious, maybe, but understandable. While the authors suggest that a certain reverse Gresham’s law of Catholic education would induce Catholic universities to improve their Catholic claims once such testing had begun, we suspect they would have little incentive to introduce such testing. One suspects such testing would reveal much, perhaps too much, and then institutions would need to set in train much effort and expense to remedy the effects of what it reveals. Avoiding such an undertaking altogether is both easier and cheaper.

But an outside body could also devise such an advanced placement test and start the ball rolling. That outside body might be the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars itself or even the Catholic Studies Honor Society, Alpha Tau Omrikron Omega (or both). Besides devising and overseeing such testing (the actual testing would be administered by the College Board), the outside body could also provide to those achieving a sufficiently high standard a certificate attesting them to be “Scholars” and permitting them to use such initials as SFCS, “Scholar of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars.”⁴ Presumably, testing would cover a number of fields, including philosophy, theology, sacred scripture, liturgics, Church history, canon law, and Catholic arts and letters. The last would include literature, music, art,

and architecture.

Moreover, the testing could be expanded beyond advanced placement testing to measure the attainment of a university Catholic Studies program. This could operate much as the external examiner and comprehensive examination do at British universities, where students undergo a comprehensive examination at the end their university course, and the presence of the external examiner guarantees that students do not merely seek to regurgitate what an individual instructor had taught them, but they are measured by a national standard of achievement. Here the external examining authority would ensure that the Catholic Studies program at each university maintains objective standards, and so provide a further measure of Catholic claims.

Those passing this university-level Catholic studies examination would be presented a certificate making them Associates of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars (AFCS). There might also be a graduate level to the program with those achieving a certain standard being Licentiates of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, LFCS. Admittedly, this all apes much of what is done in British education and qualifications measuring. Besides the external examiner and the comprehensive test at the end of one's university course, before they had degree-granting powers, a number of British institutions granted (and still grant) the designations "associate" and "licentiate" to their members who had attained a certain standard in testing administered to them.⁵

Of course, it is not just British. Other civilized societies have long made use of testing. Such testing as proposed in fact would merely parallel that invented

and administered millennia ago by the Chinese, and the initials LFCS would merely indicate that the person possessing them is a sort of "Catholic Mandarin." One additional value of this apparatus is that it might, if put into execution, also provide diocesan bishops some quantitative data, when, under the apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae* and the ordinances enacted pursuant thereto, they seek to determine whether an institution is a Catholic university. ✠

Endnotes

- 1 Robert F. Gotcher, "Introduction to Catholic Studies Programs," 79-83; Paula Jean Miller, "Catholic Studies Programs in Global Perspective," 85-92; and John C. Cavadini, "Catholic Studies: A Cautionary Note," 93-99; in *The Idea of the Catholic University: Proceedings from the 30th Annual Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, September 28-30, 2007, Washington, DC*, ed. Kenneth D. Whitehead (2009).
- 2 Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, "Measuring Catholic Claims," in *ibid.*, 39-65, at 55. This paper notes that "management theory warns managers that they need regularly updated data to adequately supervise their area" and seeks to find qualitative as well as quantitative measures for the Catholic claims of Catholic universities.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 4 The term "Catholic Scholar" one might avoid on the certificate, so as not to suggest that the body of Catholic Scholars forms an (unincorporated) association of the faithful. Avoiding the term also obviates running afoul of canon 300, which says no association may call itself "Catholic," except with the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority. The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, which was formed in 1977, need not worry about offending this canon, which went into effect in 1983, inasmuch as canon 9 says the laws are presumed to be prospective, unless it is clearly stated that they are to have retroactive effect. There is no indication that canon 300 was intended to have retroactive effect.
- 5 Alternatively, the designations might be "Associate," "Licentiate," and "Scholar" to designate the completion of a course of Catholic Studies equivalent to a "minor" and a "major" at the undergraduate level and a masters degree in Catholic Studies, respectively.



Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order: Defending Democracy against Its Modern Enemies and Immoderate Friends*. Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2010.

Reviewed by Kevin Walker

In 1945, Winston Churchill, the “man who saved the West”—who had been right again and again about Nazi Germany, who was summoned to be prime minister in the darkest hour, and who then led Britain to victory—was defeated by the Labor candidate Clement Attlee in the General Election. It was a shock for Churchill and his Conservative Party, a shameful act of national ingratitude toward the nation’s greatest hero. It was not that the people owed him their votes. Churchill recognized that the will of the people was final, and he understood his duty to accept that. The greater injustice was directed at what he stood for. Churchill showed his countrymen the startling truth: that no matter how advanced or enlightened we become, the evils of human nature would never go away, and that the right response would always be to “overcome evil with good” through timeless qualities like courage, practical wisdom, and greatness.

But Britain found itself in a new age of liberal democracy where those claims were no longer believable—and even when the truth was obvious, they were no longer acceptable. They were reactionary, contrary to the civic values of social equality, human rights, and the evolution that would help us grow out of such antiquated views of man. Many viewed the Second World War—both Nazi fascism and Churchill’s valiant statesmanship—as little more than an annoying detour on the way to the end of history. Once that obstacle was overcome, liberal democracy would triumph, leaving no need for statesmanlike virtues. In practice, it meant the rise of administrative planning in place of politics, and a bureaucracy that would manage and regulate all national affairs. Churchill’s defeat marked the beginning of the British welfare state, with its massive agencies overseeing education, business, insurance, housing, and healthcare, staffed by a civil service of over half a million public employees, assigned to a variety of tasks in social and cultural engineering. This is the culmination of the

need to “Face the Future,” as one Labor campaign slogan put it in 1945. Another slogan proved the depth of popular ingratitude, as well as the new trouble facing British society: “Cheer Winston: Vote Labor.”

How could liberal democracy proceed with such monolithic confidence in a liberal order when it denies its only sure foundation? Daniel J. Mahoney’s new book, a study in “political philosophy and socio-cultural criticism,” aims to address that error and examine its consequences. Mahoney teaches us the value of conservative thought, in the hope that non-conservatives will recognize that it does have an important contribution to liberal democracy. It is not about strategies of attack on the left, but an introduction to the “art of loving democracy moderately”—of letting progress run its course, but ensuring that it never forgets its foundation. Real conservatism ensures that progress progresses *toward* something, and that “change” is for the better.

Mahoney’s book continues his ongoing research and meditation on the modern statesmanship of Churchill, Edmund Burke, Abraham Lincoln, and Charles DeGaulle, and on the importance of public intellectuals like Alexis de Tocqueville, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Pierre Manent, and Raymond Aron. Their greatness came from their “conservative-minded liberalism,” he writes, which distinguished them from mere “reactionaries.” Their lives and writings remind us of how “the democratic order is not self-sufficient,” and that it “depends upon a precious civilizational inheritance that it has trouble renewing and that it sometimes actively undermines” (21). It is the distinctive feature of twentieth-century liberalism to reject its origins—and, in our times, to forget that something was even rejected.

This was not always the case: the older liberalism of John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill, no matter how novel their objectives, still paid a due respect for the classical virtues, the primacy of politics, and the enduring need for great statesmen. Figures like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison exemplified this. For all their revolutionary zeal against Britain, they still drew from the English common law, Christianity, and classical European histories when they framed and ratified the Constitution. It

was truly an “improved science of politics,” as Alexander Hamilton put it, since they recognized a preexisting “We,” that was the “crucial precondition for forming a ‘more perfect union’ at the time of America’s constitutional founding” (6). Great liberals proposed modest and simple plans—limited government, the right of property, individual freedom, and “the laws of Nature and Nature’s God”—which rested on much grander traditions and customs, which they always respected.

But theirs was a “gentleman’s liberalism,” and it could not last with the onslaught of more radical forms that would later appear. Soon, liberalism would not pursue happiness, but invent it; social reform would not build and improve on tradition, but destroy it. The old liberalism endures in our language of “equality,” “rights,” and “freedom,” to be sure. But it is easy to see how these are often hollow terms today. Rather than the premises of meaningful arguments, such words are reduced to mere symbols, which drive an unreflective progressivism that speaks in the tones of high morality about the urgent need to destroy all traditions and institutions. Those who still appreciate the achievements of the older liberalism, who recognize the reality behind our words, and who view tradition as a great protector and preserver, feel compelled to conserve something—to become “conservatives.”

Conservatism today recognizes how much more important it is to “take greatness seriously,” even if there are no more great men to be found. Indeed, figures like Lincoln and Churchill and DeGaulle are not supposed to exist in modern times, and their appearance seems miraculous, given the effectiveness of liberal democracy when it comes to extinguishing the qualities that make them possible. It is therefore the *study* of statesmanship that “punctures our egalitarian illusions and reminds us of those rare human qualities—courage, moderation, foresight, prudence, magnanimity, among them—that are worthy of admiration in every time and place” (53). We have trouble meditating on greatness partly because it appears “elitist” or anti-democratic, but also because it praises qualities of character that modern liberalism insists we can do without. It takes a certain simplicity of mind to see nature, and to look at things as they present themselves.

But “[i]t is no easy task to become naïve again,” Mahoney writes. “Modern theory and practice place seemingly insuperable obstacles in the way of an authentic appreciation of political life” (55). The lives of great statesmen are so ancient and forgotten, while “greatness” and “virtue” are so thoroughly debunked and vilified, that we are unable to become even the slightest bit familiar with the thing that has saved us, and might save us again.

Our greatest threat, though, is not from external enemies, but from ourselves. Abraham Lincoln’s words are as true as ever, that “if destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher.” The possibility of that destruction came in the 1960s. It appeared in the various “youth movements” that terrorized Western academia, such as the 1968 “May Events” in France where demonstrators flooded the streets in one massive “psychodrama,” where they sought to “transform and to undermine every authoritative institution.” Raymond Aron witnessed much of this firsthand, marveling at the bizarre mixture of juvenile reasoning with hypermoralistic rhetoric that fueled the uprisings. He revealed to everyone the painful truth: that the radicals were not in revolt against “conservatism” as it was later understood, but the older liberal order, with all of its golden visions of administration and progress. The spirit of education in the French universities was “lacking in a sense of the tragic,” Mahoney writes; it was “oblivious to the political realities that might be discerned from an attentive reading of Aristotle and Machiavelli, and too confident in the power of ‘positive’ science to provide the ‘rational’ foundations of a humanized world” (164). The new radicals found the old left’s project terribly incomplete. It failed to pursue the full scope of human possibilities, and therefore slumped back into a form of conservatism—a rigid, sterile, dry set of norms. It accidentally held on to many leftover assumptions from a past it meant to destroy—i.e., the family unit, sexual norms, the expectations of a “gentleman,” and a basic sense of decency and benevolence. The radical left “showed limitless contempt for the habits, practices, and judgments that had long served to support civilized human existence” (101). It would therefore

have the explosive and destructive energy necessary to finish the job.

Anyone even slightly familiar with cultural history knows how definitive the 1960s were for our time. Even as the radicals aged and settled comfortably down into plush tenured positions, book deals, and speaking tours, their legacy remains in the thoughts of today’s most ordinary people. The distrust of all authority, both good and bad, both traditional and arbitrary, is the unquestioned orthodoxy of the day, even among decent, upright, religious, salt-of-the-earth folk who would never consider themselves “radicals.” “This process is so regularized that we have ceased to notice or appreciate its truly revolutionary character,” Mahoney writes. “Our political orders are bereft of statesmanship, the family is a shell of its former self, and influential currents within the churches no longer know how to differentiate between the sublime demands of Christian charity and demagogic appeals to democratic humanitarianism”—which, in practice, means “the maximization of individual autonomy and consent” (104). Anything contrary to that absolute principle is considered the height of tyranny. Traditions and institutions, however ancient, sacred, or venerable, are but façades for vicious oppression.

But living in absolute aimless freedom, with no dogma or tradition or guidance, people “are likely to succumb to a psychological and spiritual ‘vertigo’ that gives way either to nihilism or to conformism with all its illiberal political consequences,” Mahoney writes. When “[h]uman subjectivity” becomes the judge of truth, it leads to moral anarchy. Hence, people submit to the desire for order and unity—or authority, however deadly or arbitrary, which “makes the tyrannies of old look both benign and self-limiting” (42; 44). People hunger for authority, and a framework for structuring their lives; one way or another, they will find an authority and settle on it. The more aimless they are at the beginning, though, the more likely they will be to settle on something arbitrary and closed-minded.

Since the 1960s, we have lived in conditions similar to those that preceded totalitarian regimes. It should be no surprise that the most dangerous cults in the world appear in societies that are the most secularized. Most of the world’s

Islamic radicals came of age immersed in Western culture and educated in fine universities, where they enjoyed a life of freedom unimaginable in the Middle East. Solzhenitsyn saw a similar tendency in the way liberal intellectuals flirted with Soviet Communism, despite the hostility that such a regime would have toward people like themselves. He made explicit the “underlying ‘kinship’ between every form of modern humanism.” Soviet totalitarianism was simply a more complete and comprehensive version of their own atheistic humanism, so they “had no principled ground for resisting it” (133–34).

In order to love democracy moderately, conservatism must remind people that freedom is never purely civic, and that man’s final end cannot be found here in the world. A miraculous and mystical view of life is the condition of freedom. Religion is especially good at maintaining this. Even an atheist can appreciate the utility of religion: nothing else is strong enough to ensure a common “right opinion,” and a strong set of shared assumptions. Indeed, figures like Thomas Jefferson, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Raymond Aron were men of conspicuously dubious faith, yet they never doubted how essential religious life was for public happiness. Even in its crudest and silliest forms, religion keeps people aware of something noble and beautiful, and it prevents that pantheistic impulse in democracy “that conflated the divine and human and that weakened moral agency by making human beings the playthings of vast cosmological, historical, and sociological forces” (42). A free regime, however, is one that “conceives of human beings as ‘participants’ in an order they did not make and cannot ultimately control” (44).

But conservatism at its best comes with an additional feature: it is aware of contemporary problems, understands the value of social reform, and accepts that administration and technology really are facts of modern life, which will never go away. Nostalgia, whether for great traditions or religious feelings or philosophic schools of thought, is not the same thing as prudence. The task for conservatives who still appreciate that great virtue is to “distinguish the ‘eternal content’ of conservative wisdom—the necessary defense of hierarchy, tradition, authority—from its ‘transitory content.’” It must grant the legitimacy of egalitarianism and what good

liberal democracy has done, “not only as a matter of justice but in order to moderate democratic impatience and to safeguard the full range of values that are integral to any social order,” Mahoney writes. The best arguments are won, not by the opponent admitting defeat, but by all seeing the truth. That is the goal of democratic deliberation. To engage in it, conservatives must supplement principle with prudence, and let go of the appeal of perpetual martyrdom.

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Gregory, Brad S. ***The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society***. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. Pp.574.

*Reviewed by Jude Dougherty
The Catholic University of America*

This is a remarkably erudite treatise, in the author’s words, “intended for anyone who wants to understand how Europe and North America came to be as they are.” Three hundred and eight seven pages of text are complemented with another one hundred and eighty-seven pages of notes, including a thirty-two page index. In a Hegelian manner, Brad Gregory finds that every idea is connected to some other, and furthermore that every idea has its own history. No one is likely to deny that ideas have consequences or is likely to deny that what happened centuries ago may profoundly influence the lives we live.

The Unintended Reformation is a profound and timely volume, rewarding for the insight, indeed for the wisdom, the author brings to his material. Recognizing the difficulty of tracing strands of thought with precision, Gregory, in a frontispiece quotes Jacques Maritain to the effect that “It is not easy to disentangle remote causation any more than it is to tell at a river’s mouth which waters come from which glaciers and which tributaries.”

Gregory is convinced that Western modernity continues to be influenced by the Reformation. His thesis begins as such: “On the eve of the Reformation

Latin Christianity had achieved a comprehensive, sacramental world view based on truth claims about God’s actions in history, centered on the Incarnation, life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Intellectual life was vibrant, if sometimes contentious, variously institutionalized not only in universities but also in monasteries, at princely courts, and among participants in the religious Republic of Letters....The failure of medieval Christendom derived not from defensible doctrinal positions but rather from the pervasive, long-standing, and undeniable failure of so many Christians, including members of the clergy both high and low, to live by the Church’s own prescriptions and exhortations based on its truth claims.” In short, Churchmen failed to practice what they preached. As a result, “communities were hampered in their capacity to foster habituation into the virtues on which individual good, the common good, and eternal salvation depended.”

In Gregory’s judgment the Reformation succeeded in the sense that it provided an alternative way of grounding Christian answers to Life Questions and thus provided a basis for living a Christian life, ideologically and socially separate from the Roman Catholic Church. The unintended problem created by the Reformation was the problem of how to know what true Christianity is. Scripture alone was not a solution. An open-ended range of rival truth claims followed exegetical interpretation. Exegetical disagreements were translated into doctrinal disagreements that were in turn expressed in socio-moral division and political contestation. “Having rejected the authority of the Roman Church, Protestants shared no institutions or authorities in common to which they could turn to resolve disputes among themselves.” Throughout the book, Gregory highlights the importance of religious communities in the formation of those virtues without which their can be no civil community.

“Western modernity was forged in the context of the unintended persistence of Christian pluralism and the failure of confessional rulers to achieve their goals.” Once a distinction was made, as occurred in the Dutch Republic of the late 16th century, between public and private life, that is, when the private became separated from the political and economic order,

conflict across confessional lines was relegated to the private sphere. “Dutch Christians preferred prosperity to religious-political hostilities.” A politically protected individual right to freedom of religious belief and practice within the state’s law solved the European problem of confessional coercion, but it also destroyed social cohesion. “A centrally important paradoxical characteristic of modern liberalism is that it does not prescribe what citizens should believe, how they should live, or what they should care about.” Modern liberalism nonetheless depends for social cohesion and political vitality of the regimes it informs on something it did not create, on traditionally shared beliefs, and values. Absent the cohesion provided by tradition, states are forced to become more legalistic and coercive in order to secure stability and security.

Gregory finds that modernity is failing partly because of the naturalistic assumptions of academic life. “Reason alone in modern philosophy has proven no more capable than scripture alone in discerning or devising consensual persuasive answers to Life Questions....There is no shared, substantive common good, nor are there any realistic prospects for devising one.” Given liberalism’s politically protected formal ethics of rights, secularism is impotent when it comes to resolving any of the many contested moral or political issues that emerge in the social order. “Modern philosophies replicate in a rationalist key the unintended, open-ended, apparently irresolvable pluralism of Protestantism.” Gregory finds “nothing remotely resembling agreement or convergence among contemporary philosophies about what is true, what the discipline’s starting point or assumptions ought to be.” Since the 17th century modern philosophy has sought universal, rationally demonstrated truth but has produced instead an open-ended welter of arbitrary truth claims. In short, modern philosophy has failed. Ever expanding technological capacities afforded by scientific advances are set within an increasingly rancorous culture of moral disagreement and rudderless political direction.

The failure of modern philosophy to provide a convincing rational substitute for religion with respect to Life Questions is in part due to the exclusion of alternate religious claims and metaphysical assumptions in the academic world.

“Intellectually sophisticated expressions of religious world views exist today within Western pluralism,” but they have been banished from secular research universities. Theology, the philosophy of religion, and non-skeptical biblical scholarship find no place in the secular academy. One consequence is that “most scholars and scientists are notably lacking in theological sophistication and self awareness of their own metaphysics and beliefs.” Gregory is not optimistic that change is likely in the near future. “Unsecularizing the academy would require, of course, an intellectual openness on the part of scholars and scientists sufficient to end the long standing modern charade in which naturalism has been assumed to be demonstrated, evident, self-evident, ideologically neutral, or something arrived at on the bases of impartial inquiry.”

Anyone interested in how the actual past has made the real present will value this carefully researched and timely volume. The book is a research tool in itself.



Étienne Gilson, *Medieval Essays*. Translated by James C. Colbert. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011, 222 pp.

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

The inimitable verve and prowess of Étienne Gilson, as both historian and philosopher, is in prominent display in this sparkling collection of nine essays brought together by Jean-François Courtine. Reading Gilson is always a delightful experience, and invariably an educational one as well. There is something especially captivating in the frank earnestness of purpose he displays as he goes about exploring, in his typical thoroughgoing manner, whatever subject has commanded his attention. Gilson deserves to be called a scientific historian, in the best sense of the term, for the meticulous and judicious manner in which he gathers his evidence, and then never allows whatever conclusions he might draw to extend beyond the bounds set by that evidence. No one, I think, would contest the claim that he is to be ranked among the foremost scholars of medieval studies of our times. The fact that today medieval studies is

one of the most vibrant of academic fields is in great part due to his work and influence. It will no longer do to succumb to that shallow Renaissance prejudice which dismisses the medieval period as if it were of no consequence. Gilson has taught us that to be ignorant of the Middle Ages is to have but a tenuous understanding of Western civilization itself.

Something to which Gilson habitually gave great stress is the idea that it is not possible rightly to understand medieval Scholastic philosophy, especially with regard to the work of Thomas Aquinas, if one supposes that it can be divorced from theology. To be sure, St. Thomas made brilliant use of philosophy, but always as put to the service of theology, and while I suppose there is no harm in looking upon him as a philosopher, it is well to keep in mind that he steadily regarded himself as first and foremost a theologian. It is precisely to the degree that medieval philosophy is integrated with theology that its originality is most fully revealed. For Gilson, “medieval philosophy owed its fecundity precisely to being a theological instrument” (5). We therefore find that the greater the theologian, the greater the philosopher. Theology invariably came first with these thinkers, and thus we find that, with figures such as Duns Scotus and Aquinas, they did not found their theology upon philosophy; rather, “they used philosophy in the light of faith” (6). Faith, not philosophy, was their standard point of departure. The result was that Scholastic theology ended by creating a new metaphysics, an independent metaphysics, in that it freed itself from dependency on positive science. What bearing does all this have on Scholasticism today? Gilson believed that if Scholasticism was “to return to itself,” the formula for its doing so was quite simple: “*Return to theology!*” (emphasis in text) And Gilson follows that clarion call to action with this arresting assertion: “The true *scholastic philosophers* will always be theologians” (8, emphasis in text).

In discussing the relation between the Middle Ages and Greek and Roman naturalism, Gilson develops the perhaps unexpected thesis that Erasmus, though it is commonly supposed to be otherwise, should not be regarded as an unqualified advocate of what we might call the Renaissance spirit. He did not, for example, show, as did many others, indiscriminate

enthusiasm for Greek thought. Whatever justification there can be for labeling Erasmus a Renaissance man, it would be found in the fact that he showed a generally sour attitude toward the Middle Ages, particularly for the emphasis it gave to philosophy. In this he was of one mind with Luther, however deeply he disagreed with him on other matters, e.g., regarding free will. He shared the one-time Augustinian friar’s disdain for what they dubbed the Hellenism of the Middle Ages. Luther, while attaching appropriate importance to grace, nonetheless developed a flawed doctrine of grace by failing to give due importance to nature. This was a mistake that both St. Augustine and St. Thomas studiously avoided, and from them we have the classic principle that grace works hand in hand with nature.

We typically associate the Renaissance with humanism, and that is fair enough as far as it goes. But, as Gilson points out, the Renaissance did not invent humanism, and the Middle Ages produced its own peculiar brand of the phenomenon, which he identifies as “a humanism of the present.” This humanism stands in marked contrast to the “humanism of the past,” the peculiar brand of humanism to which the Renaissance had dedicated itself. The medieval humanism of the present is specifically exemplified in the focused regard and respect that Scholastic philosophy and theology had for nature, not allowing it to dissolve into the supernatural.

The centerpiece of this collection, in my opinion, is Gilson’s penetrating and thought-provoking essay on the famous “ontological argument” of St. Anselm. Notwithstanding St. Thomas’s judgment of it as failing to do what it purports to do—prove the existence of God—the argument has shown remarkable endurance in the way it has continuously exercised its uncanny influence down through the centuries, and to this day it has its dedicated defenders. Gilson’s comprehensive treatment of the argument raises any number of interesting questions. He takes the position that much of what is vital about the argument is insufficiently appreciated, if not missed altogether, by many of its critics because they bring to their analysis of the argument certain presuppositions that prevent them from seeing and duly appreciating the peculiar presuppositions which had guided St. Anselm himself in the formulation of

his argument. In order properly to understand what the argument is all about, Gilson argues, we must first of all recognize what it is not; it is not a discourse which can be regarded as purely philosophical, nor purely theological, nor can it be rightly interpreted as the expression of mystical experience. Perhaps it could be best described as a faith-inspired venture into epistemology.

It is important to recognize St. Anselm's understanding of truth as necessarily implying *rectitude*, which for him meant that, for any statement to be true, it must be grounded in the object to which it refers. Thus, for any statement about God to be true, it must be grounded in the object to which it refers, God Himself. St. Anselm's notion of God as "a being a greater than which cannot be conceived" is not simply an "idea" of God, as if it were but one concept among many that the human mind could entertain, but rather is simply the expression of a foundational truth, a truth which is nothing other than God Himself. So, Gilson explains, "it is a necessity of thought to affirm the existence of God because in itself the existence of God is necessary" (45). It is not the idea that grounds extra-mental existence, but extra-mental existence grounds the idea. Once one understands what "God" means, His nonexistence is unthinkable; that is, it is an inherently contradictory thought. "What Anselm wants to make us understand," Gilson writes, "is precisely that the necessity of affirming the existence of God is only an imitation, by mode of knowledge, of the intrinsic necessity of the real existence of God" (47). St. Anselm forthrightly admits that his concept of God comes to him through faith, but that fact, Gilson interestingly contends, does not detract from the demonstrative force of the argument.

But let us say that we balk at accepting the argument as being truly demonstrative. Even so, what St. Anselm has given us can be profitably accepted as a "theological explanation" (51) of the existence of God, a prime example of "faith seeking understanding." The argument, we can say, begins in faith and ends in philosophy, and it is a staunch believer who leads us from one realm to the other.

In his detailed examination of the thought of William of Auvergne (c. 1190-1249), particularly as it bears on the concept of existence (his understanding

of which owed much to Alfarabi and Avicenna), Gilson wrestles with the disputed question of whether William held that the distinction between essence and existence was real, and not merely logical—the position later taken by St. Thomas. After closely examining the issue, he concludes in the negative. William regarded essence and existence as separable, that is clear enough, but he would seem to have developed no clear notion of the two as distinct principles existing within, and constituting, in the most foundational of ways, an individual created being. For all that, Gilson does see William, given the general direction of his thought, as paving the way toward St. Thomas's understanding of God as the Being in whom there is no real distinction between essence and existence; God is the one whose essence is simply "to be."

One needs to be only superficially acquainted with the works of Gilson to know that he regarded St. Thomas's most distinguished contribution as a philosopher-theologian to be the clear distinction he drew between essence and existence (*essentia* and *esse*), and the primacy of place he gave to *esse*, and he begins his essay on Moses Maimonides by reminding us of that. Gilson regards Maimonides as the thinker who in a distinct way set "Thomas Aquinas on the royal road of the metaphysics of *esse*, but only St. Thomas traveled it to the end" (126). To be sure, and the multiple applications of that metaphysics are to be found throughout the Angelic Doctor's writings. It is commonly held that one of the distinctive features of the Latin Averroists was their subscribing to the notion of the double truth, an error publically condemned by Bishop Tempier of Paris in 1277. The notion of the double truth held that there are two truths, one for philosophy and one for theology, and that they could be mutually contradictory. Gilson takes up the question whether or not Boethius of Dacia, a philosopher and a member of the arts faculty at Paris, was guilty of harboring this notion. After examining all the pertinent texts, Gilson concludes that there is no firm evidence for supposing this to be the case. Boethius was a philosopher through and through, and took great care to distinguish between knowing something by faith and knowing something through the exercise of natural reason.

The knowledge we have by faith is certain knowledge; the knowledge we gain by natural reason, on the other hand, is not. Because of the limitations of natural reason, on which philosophy entirely depends, it is not for philosophy to pronounce on the truths known by faith. So, for example, it is beyond the competence of philosophy to prove that the world began in time. However, this is not to be interpreted as philosophy's taking it to be false that the world began in time. Philosophy simply cannot make a definitive judgment on the matter, one way or the other. Boethius, deeply influenced as he was by Averroism, argued for the strictest kind of separation between philosophy and theology, and thus adopted an altogether too narrow view of things. If that attitude had succeeded in winning the day, Gilson argues, it is likely that we would not have had the immensely fruitful integration of philosophy with theology which saw its brilliant culmination in St. Thomas.

In "Notes for the History of Efficient Causality," the penultimate essay in the collection, Gilson examines the question of whether there is reason to alter, or attempt to improve upon, Aristotle's famous quartet of causes—i.e., the formal, the material, the efficient, and the final. Specifically, is there warrant for supposing that there is a fifth cause which is to be acknowledged? We might, for example, cite the exemplary cause as a possible candidate. But that wouldn't work, for the exemplary cause is simply a combination of the formal and the final cause, as existing in the mind, say, of an artist. The artist must first form a conception of what he intends to produce before he begins the actual process of production. What then might we say about the efficient cause? The literature would seem to suggest that here we might have the possibility of two quite different causes. It is certainly the case that the efficient cause can be thought of in two distinct ways, as we find in the writings of Albert the Great, who distinguished between an efficient cause which brings about change in being, and, on a much more radical level, an efficient cause that accounts for the very existence of being.

However, upon reflection we see that this does not really give us two clearly different kinds of causes. We are dealing with but one cause here, the efficient

cause, which effects in two quite different ways, as either the “origin of movement,” or the “origin of being.” The only efficient cause that is the origin of being in the most complete and foundational of ways is God the Creator, who causes something to be where antecedently there was nothing. This understanding of efficient cause as “origin of being” has significant application to St. Thomas’s “Second Way” of proving the existence of God, the argument from efficient causality. There is good reason to believe that, in this argument, the efficient cause in question is to be understood, not simply as the ultimate explanation for “origin of movement,” but, more tellingly, as the “origin of being,” the ultimate explanation, not only for modes of existence, but for existence itself. “The first proof, by the motor cause [the argument from motion],” Gilson writes, “stands with the philosophy of Aristotle, etiology and ontology included. The second way, by the efficient cause, presupposes a broadening of the Aristotelian concept of cause that goes beyond the Aristotelian scheme” (177).

The final essay in the collection is dedicated to a discussion of the influence of Avicenna in the West during the medieval period, and we learn that this influence was both extensive and intensive. Avicenna’s thought played “an important role in the formation and development of medieval philosophies and theologies” (184). And, in Gilson’s view, that influence, though certainly affecting the philosophers, affected the theologians even more so; indeed, it was so pervasive among the latter that it even had an effect on their writing style. Of course, Christian theologians could not and did not adopt the thought of a Muslim philosopher at face value, but altered it to suit and best serve their Christian theology. A case in point: Avicenna, following a controversial interpretation of Aristotle’s notion of the agent intellect, saw it, not as an integral part of the human mind, but rather as a separate substance that exercised its abstracting agency for the whole of mankind. The peculiar adaption Christian theologians made of this aspect of Avicenna’s thought was neatly to interpret the Muslim philosopher’s agent intellect as the divine Word, the illuminating source of all human knowledge. Might Avicenna’s understanding of the agent intellect have

some similarities with certain views held by St. Augustine? Gilson writes: “All those for whom the real Aristotle was Avicenna’s Platonist Aristotle were predestined, as it were, to associate him with Augustine’s neo-Platonist Christianity” (194). St. Thomas, for his part, chose to put his trust in the Aristotle of Averroes rather than in the Aristotle of Avicenna. This is not to say that St. Thomas was not appreciably influenced by Avicenna, but, Gilson informs us, that influence steadily diminished over the years. If we would want to know the theologian who was most influenced by Avicenna, it is to John Duns Scotus to whom we should point. Scotus found in Avicenna, of all the philosophers he knew, the one whose thought he regarded as most compatible with his Christian faith.

Étienne Gilson’s *Medieval Essays* is a book that no one who has any interest in medieval philosophy and theology would want to neglect. One comes away from reading it with a renewed respect for Gilson’s wide-ranging erudition, and the wiser for having been exposed to the book’s rich store of stimulating insights. We are indebted to Jean-François Courtine for having given it to us, and to James G. Colbert for his excellent and eminently readable translation.



Harper, William L. *Isaac Newton’s Scientific Method: Turning Data into Evidence about Gravity and Cosmology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. xvii + 424 pp.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty
The Catholic University of America

A classic example illustrative of the nature of the scientific method is found in Isaac Newton’s *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), called one of the most important single works in the history of modern science. We speak of modern physics up to the age of quantum mechanics as Newtonian physics. With Newton we enter the age of Galileo, Kepler, Boyle, Halley, Gassendi, and Leibniz, intellectual giants all. In the seventeenth century physics turned from qualitative analysis to quantitative precision. As William Harper shows, Newton wrestled with the problem of how to relate common new algebraic

analyses of modern approaches with the venerated methods of the ancients. For Newton, large questions begged to be answered. When is a geometrical construct exact? What guarantees the applicability of geometry to mechanics?

In his exposition of Newton’s method, Harper traces the steps by which Newton argued from the phenomenon of orbital motion to centripetal forces and then to universal gravity. This in turn enabled him to calculate the masses of the sun and the planets from orbits about them, and further it led to the decisive resolution of the problem of deciding between the empirical equivalence of the heliocentric and geocentric world systems. Newton concluded that neither is completely accurate because both the sun and the earth are moving relative to the center of the solar system. The sun, he finds, never recedes very far from the center of this mass, thus making it possible to achieve proximate calculations of the complex motion of the planets by successively more accurate models. Newton employed the notion of gravity as a physical cause to explain planetary motion in general, even though he was unable to find the initial cause of orbital motion itself. Having established that all celestial bodies are kept in their orbits by the centripetal forces of gravity, Newton calculated those forces to be the inverse of the square of the distance from their centers.

As the familiar model of scientific investigation would have it, hypotheses are verified by conclusions drawn from them, or put another way, empirical success is determined by and limited to accurate predictions. Newton differs from what has become the positivist understanding of science. In addition to accurate prediction, he held, a theory must attempt to explain, to exhibit a cause for the phenomena in question. A true explanation turns theoretical questions into ones which can be empirically answered by the measurement of relevant phenomena, but more than that, theoretical propositions inferred from phenomena specify their parameters, and, when successful, function provisionally to serve as guides to further research.

Harper distances Newton from the basic hypothetic/deductive model for scientific method that dominated much discussion by philosophers of science in the twentieth century. “Newton’s

method,” he writes, “differs by adding features that go beyond the basic H-D model. One important addition is the richer ideal of empirical success that is realized in Newton’s classic inferences from phenomena. The richer ideal of empirical success requires not just accurate predictions of phenomena, it requires in addition accurate measurement of the parameters by the predicted phenomena.” Harper subsequently defends Newton against some contemporary challenges to his basically Aristotelian realism.

A short review cannot do this profound work justice. In sequentially organized chapters Harper discusses Book Three, Propositions 1 through 13 of Newton’s *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. In a section entitled, “Lessons from Newton’s own Scientific Method,” Harper spells out in detail the inductive insight that led Newton to formulate his laws of motion and their corollaries. The book ends with a postscript, “Measurement and evidence—Newton’s method at work in cosmology today.” Harper cites a work by Robert Kirshner, *The Extravagant Universe*, as evidence that Newton’s method for turning data into evidence still guides cosmology today.



Nye, Mary Jo. ***Michael Polanyi and His Generation: Origins of the Social Construction of Science***. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. xxi +405 pp.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty
The Catholic University of America

This is a chronicle of the scientific achievements of Michael Polanyi, but it is more than that. It is a description of the scientific, political, and cultural landscape of Europe from World War I to the Cold War. Nye follows Polanyi’s life and career from his birth (1891) in Budapest to his death in Manchester at the age of 84 (1976). She documents Polanyi’s many scientific achievements, but the strength of the volume is her description of the scientific communities in which he flourished, first in Budapest, then in Weimar Berlin, and finally in Manchester. Polanyi earned a medical degree in 1913 and a Ph.D. in physical chemistry in 1917 at the University of Budapest. With the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following the

Great War, many Hungarian scientists trained in Budapest found it expedient to leave Hungary. Eugene Wigner, John von Neumann, Leo Szilard, and Edward Teller were among the Hungarian émigrés. Some found refuge in Germany, others in England. Polanyi chose to further his study of physical chemistry at Karlsruhe but in 1920 moved to Berlin to work at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Fiber Chemistry. Berlin of the 1920s was the city of Einstein, Planck, Fritz Haber, Walter Nernst, and Lisa Meitner. Weimar Berlin had become the cultural center of Central and Eastern Europe. Besides the Humboldt University, suburban Dahlem was the site of seven scientific institutes.

The racial policies of the National Socialist Party eventually forced Polanyi to leave Germany. After first declining, Polanyi accepted a chair in chemistry at the University of Manchester in 1933. By 1940 his interests had shifted to economics and social and political philosophy, and he exchanged the chair in chemistry for one in social philosophy. In 1951 he was offered a chair in social philosophy at the University of Chicago, a position that he was unable to accept because he was denied a visa by the U.S. State Department, no doubt because his name was associated with the leftist politics of his brother Karl who had supported the Soviet economic policies of the 1920s and 1930s.

Nye is especially interested in the social nature of science, in the close-knit families of physicists and chemists who comprised the scientific communities of Budapest and Berlin. Polanyi’s views on the nature of science are worthy of a treatise unto itself. Science, he held, is a community of dogmatic traditions and social practices, not a march of revolutionary or skeptical ideas. Polanyi describes his own scientific investigations as ordinary, typical of science, “natural science,” in Thomas Kuhn’s use of the term. “The popular notion of a straightforward relationship between empirical data and scientific discovery or verification is rooted in a misunderstanding of how science really works.” Good evidence is often ignored when a community of opinion favors one opinion over another. He describes as pernicious the simple prescription of nineteenth-century positivism and logical empiricism as naïve. Bertrand Russell is a target for Polanyi. Russell had written, “The triumphs of science are due to the

substitution of observation and inference for authority in intellectual matters. Every attempt to revive authority in intellectual matters is a retrograde step.” “Nothing could be further from the truth,” argues Polanyi, citing his own experience, his career, and authority structures in science.

The scientific community of Weimar Berlin was in a sense detached from the social and political turmoil that was destroying the Republic. In describing the situation, James Crowther, a reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, wrote upon visiting Berlin in 1930: “I was left with the impression the brilliant scientific effervescence . . . had an intellectual life of its own, above that of industry and the people, in spite of the integration of the scientific research with industry. This division of high intellectual life from the rumblings underneath was one of the most striking features of the Weimar Republic.” Polanyi’s mother had a different perspective: “The times in Berlin are beginning to be frightful,” she wrote to a friend in Budapest, “unemployment, privation, and disheveled economic, political and emotional life. One says the worst will come in January, the other in February . . . but that it will come, they all believe” (67).

Nye devotes an entire chapter to the reception of Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge*, a book based on his Gifford Lectures of 1951–52. Of the book, Nye writes, “Polanyi’s realism appealed to many scientists who found his account of scientific life and scientists’ behavior more recognizable than most philosophers’ or historians’ analyses. The religious tone of the realism was also congenial to many scientists. The spiritual dimension of *Personal Knowledge* found favor among Christians, and his discussion of cosmic evolution proved useful to proponents of teleology and intelligent design in arguments against mainstream evolutionary biology.”

With respect to economic theory, Polanyi took the side of von Hayek and von Mises. The economy, he maintained, is not to be used for social engineering. Economic theory based on political preferences is no substitute for natural laws. He agreed with von Hayek that if a depression seems underway, any attempt to cure it by monetary and fiscal policy will likely worsen the situation. A slump in a trade cycle is a sign that the system will head back to equilibrium and should be left alone. Patience must reign during

inevitable periods of unemployment, and an elastic supply of currency makes the situation worse – not better.

No brief review can do justice to this densely packed book. Those interested in Polanyi's insider account of the nature of scientific investigation can be grateful for Mary Jo Nye's painstaking research.



Fantoli, Annibale. *The Case of Galileo: A Closed Question?* Trans George V. Coyne. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 2012. xii + 271 pp.

Reviewed by Jude Dougherty,
The Catholic University of America

The facts are indisputable. Aristarchus of Samos (310-230 B.C.) proposed in ancient Greece a sun-centered system. Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) promulgated his heliocentric theory as early as 1510, although publication of his complete work, *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres*, a mathematical defense of the heliocentric system, had to await 1543, the year of his death. Copernicus showed that all that was required to explain the phenomena in the heavens was to put the sun in the center instead of the earth and attribute motion to the earth, i.e., daily rotation on its axis and orbital motion around the sun. Copernicus calculated that the earth's axis to the plane of its elliptical motion to be 23.5 degrees. His theory had the merit of simplicity, but it seemed to contradict common sense and Sacred Scripture. In a preface to *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres*, the Protestant editor, Andreas Osiander, wrote that Copernicus's theory should be considered a pure mathematical hypothesis and not a physical explanation of the heavens. Johannes Kepler was shortly to do away with the assumption of circular orbits assigned to the planets. Copernicus's book sold 500 copies within a short time but did not undergo a second edition until twenty-three years later.

Enter Galileo (1564-1642). With lenses provide by Kepler, Galileo constructed a crude telescope but adequate enough for Galileo to discover the satellites of the planet Jupiter. With that and other observations the Aristotelian principle of the incorruptibility of the heavens

was shattered. Ptolemaic astronomy was soon to be replaced. Galileo's observations convinced him that Copernicus was right, and he published the results of his observations in his book, *The Starry Messenger* (1610). Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), the most famous of the period's astronomers, could not endorse the Copernican theory except as a hypothetical explanation because it lacked proof. Aristotle's cosmology may have been undermined, but his distinction between demonstrative proof and a hypothetical explanation remained then, as it does today. If one could only measure the parallax of the stars, the heliocentric claim would be settled. Aristarchus thought as much, so did Brahe, and even Galileo sought the proof that eluded him. The Copernican theory remained just that until Friedrich Bessel's successful measurement of stellar parallax in 1838. Beyond doubt, the earth was shown to move against the background of the remote heavens.

Twenty years after *Starry Messenger*, Galileo published *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* in which he hoped to eliminate, in the light of new astronomical findings, commonsense opposition to the Copernican view. The *Dialogue* was at once polemical and pedagogical. Galileo was aware that he could not produce a rigorously valid and decisive proof of the heliocentric view, but he nevertheless held that the preponderance of evidence favored the Copernican system. The book drew the renewed attention to Galileo's claims and renewed opposition in spite of the fact that the *Dialogue* ended somewhat ambiguously with Galileo accused by some of playing to both sides of the debate. The story becomes ever more complicated at this point.

In the "Prologue" to *The Case of Galileo* Fantoli opens his book dramatically with Galileo on February 26, 1616, on his knees, in the presence of Cardinal Bellarmine, swearing that "after having been judicially instructed with injunction by the Holy Office to abandon completely the false opinion that the sun is the center of the world and does not move and the earth is not the center of the world and moves and not to hold, defend or teach these false doctrines in any way whatever, orally or in writing, and after having been notified that this doctrine is contrary to Holy Scripture,

I wrote and published a book in which I treat this already condemned doctrine and adduce very effective reasons in its favor. . . . I abjure, curse and detest the above mentioned heresies." With the publication of *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* Galileo seemed to be going back on his sworn word, and he was brought to trial again in 1633.

How did it come to this? Galileo had not been able to demonstrate the truth of the Copernican system, and, if he had followed the advice of friends and taught the system *ex supposito* as a hypothetical explanation, the trial may not have occurred. On the other hand, if the theologians had not needlessly insisted on a literal interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the matter may not have come to a head. Serious scholars differ on the assessment of blame. Galileo had both friends and enemies. He could cite some support from the Collegio Romano, but the Dominicans remained hostile, not only because they were defending an inherited Ptolemaic/Aristotelian worldview, but in the opinion of one commentator because of some offense or slight on Galileo's part. For a description of the personalities and warring factions involved, Fantoli may well be read in consort with Richard Blackwell's *Behind the Scenes at Galileo's Trial* and Maurice Finocchiaro's *Retrying Galileo*.

In the years after his second trial and condemnation Galileo remained convinced that his downfall had been caused by a plot against him by his enemies. Evidence of a plot may be lacking, but he did have enemies. His sharpest opponent was Christopher Schneiner, an astronomer, who fell out with Galileo twenty years before the second trial over the issues of priority of observations and interpretations with regard to sun spots. Another critic was Melchior Inchofer, S.J., a theologian with no background in astronomy or science, who was in a position to harm him as advisor to the Holy Office.

Without doubt the *l'affaire Galileo*, as Descartes was to call it, is one of the most studied events in the history of Western culture. By Finocchiaro's account, almost sixty books were written about the trial during the period 1633-1651. Add to that the vast numbers of commentaries, countless interpretations and evaluations

that have been advanced by physicists, astronomers, theologians, philosophers, churchmen, historians, and even playwrights over the last four centuries. The trial was seized upon by D'Alembert, Voltaire, and other Enlightenment figures to bash the Church. Domenico Bernini, for one, contributed to the invention and diffusion of myths about the affair when he maliciously asserted that Galileo was held in an Inquisition prison for five years. Voltaire picked up the theme and in either ignorance or hatred wrote that Galileo was thrown into prison and made to fast on bread and water. Of course, Galileo was never imprisoned in any usual sense. When in Rome, his "prison" was the Palace of the Duke of Tuscany, where he was treated as an honored guest; so too when he endured confinement as the guest of the Archbishop of Siena. As to his house arrest, one might envy Galileo, who in his late sixties, was obliged to live out his last years in his country home at Arceti overlooking a beautiful valley outside of Firenze.

In November 1979 at a celebration to commemorate the centennial of Albert Einstein's birth, Pope John Paul II called for a reopening of the Galileo Affair. A Vatican commission was subsequently appointed with a view to the rehabilitation of Galileo. Paul Cardinal Poupard, thirteen years later in 1992, made the formal report of the commission at a meeting of the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences, with John Paul II in attendance. In his own speech after receiving the report, John Paul II seemed to be admitting that Church authorities not only had been in error but also had acted unjustly, something Descartes in his day would not have conceded. As subsequently reported the condemnation of Galileo was itself seemingly condemned. Whatever its intent, John Paul II's speech has not ended the centuries-old controversy. Galileo's rehabilitation has merely started a new episode of Galileo studies. Bellarmine has his defenders even in the secular academy.

One must acknowledge that George Coyne has beautifully rendered into English Annibale Fantoli's original Italian text.



Peter H. Görg, *The Desert Fathers: Anthony and the Beginnings of Monasticism*. Translated by Michael J. Miller. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011. 131 pp. \$16.95.

Reviewed by Anne B. Gardiner
John Jay College, CUNY

This slim book is a beautiful introduction to the origins of monasticism. Peter Görg, assistant professor of systematic theology at the University of Koblenz, finds the source of monastic life in the counsels of perfection, which our Lord directed to those areas of life most afflicted by temptations—ownership, sexuality, and self-determination. Görg calls it one of the great "follies" of the Enlightenment that it played off "contemplation against action," depriving the latter of its "source of power." More than half the book is devoted to the Egyptian hermit St. Anthony, "the bedrock of asceticism," while the last part treats of those who helped monasticism develop and spread from East to West—among them Pachomius, Basil, Martin of Tours, Cassian, Patrick, Columban, and Benedict.

Görg is unabashed about his belief in the supernatural. He notes that his work "sets itself apart" from many others on the subject because he does not deny the factuality of miracles. When he tells how the devil confronted Anthony "with phantasms of sexual allurements," he remarks that while the Church has always "affirmed the existence of Satan and of other fallen angels," some in recent decades have tried to turn these into "mythical figures." Then, when he recounts the miracles Anthony performed, Görg defends the Catholic belief: "To this day the Church requires heavenly confirmation, so to speak, in the form of several miracles that can be attributed to the intercession of the person in question, before she declares that a witness to the faith was a saint. The records of canonization processes . . . testify to the countless confirmed healings." And so, why not "lend credence" to accounts of Anthony's miracles, he asks, when we cannot deny the miraculous events in the lives of Don Bosco, Vincent Pallotti, Padre Pio, or Sharbel Makhluף, the wonder-working monk from Lebanon?" [where does quote begin?] He adds pointedly, "Modern exegetes of Scripture must be blind when

they ignore these testimonies and explain away the miracles of the God-man as parables and legends."

Far from being "the product of pious legends and hearsay," Görg declares, Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* was written and widely disseminated right after the desert father's death in 356. Athanasius drew on his conversations with the holy hermit, provided the names of those he had healed, and often reported the exact places they came from and the illnesses they had. Görg concludes: "The proximity in time between the events and the written account rules out the possibility that these are legends meant to glorify Anthony."

Many great artists have painted the scene where young Anthony was physically attacked by "a host of demons." Nowadays, however, some "disconcerted biographers" suggest that maybe he was attacked only by "highway robbers." Görg replies that "the account by Athanasius, which relies on the firsthand testimony of the Abbot, [is] the unvarnished truth." He rightly parallels the "manifestations of the evil one" in third-century Egypt with those recorded more recently in the lives of the Curé of Ars and St. Pio. Like the Curé, Anthony jeered at the devils not only when they attacked him, but also when they made a hellish din and assumed the forms of wild animals. These torments were a "test" before our Lord found Anthony, at age 35, worthy of "beholding his inexhaustible light," the "light of Tabor."

Görg sees Anthony as still a butterfly in a "cocoon" when, after traveling deeper into the Egyptian desert, he refused to see anyone for almost twenty years. Visitors would come and sometimes grow frightened when they heard demonic noises behind the door. The saint would reassure them, saying, "Just make the sign of the cross and depart in peace. Let them jeer at themselves." He would sing the psalms which remain part of the Church's prayer of exorcism and which Görg says should be recommended to those "beset by psychological distress or spiritual temptations."

When he finally emerged from total solitude, Anthony had "achieved a union with God such as is granted to only a few human beings on earth" and could now heal, drive out demons, admonish, and recruit for the "solitary life." Yet much as he loved the desert, he left it during

Emperor Diocletian's persecution of the Christians to serve those in prisons and mines and about to be executed. Although monks had been expelled by edict from Alexandria, he remained publicly at his post. Only when the persecution ended around 311 did he return to the desert, and then he sought an even greater solitude on Mt. Kolzim. There too visitors would "hear noise, voices, and a great din" and see the saintly hermit "advancing against the infernal powers as though contending with visible opponents."

Anthony once argued with visiting pagan philosophers in the manner of Elijah: he showed them some possessed men, challenged them to call upon their idols, and then called upon Christ, making the sign of the cross three times over the men and driving out the devils. In recounting these exorcisms, Görg counters skeptics by noting that "even in the recent past" the Magisterium has maintained "the real possibility of demonic possession."

Two years before the Arian heresy broke out, Anthony learned of it through visions which left him weeping and trembling. He warned that the Church was "about to be handed over to people who are like irrational animals." Görg compares his prophetic messages to those of John Bosco and the children of Fatima. Soon churches were plundered, sacred vessels were taken away by force, and the "unbloody sacrifice of Christ" was no longer offered upon the "remaining altars." Anthony instructed his disciples thus: "do not defile yourselves with the Arians! For this teaching comes not from the apostles but from the demons and their father the Devil." When some Arians visited him, he told them "their talk was worse than snake venom." In spite of all this, the lie was spread "that Anthony thought just as they did." For this reason, he went to Alexandria and publicly preached that Arianism was the "forerunner of the Antichrist."

By the time he died at age 105, Anthony's fame had spread from his Egyptian hermitage to Spain, Gaul, and Rome. The type of monasticism he established has continued till modern times, as seen in the lives of Nicholas of Flüe and Charles de Foucauld.

Communal monastic life started with another Egyptian, a pagan soldier who converted upon meeting some Christians. Görg comments acidly: "Pachomius was

fortunate that the missionary zeal which is often so suspect to Christians today was still taken for granted by the people whom he asked." At first he learned about the monastic life from a Greek hermit, but he soon founded a monastery and instituted a rule that required poverty, fasting, silence, common prayer, manual labor, and a general chapter. His monks wore cowls, offered the Holy Sacrifice when a brother died, and, for humility's sake, did not seek ordination. By the time he died in 348, there were about 7,000 monks living under his rule.

In the same era, Basil of Caesarea, "Patriarch" of Greek monasticism, founded what is still the "most renowned religious order in the Eastern Church," the Basilians. Born in 329, Basil traveled to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to learn about the monastic life, and on his return gave away his property and founded several monasteries under the rule called "Asketikon." He also strove against Arianism, dying just two years before the heresy was definitively quashed at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

The Latin Fathers Jerome, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine all founded monasteries. Even after becoming a bishop in 396, Augustine continued to live as a monk, urging his clergy also to live in community. In the same era, the basilica monastery arose in Rome—a community of monks placed at the service of a particular church. What made Western monasticism unique was that the aristocracy embraced it and bishops gave it financial support. It soon spread to Gaul, where Martin of Tours established a monastery in 360. His monks had separate cells, lived a communal life, and worked at transcribing books. Shortly after, in another part of Gaul, Honoratus adapted Eastern monasticism to the West and founded an island monastery in Lérins, circa 405. There members of the aristocracy combined asceticism and scholarship, and bishops were again chosen from the ranks of these learned monks.

Meanwhile John Cassian was captivated by Egyptian monasticism, visited Anthony's disciples, and wrote down what he learned from them in the *Institutes of Cenobitic Life*. Thus he brought "the essential doctrines of the Desert Fathers into the Latin-speaking world." Görg mentions our debt to him for the "prayer of quiet," still practiced in the East but

needing to be "brought back again to the West." After studying with John Chrysostom, Cassian was ordained in Rome around 405, founded the monastery of St. Victor, and died not long after composing a treatise against Nestorianism in 430.

Then Patrick, who had once been a captive slave in Ireland for six years, returned there in 432 with two dozen companions and peacefully overcame the opposition of Druids, converting that nation. The unique feature of the Irish Church was its monastic character: each clan had a monastery and these abbots were the "real" ecclesiastical leaders in Ireland. Monasticism also kept an "anchoritic character" there, for many monks sought solitude on the islands off the coast. Next, Columban the Younger, after living most of his life as a monk at Bangor (in Ulster), left for the "mainland" and traveled with twelve companions through Brittany, Gaul, and Burgundy, preaching to the nobility and founding fifty monasteries. He died in 615 after crossing the Alps into northern Italy. Görg comments, "the landed aristocracy in the late sixth century proved to be remarkably receptive to the monastic-ascetical ideal, in which they found a new purpose in life."

Finally, we come to Benedict of Nursia, the father of Western monasticism, whose life was recorded by Pope Gregory the Great. Like the Egyptian desert fathers, Benedict lived at first in a cave in Subiaco, where for three years he endured temptations like Anthony's. He was then elected abbot of a nearby monastery, but when he saw he could not reform the monks there, he retreated to his cave. He later founded twelve monasteries in the area under the rule of the Egyptian monk Pachomius. In 529 he went to Monte Cassino, where he eradicated pagan idolatry, worked miracles, and founded a monastery under his own rule. Two generations later, in 590, Gregory the Great became the first Benedictine Pope.

Görg concludes that Christians are too often ready to settle down in this world. Hermits and monks, however, are a perpetual thorn in their flesh, because these ascetics "deny the self-sufficiency of earthly life" and "prefer a renunciation that can be explained only by the hope of heaven and eternal life." After reading this inspiring book, one can only thank God for holy monks and hope that the spirit

of Anthony, Pachomius, Basil, Cassian, and Benedict will animate Christians to seek out the desert anew and revivify the Church.



Leo J. Elders, S.V.D., *La vie morale selon saint Thomas d'Aquin: Une éthique des vertus*. Paris: Les Presses universitaires de l'IPC: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2011. 335 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Anne Gardiner
John Jay College, CUNY

Father Leo Elders's study of the moral life in St. Thomas Aquinas is based on the *Summa contra gentiles*, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, *Summa theologiae* (I-II, 1-109), and *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. In thirteen chapters, Father Elders examines St. Thomas's thought in the context of what ancient philosophers, early Church fathers, medieval doctors, and modern philosophers have had to say on this topic.

In Chapter I, Father Elders explains how Thomas elaborates an ethic based on our quest for total happiness. More than the exploits of modern science, this quest reveals the grandeur of human nature. The moral life is the way to such happiness, which is defined as the contemplation of the perfection and beauty of the beloved. Father Elders notes his disagreement with the philosophers Germain Grisez and John Finnis, in that the former finds it reductive of our liberty to say that all our actions should be tending to one final end rather than multiple ends, and the latter insists that there is not one ultimate good in the perfect act of our most perfect faculty, i.e. contemplation, but many incommensurable goods. For Thomas, however, there must be *one* last end. To the extent that beings aspire to their proper fulfillment, they direct themselves toward God.

Chapter II is about free choice. In St. Thomas, what carries the morality of an action is free choice, which results from a series of acts of the intellect and will. Choice is the moment when, after the intellect has presented a few possible actions, the will – which desires good in general – stops and chooses one. What makes the will enter into action? The first movement emanates from its own nature:

an intention stands between the simple will for good and the choice. Intention is what brings the intellect to deliberate on ways of attaining a goal, and the will makes a choice. Choice, then, presupposes that the will and the intellect collaborate. In modern thought, choice means independence with regard to laws, rules, and the natural order, but in Thomas, the will is oriented to the good and liberty in act exists in free will because the intellect presents limited goods against the backdrop of good in general.

In Chapter III Father Elders starts by discussing the criteria of morality in Kant, Mill, Dewey, Freud, Sartre, and Ayer, as well as in philosophers of Greek antiquity. Thomas himself distinguishes four levels in his ethic: the speculative intellect which elaborates laws of moral conduct; the practical intellect which tells us how to act in the concrete; the choices which proceed from these two intellectual acts; and the actions that follow from our choices. Norms of conduct are deduced from human nature, including its social dimension. Our nature directs us toward life, health, knowledge, family, and society – goods that surpass the level of biology and enter the moral domain when the will approves and chooses them.

An important question today is whether the principles of the moral life, as grasped by the practical intellect, have a basis in the ontological structure of our being. Must we with David Hume reject the connection between “is” and “ought”? According to Finnis and Grisez, there would be in us an intuitive apprehension of several fundamental goods without rapport to nature. Where Thomas speaks of the fundamental inclination to preserve one's life, Finnis speaks of the fundamental good of human life. As Ralph McInerney observes, it is unreasonable to speak of a natural law without founding its precepts on nature. For Grisez, the first principle of practical reason is pre-moral, while Finnis speaks of intermediary and autonomous principles, like modes of responsibility.

In Chapter IV we learn that the longest treatise in the *Summa* is the one on the passions, with twenty-seven questions. For Thomas the passions are dynamic forces for self-protection, sources of energy, and an integral part of the rational soul, since the journey toward God concerns man in his totality. Passions have onto-

logical goodness, but their moral value is neutral until the will consents to them.

Chapter V is a consideration of the concupiscible and irascible passions. We learn, among many other things, that there can be an enjoyment against nature when deviations on the plane of reason are acted out in the psycho-physical life of the body, forming a “second nature.” Then enjoyment, though contrary to nature in general, becomes “natural” by accident, as with some homosexuals. In Thomas, enjoyment is no proof that the will has chosen something good.

In Chapter VI we learn about habits, which can collaborate in leading up to virtuous choices and help us act with facility and pleasure. It is a “fundamental point” in ethics that habits are like a “second nature.” Since our appetitive powers can oppose orders from the intellect and violent passions prevent the intellect from making correct judgments, we need virtuous habits to help us follow right reason. Although the body can have natural dispositions to some virtues, only by repeated actions are moral virtues acquired under the influence of the intellect. For Thomas, the virtuous act is more important than the virtuous habit, which is not situated at the level of action. In their essence, virtues have no limits and can be intensified by repeated acts, and acquired virtues can help us understand the infused virtues essential to supernatural life. Father Elders notes that in the twentieth century, Alasdair MacIntyre, Joseph Pieper, and Servais Pinckaers placed new emphasis on the importance of virtues in the moral life.

Virtues are not equal: wisdom is the greatest of the intellectual virtues because God is its object. Though imperfect, the knowledge that wisdom provides has more value than everything else we can know. Among the cardinal virtues, prudence is superior to the other three because it comes entirely from reason, while the three moral virtues are applications of what reason determines. Likewise, justice is superior to courage, and courage to temperance.

In an appendix to Chapter VI, Father Elders writes about Hans Jonas, a Marxist who argued that our sense of duty does not have its source in reason but in the object which awakens a sense of responsibility, such as the biosphere. By contrast, the social doctrine of the Church flows

from principles inherent in us by natural law.

Chapter VII deals with the moral evil found in human acts freely chosen but deprived of conformity with right reason. Sin occurs when we direct ourselves in a disordered way toward limited goods that promise pleasure. The objects of sins are not coherent and sometimes make us go in different directions.

Since the intellect knows two categories of action – knowledge of truth and the direction of the other faculties – it can sin both ways, by culpable negligence and by directing the other powers to act in a disordered way or failing to prevent their bad actions. In ten questions on the causes of sin, Thomas shows that nothing exterior can act on our free will to cause sin, not even Satan: only free will is a sufficient cause. The sensitive appetite, however, can cause the will to lose vigor and concentration and impede reason from making a correct judgment. In addition, the will can lose force by lethargy, drunkenness, or violent anger. Yet when we freely allow passion to overwhelm us so that liberty disappears, we are responsible. Thomas observes that the mass of sin in history is the sign of a perturbation in the order of things – original sin, the first cause of later sins.

Chapter VIII is on eternal law, natural law, and positive law. Father Elders calls the treatise on laws “the central metaphysic” of Thomas’s ethics. This is where the Angelic Doctor proposes his celebrated doctrine of natural law, which is a “new synthesis of unequalled clarity.” Eternal law is the first and most fundamental law, the plan of divine wisdom by which God directs all activities in the world, and the transcendent foundation of all norms of morality. All law is derived from and is an application of eternal law.

In man, natural law consists of the first principles of the practical intellect which formulates these principles from our fundamental inclinations. This is “very important,” Father Elders says, for it means the order that man must observe is founded on human nature, so we have ontological order as the ground of ethics. All men have in common these first principles, which need to be clarified by more detailed rules. Natural law is the basis and condition for the validity of positive laws. If positive laws deviate from natural law, they are no longer true laws.

Thomas’s treatise on natural law is “one of the summits” of the *Summa* for its “importance, clarity, and depth of argument.” Thomas puts the accent on the ontological, natural, permanent order on which natural law is founded. Historicists, positivists, and existentialists reject the existence of immutable norms founded on human nature, but for Thomas, natural law is a participation of human reason in eternal law and its principle is given with human nature.

Natural law relates to all the moral obligations we can deduce from these principles. Yet it is not our natural inclinations which are the natural law, but rather the obligations that flow from them, as formulated by reason in view of the end of human life. Karl Rahner admits that natural law flows from human nature but thinks its prescriptions remain general, hence the need for an existentialist approach. Father Elders counters that the intellect sees concrete actions as contained in the general rule.

Hume opposed the doctrine that deduces moral obligations from ontological structures and, ever since, utilitarian theories on natural law have dominated the Anglo-Saxon world. Some Christian philosophers have tried to save the morality of the commandments while rejecting its base in the natural inclinations, but in doing so, they have remained tributaries of Hume. Finnis refuses to find support for the commandments in human nature. He distinguishes between several basic goods which contribute to make man more perfect, so that the acts ordained to these goods become morally good, leading to human fulfillment and flowering. There where Thomas distinguishes a fundamental inclination to preserve life proper, Finnis sees the fundamental good of human life. Yet it is difficult to establish a relation between the goods he mentions and the moral life. It is possible today that many people in the West no longer think of procreation as being a fundamental good that contributes to their fulfillment. While Finnis contends that it is impossible to deduce a commandment like “Do not lie” from a natural inclination, Father Elders responds that living in society requires that we speak the truth, that the natural function of language is to express what we think, and that to lie disturbs the natural order.

The common good comprehends the

sum of institutions, laws, and material goods necessary for life and also consists in the collaboration of individuals for the well-being of all. Locke, however, elaborated a theory of the individual as detached from society and able to acquire wealth without worrying about others, and Maritain made the person an autonomous subject endowed with rights anterior to society. Thomas takes man situated in the natural order as his starting point and he sees man as having a social nature and as destined to a community life ordained to the perfection of its members.

Chapters IX to XII deal with the cardinal virtues in detail. In an appendix to the chapter on justice, Father Elders discusses Thomas’s view of the just war and violent revolution against tyranny. In the chapter on temperance, we learn, among other things, that Thomas views cohabitation as contrary to nature because the stable union of marriage is founded in natural law. As for deviant sexual relations such as zoophilia and homosexuality, Thomas calls these grave faults. Father Elders comments that we are told today that the tendency to homosexuality is in the nature of a person, but man is a unity that excludes a divergence between the proper self and the body; he must act in conformity with the fundamental structures of his being.

The final chapter is on love and friendship in Thomas. For the Angelic Doctor, the love that follows right reason is in all the virtues, while disordered love is in all the vices. Friendship is necessary, and perfect friendship, such as is found only among the virtuous, is the crown of a good life and part of the true happiness possible on earth.

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James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. 607 pp.

Reviewed by Duane L. C.M. Galles, JD, JCD, PhD

This wonderful book will no doubt delight many *FCS Quarterly* readers. The author has made research in the history of medieval canon

law his *Hauptfach* for half a century while teaching at Fordham (where he took his doctorate), the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the University of Kansas, and the book represents a synthesis of his (and a bevy of other scholars') life's work.

While a work of fine and impressive scholarship, it remains a very readable book filled with dashes of the author's dry wit. The footnotes are actually footnotes, not endnotes, and so they can be read with ease, and those who read Latin will find Professor Brundage's translations often as enjoyable as the text. They will also read some of the earthiness of which medieval lawyers were capable. The sixty-five-page bibliography at the end of the book is nearly a monograph in itself, and it is a most valuable part of the work.

We all, of course, stand on the shoulders of those who went before us, but the last half-century has been an amazingly fruitful period for research into medieval legal history. Doubtless the explosion of university populations since World War II is part of the story, sending thousands of graduate students scurrying for esoteric and erudite research topics as yet uncovered. At the same time I expect Europe's quest for integration with the establishment of the Council of Europe, the European Human Rights Convention and Court, the European Communities, and finally the European Union and the launching of the Euro have fascinated contemporaries and sparked an interest in and perhaps nostalgia for the *ius commune* that had its rise in the twelfth century.

It was then that there occurred the revival of Roman law after the discovery in Pisa of the *Littera florentina*, an ancient copy of Justinian's sixth-century *Digest of Roman Law*, and its subsequent study by the four great doctors of civil law at Bologna. About the same time came Gratian's *Concordance of Discordant Canons* and the birth of canon law as a discipline distinct from theology. The two laws, given the medieval dyarchy of church and state, together were called the *ius commune*, and they held sway as the general and learned law of western Christendom until the rise of nationalism and national codifications about the time of the French Revolution. Granted there was local law—usually customary law, like English Common Law—but wherever this law needed supplementing, lawyers and rulers looked to Roman law and

canon law. It was because these bodies of law were common to western Christendom that they were known as the *ius commune* or the common law of Europe. Today, as the European Court tries to fashion out of the Treaties of Rome and Maastricht and general principles of law a new European common law, many Europeans have developed a bit of nostalgia for the days when that continent enjoyed a *ius commune*, and I expect this is part of the attraction for the study of medieval canon and civil law.

The teachers and practitioners of both learned laws were then known as *doctores utriusque juris*, and some Central European universities to this day grant the degree of *iuris utriusque doctor*.

England in large part resisted the adoption of Roman and canon law. Nevertheless, large parts of Roman law are to be found in English admiralty law and the law merchant, and, since the Lord Chancellor, who presided over the Court of Chancery or equity, was, until the time of Sir Thomas More, generally an ecclesiastic, equity jurisprudence bears the impress of canon and civil law. The language of equity procedure clearly bears the impress of its Roman law past. The introductory pleading in equity was a bill of particulars, derived from the *libellus* of canon and civil law procedure. While at Common Law a judge will give "orders" and "judgments," the chancellor or equity judge will issue "interlocutory decrees" and "decrees," which might be "dissolved," and not "vacated" as at Common Law. Family and probate law in England were under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts until the mid-nineteenth century, and so these branches of the Common Law still use this same civil law language and so reflect their canon and civil law heritage. This heritage is also reflected in the substantive law of these branches of the law.¹

Until the eighteenth century, Roman and canon law were the only bodies of law taught at the English universities at Oxford and Cambridge, with the teaching of canon law ceasing in 1546 when royal injunctions that year halted its teaching. This fact is reflected in the law degrees conferred today in England and still survives as relic of bygone days. At Cambridge (and most other English and Commonwealth universities) the first degree in law is the LLB, the *legum baccalari-*

us or bachelor of laws degree. The "laws" referred to here are those traditionally taught at English universities (until the Reformation), i.e., Roman law and canon law. One is always therefore amused when English lawyers sniff at the American *juris doctor* (JD) degree and insist that the LLB is the "proper" law degree for Common Lawyers, when in fact in origin it was a degree in Roman (and until 1546 canon) law. Oxford was more up-to-date than Cambridge, and so it noted in its law degree the demise in 1546 of canon law teaching in England. Oxford's law degree is the BCL or bachelor of civil (Roman) law. The law school at William and Mary College in Virginia dates to the eighteenth century, and it long followed the practice of Oxford, and so, until the advent of the JD degree about 1970, its law degree was the BCL, another degree in Roman law conferred on students of the Common Law.

In his 500 pages of text Professor Brundage tells the story of the rise and development of the lawyers who gave birth to this *ius commune*. They were not just members of a profession. Even in that Age of Faith, when theology was still the Queen of Sciences, law was the most studied subject at medieval universities. At Avignon in 1394, just two decades after the seat of the papacy had returned from there to Rome, law students numbered 1,134 out of a student body of 1,373, making them 83 percent of the student body! And while the popes had forbidden the study of law at the University of Paris, 39 percent of all known university students in northern France were law students. Even at Cambridge, in a country where the Common Law held its own against the *ius commune* (and so presumably reduced the attraction of the study of Roman and canon law), civil and canon law students accounted for one-third to two-fifths of the student body there (268). Some measure of the premium placed on a law degree in the Middle Ages can be garnered from the fees required at Cambridge before a student might incept or begin giving introductory lectures and put himself on the road to a doctorate. Inception carried with it the style of bachelor. At Cambridge the fee to incept for a bachelor of theology was twenty shillings. By contrast, that for a bachelor of civil law was twenty-six shillings and eight pence, or one third

more. The fee for inception as a bachelor of canon law was forty shillings or twice the fee to incept in theology (259). Lay canon law students today (in the U.S. at least) must be most wistful as they read in Dr. Brundage's pages the relative worth of a medieval canon law degree over a civil law one!

Medieval lawyers it seems were well paid. Indeed, medieval lawyers pro-pounded pithy and assonant slogans to convince the world that they were worthy of their hire. They chanted *doctoribus [legum] bona dona danda sunt*: lawyers are worthy of goodly fees. And for them with money came also social prominence. Medieval lawyers saw themselves as the social equals of the knightly class, and, in the tradition of the Roman law first elaborated by the *collegium pontificum*, they argued that their function of justice was priestly. Perhaps in their own graduation ceremony, which involved the delivery of a law book, a ring, and a doctoral biretta (later of four *cornua* or horns rather than the clerical three), the doctors of civil and canon law saw an analogy to the miter, ring, and Book of the Gospels given to a bishop at his episcopal consecration.

Being professionals, medieval lawyers had developed a sense of professional ethics. Contingent fees then, as in most of Europe today, were forbidden and considered evil and a matter for confession (331). It was also considered unethical for one party to a lawsuit to hire all or most of the experienced advocates, with a view to denying one's opponent the availability of counsel (33). Some canon law clients today will no doubt be surprised to know that lawyers coming on the heels of the so-called Dark Ages were held to a higher ethical standard in this matter than some contemporary bishops who, without compunction, have been known to employ this stratagem and hire most available English-speaking canonists to leave their foes without suitable counsel!

At the same time, while ethicists, medieval lawyers were also realists. They realized that the practice of law was not merely brilliant courtroom forensics of the Perry Mason kind. Like Pliny, they knew by experience that the business of law "is more fatiguing than pleasant." Nor were they any more well liked than lawyers today. If they gave the Devil his due and defended unpopular clients, they were charged in the popular mind,

like modern lawyers, with defending, and so cooperating with, evil. In classical times they had been called "vultures in a toga" and the people of the Middle Ages echoed this term of opprobrium.

Financing one's study of the law is often a matter of some difficulty. Today the Canon Law Society of America has striven mightily to provide a handful of scholarships for canon law students. In the Middle Ages, given the attractiveness of legal studies, other and less idealistic methods for financing legal studies were resorted to. One method was to take minor orders, receive first tonsure, and so become a cleric and accept appointment to a rich benefice. One then acquired a dispensation from residence in order to pursue one's studies and paid another cleric a modest fee to undertake the actual duties of the care of souls at the church to which the benefice was attached, and then used the difference to finance one's studies. If one had good connections, one could obtain another dispensation and acquire a further benefice or benefices and become a pluralist as well as a non-resident. In time for the best of motives—to finance university education—pluralism and non-residence became serious abuses in the medieval church, and Trent would spend much time and ink writing decrees of reform to extirpate such abuses. At the same time one wonders what reformers must have thought of the "realism" of such medieval lawyers who set in train such abuses. They (and those today who advocate ethical investment practices) may also have wondered at the ethics of their medieval forebears, upon learning that the well-funded chair of canon law at Padua was funded by the profits of the municipal brothel there (244).

The Pollyannas of our own day sometimes rush to judgment and dark thoughts and compass intemperate acts when faced with failure to act and when they see even sin in high places. Medieval canonists may have had a more profound appreciation of the reality of original sin and its effects. For solace, when faced with such evil, they had a maxim, *Perfectius est non quid Romae fiat sed quid Romae fieri debeat considerare*: take account not what is done in Rome but rather what ought to be done in Rome (196). Even after half a millennium there is still much wisdom to be learned from medieval lawyers, and we may thank Dr. Brundage

for appropriating much of it for us in the wonderful book.

Endnotes

- 1 Duane L.C.M. Gales, "The Civil Law," *The Jurist* 49 (1990): 241-48.



Milton Walsh, *In Memory of Me: A Meditation on the Roman Canon*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Stephen J. Kovacs, Graduate Student of Sacred Theology at the Graduate School of Theology, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary (Overbrook, PA) and Graduate Student of Philosophy through Holy Apostles College and Seminary (Cromwell, CT).

The implementation of the revised English translation of the Roman Missal has afforded English-speaking Catholics a timely occasion to grow in their devotion and understanding of the sacred mysteries they meet in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In conjunction with the new translation, Ignatius Press has released a book by Milton Walsh entitled *In Memory of Me: A Meditation on the Roman Canon*. Walsh, who obtained a doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Gregorian University, taught theology for many years at St. Patrick's Seminary (Menlo Park, CA) and served as the pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco. He has previously written two books published by Ignatius Press. As the title of his latest book conveys, Walsh provides a spiritual reflection on the very heart of the Mass—the Roman Canon (also known as the First Eucharistic Prayer)—where earthly worship meets heavenly worship. The Roman Canon, which for much of the Church's life was the only Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman Rite, stands largely unchanged from the time of its initial development in the Patristic era. Walsh calls the Roman Canon "A Setting for the Pearl of Great Price," for within its prayers is to be found the words of the institution of the Eucharist, when the bread and wine offered truly, really, and substantially become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. For this reason, the Roman Canon is perhaps the most fitting of all the prayers of the Mass upon which to meditate.

In his foreword, the Most Reverend J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P., Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, reminds the reader that the Roman Missal, like Sacred Scripture, is a “wellspring of inspiration,” and ought to be the object of deep meditation. In addition to DiNoia’s foreword, there is a preface and an introduction, both of which provide important background before beginning the meditations. Of particular importance is the initial examination of the recurring themes of thanksgiving, sacrifice, and intercession that form the backbone of the Roman Canon, as well as the discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in our worship.

Although the Roman Canon, like the Mass itself, is truly one prayer, it is composed of several distinct prayers that are each marked by a number in the Missal. Walsh adopts this format by writing a chapter for each prayer of the Roman Canon, including at the beginning the assigned number from the Missal, the new English translation of the prayer, and the original Latin form of the prayer. The meditations in each chapter follow along with the recurring themes of the Roman Canon; however, each chapter can stand on its own for the profound insights provided, usually centering on one or more particular theme(s) unique to the prayer for each chapter, such as ecclesiology, soteriology, Mariology, etc. At the end of the book is an appendix which includes an examination of the lives of the saints and martyrs whose names are invoked within the Roman Canon, as well as the history of how they came to be added to the Prayer.

Walsh’s meditations are intensely scriptural, and he demonstrates the seamlessness of Sacred Scripture by drawing liberally but effectively from both the Old and New Testaments. When appropriate, he also presents teachings from liturgical theology to better express the reality of what is before us in these prayers, and examines some prayers line-by-line and even word-by-word. All of the scholarship Walsh employs is done with the primary aim of drawing out the spiritual riches to be had, which is the ultimate goal of any proper theological undertaking. He also makes clear that the Mass, with the Eucharist as its soul, is not a mere recollection of Christ or His deeds but an actual means of entering into the Christian

mysteries. Because it is a meditation on the Eucharistic Prayer, the spirituality of the book is thoroughly Eucharistic. Such spirituality embraces the fullness of our Faith, for the Eucharist, as Walsh points out, contains the entire economy of salvation and by nature looks forward to the eternal heavenly banquet.

In Memory of Me can be of great value to a diverse group of Catholics. Priests could perhaps benefit the most by it, for they are the ones who pray the Roman Canon as the celebrant of the Mass and who minister the Eucharist. Though the book is broadly accessible in many ways, it is rich enough in theology and spirituality to surely provide even the best formed priest with new and valuable insights for reflection. Likewise, religious, theologians, catechists, and others who already have a vast knowledge of liturgy and Catholic theology, as well as a deep spiritual life, still have much to gain from reading this book. The general laity can also benefit; yet some prior foundation in liturgy and the basics of Catholic theology would be indispensable. This book has much appeal and is written well, but it is not for the totally uninitiated. Many Catholics newly confronted with a major change in the liturgy may want to read books about the Mass to learn more about what takes place there, but because the average Catholic unfortunately tends to be poorly catechized, this book may be more than many could really appreciate. Other fine books are available and could greatly assist those who want to learn more about the Mass or the Eucharist, but don’t have the necessary foundation to start out with Walsh’s book.

While Walsh’s principle aim is to provide individuals with a meditation on the Roman Canon to nourish their own spiritual life, his book has the potential to be of further value within the Church. Walsh laments the fact that the Roman Canon is not used more often in the ordinary celebration of the Mass, but is instead commonly replaced by one of the other Eucharistic Prayers that are alternative options in the Roman Missal. While he does not engage in a comparison between the Roman Canon and the other Eucharistic Prayers, his reflections speak for themselves to show the richness and beauty of the Roman Canon, as well as the richness and beauty of the new translation. This book could in fact help to “rehabilitate”

the Roman Canon and see its usage more common once again. The revised translation of the Roman Missal is a major step in the process of liturgical renewal, which is a central task in the pontificate of our current Holy Father. Pope Benedict XVI has continually stressed the need for personal, interior renewal, almost as a prerequisite to any lasting and authentic liturgical renewal. Walsh’s book can do much in the way of better forming Catholics in the spiritual dimension of the Sacred Liturgy so that true liturgical renewal can be possible. The emphasis he places throughout the book on the sacrificial character of the Mass can also help make this central reality of the Mass—which often gets downplayed, to the detriment of how the Church worships—more present to our minds.

With the new English translation of the Roman Missal still a recent development in the life of the Church, *In Memory of Me* is a timely and rich meditation on the ancient prayer of the Roman Canon—the heart of the Mass. It offers much theological insight for spiritual reflection centered on the mystery of the Eucharist that can benefit countless Catholics for an ongoing renewal and growth in their life of faith in the sacred mysteries of Christ, ever ancient, ever new.



Peter Bristow, *Christian Ethics and the Human Person: Truth and Relativism in Contemporary Moral Theology*. Oxford: Family Publications, 2009. 384 pp. £18.95.

Reviewed by Catherine Peters

Catherine Peters is completing a philosophy degree at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI, and will begin graduate studies in the fall.

Fr. Peter Bristow, professor of ethics at the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham, England, “proposes to fulfill the contemporary need for an explanation of Catholic ethics as it has been renewed in the second half of the twentieth century . . . and the theology which gave rise to it” (5). In *Christian Ethics and the Human Person*, Bristow presents Catholic teaching on moral issues and analyzes several

significant moral controversies of our day. Drawing frequently on John Paul II's personalism, Bristow nevertheless notes that his is not a study "of personalism as such, but rather of Christian ethics in general with particular reference to the progress and problems of the last half-century" (8).

This work is divided into four parts. In part I (chapters 1–6) Bristow presents fundamental principles of Christian ethics and begins with an overview of developments following Vatican II (chapter 1). The rationality of Christian ethics is then also summarized with particular regard for the importance of practical virtues in living an ethical life and the necessity of uniting ethics with lived experience (chapter 2). Christian anthropology is presented next as the basis for ethics in contrast to dualistic conceptions of man which attack the hylomorphic unity of man (chapter 3). Bristow examines contemporary personalism next, with an emphasis on the work of *Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (chapter 4). The chapter on Natural Law (chapter 5) successfully conveys the immutable connection between natural law and human nature, which in turn leads to a discussion of freedom, autonomy, and truth (chapter 6). Bristow emphasizes the importance of understanding freedom positively as an opportunity to choose the good, not merely as independence from impositions.

Though this first part includes references to numerous influential thinkers (for example Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, and Mill), Bristow provides his readers with little, sometimes no, introduction to them. For example, Bristow points out the importance of the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative on the "personalist principle" of Karol Wojtyła on page 37, but then waits to explain what this formulation is until page 82 (and even then, the explanation is brief). Indeed, Bristow waits until page 67 to present even a summary of Kant's deontology; an unnerving delay.

In part II (chapters 7 and 8) Bristow scrutinizes several objections to Catholic ethical teachings (namely revisionism, proportionalism, and the "fundamental option"). I found this to be one of Bristow's most intriguing discussions, and his presentation of these contemporary objections, though complex, awakens within the reader a desire to rise and defend the

teachings of the Church. In particular, he shows the inability of consequentialism to ground absolute moral norms because of its never-ending calculations of effects. In the beginning of this work, Bristow reminds his reader that "the moral teaching of Christianity has a compelling attractiveness" (7) and here he presents the teachings of the Church as precisely that: attractive and satisfyingly rational answers to modern moral dilemmas.

In part III (chapters 9 and 10) the reader receives a clear explanation of the biblical foundations of Christian ethics and comes to a better appreciation of the importance of virtue in living a moral life. Bristow's hearkening to Sacred Scripture is particularly appropriate to his presentation of ethics because, as John Paul II explained, Scripture allows "a vision of the human being and the world which has exceptional philosophical density" (*Fides et ratio*, 80). Bristow's discussion of *The Sermon on the Mount* shows the biblical foundation for moral theology and virtue ethics and emphasizes that "living of the virtues makes us blessed, or happy" (262).

In part IV (chapters 11–14) Bristow considers John Paul II's "theology of the body" discourses and then addresses modern issues of gender, feminism, and marriage. In the final chapter, Bristow applies some of the ethical principles he has developed to the "test case" of *Humanae vitae* where he continues to emphasize the importance of viewing sexuality as not merely biological or physical, but personal, and involving one in his or her entirety.

I am concerned that Bristow's work, though orthodox and often engaging, is unevenly presented. In the first two parts (on fundamental issues in ethics and certain modern controversies), Bristow employs concepts that require considerable background in ethical theory and metaphysics, but he waits until the last two parts (on biblical ethics and modern ethical questions) to explain concepts that were earlier assumed. This awkward delay presents the reader with difficulties that could easily be surmounted through earlier elaboration.

If this work is meant to educate those unschooled in orthodox moral theory and practice, then more accessible explanations and introductions are required throughout (though especially in the first section). If, on the other hand, Bristow

intends to reach a scholarly audience, one which expects a "deeper understanding and presentation" of moral issues (362), then more citations supporting his assertions would be appropriate. That being said, references to Thomas Aquinas and John Paul II are ample and help the reader to delve more deeply into contemporary ethical thought.

Bristow's strengths as a teacher shine in parts III and IV when he guides the reader through the material so that even neophytes to the formal study of ethics can follow him; indeed, these sections make his reader wish that the first two parts had been written equally clearly. Bristow's treatment of virtue (255–262) is particularly rewarding. Not only is it grounded in a classical understanding of virtue (such as Aristotle's notion of virtue as a habit and mean) and enhanced by the work of Thomas Aquinas (to include man's ultimate end), it is also presented as a harmonious union of philosophical principles and Scriptural revelation. Bristow's discussion of gender in chapter 12 is also a highlight and successfully presents the merits and shortcomings of feminist movements. That is, Bristow commends the authentic feminism which defends the complementary nature of gender while reprimanding modern perversions of feminism which tend to foment strife between the sexes.

Notwithstanding my concerns about presentation, Bristow succeeds in whetting the appetite of readers to learn more about the moral teachings of the Church. He does a solid job of underscoring several key themes throughout (for example, the inadequacy of dualist anthropologies and the proper meaning of freedom) that reminds the reader of the coherence and consistency of the Church's ethical heritage. In short, Peter Bristow's *Christian Ethics and the Human Person* is a valuable contribution to the continuing renewal of moral theology. He has faithfully responded to the call of John Paul II for a Christian moral and ethical teaching capable of satisfying "the rightful claims of human reason in a way which accepts the valid elements present in certain currents of contemporary moral theology without compromising the Church's heritage of moral teaching" (*Veritatis splendor*, 37).

✠

BOOKS RECEIVED

If you would like to receive one of these books to review for the Quarterly, please email Alice Osberger—osberger.1@nd.edu

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

Words of Wisdom, John W. Carlson, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, (2012), paperback, 368 pp.

Reading the Cosmos: Nature, Science, and Wisdom, edited by Giuseppe Butera. (2011). Washington, D. Distributed by the Catholic University of America Press for the American Maritain Association, paperback, 259 pp.

The Nuptial Mind. Lloyd E. Sandelands, Lanham, MD: University Press of America (2012), hardcover, 110 pp.

Preach the Word: Homilies on the Sundays and Feasts of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. Kenneth Baker, S.J. Alba House: St. Paul's, (2010), paperback, 210 pp.

An Introduction to Foundational Logic. D. Q. McNerny, Elmhurst Township, PA: The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, (2012), hardcover, 420 pp.

NOTICES

SPEAKERS FUND

This past year the Fellowship was able to match an anonymous challenge grant of \$10,000 for the development of a special fund to support the travel and lodging expenses of the speakers at our annual conventions. So, I am happy to report that we now have some \$20,000 in this fund. Needless to say, such a fund could be easily exhausted, and so we need to continue to build it up. I am happy to report that one of our previous beneficiaries who wishes to remain anonymous recently sent me another check for \$1000.00. We are deeply grateful for that donation and yet we need to keep holding out our hat for this cause.

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

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

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Msgr. Eugene Clark died on April 11, 2012.



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*Regular members of the Fellowship are those who (a) have an earned doctorate or the equivalent thereof, (b) regularly engage in scholarly work, as evidenced by scholarly publication or in some other suitable manner; and (c) intend to be actively involved in the organization, operation, or administration of the Fellowship and in the pursuit of its purposes and goals. Those who wish to belong to the Fellowship but do not meet these qualifications will normally be considered Associate members, until otherwise classified as Regular members by the Board of Directors. Only regular members shall have voting rights.

In order to submit an application for membership please go to catholicscholars.org

At the FCS convention in Washington, Sept. 28-30, 2012 we will offer a new feature. Alongside the usual presentations to the full assembly, there will be opportunities for small group presentations and discussions in various specialties. The basic purpose of this innovation is to encourage dialogue among younger scholars in their areas of specialization with the assistance of more established scholars.

Scholars are encouraged to submit papers to the conveners of each group (listed below), and the convener will make choices about those to be presented for discussion at the conference. All are welcome to submit papers, but there will be a preferential option for new scholars. The papers chosen will be subject to charitable criticism, and we hope that these discussions will open the way to further conversations and to the sort of improvements that will help secure their future publication in some appropriate venue. Perhaps members may also discover common topics of interest, which may help the Church in various areas of her mission and upon which they might work together.

This is the foreseen organization of the groups. At the present time we have arranged for moderators, all acknowledged scholars, to lead groups in the fields of literature, philosophy, theology, morals and ethics, history, political science, law, and canon law. If other FCS members wish to start similar groups for other specializations, they are encouraged to do so for future conventions. Similarly some of these groups may wish to divide into subsections so as to deal with narrow specializations: e.g., literature into English, American, and French literature, theology into patristics, dogma, fundamental, etc. That depends upon the interest shown in the next convention and thereafter.

Each group will be moderated by a proven scholar who will read proposed papers and select two or three of the best and most interesting papers for actual discussion at the September meeting. Those papers will be posted ahead of time on the FCS

website with member-restricted access. At the conference session the authors of the chosen papers will make a brief (ten-minute) synopsis of their papers. Then the discussion under the direction of the moderator will commence. It is expected that the FCS members attending the small group discussions as auditors and critics will have read the full paper on the website beforehand. Two or three presentations can be offered, depending on the time allotted by the convention organizers for the discussions.

The deadline for the submission of papers to the moderator is August 1, 2012. By September 1 the chosen papers should be available on the website. The editor of the FCS Proceedings is open to the possibility of publishing in the Proceedings some of the more outstanding papers presented. Below are listed the names of the moderators in their various fields of expertise. Their e-mail addresses are given in order that papers might be sent to them for review.

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My special thanks to Fr. J. Michael McDermott, S.J., and to his committee for making these arrangements.

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Educating Students in the Faith at Catholic Colleges and Universities

by J. Brian Benestad
Editor

On 5 May 2012 Pope Benedict XVI spoke to a group of Catholic bishops on their “Ad Limina” visit about the need to reaffirm the distinctive identity of Catholic colleges and universities. The pope first discussed the importance of theologians having a mandate to teach theology, implying that Catholic bishops and university authorities have much work to do to persuade theologians to ask for a mandate, as required by Canon 812. As things stand, theologians not infrequently dissent from Church teaching both in their teaching and in their writing. The result of the discord, argues the pope, is at least the weakening of the Church’s witness to Jesus Christ. I believe that Catholic high schools – and even grade schools – have more difficulty maintaining their identity when they hire teachers who have been badly formed in college by dissenting theologians.

While the pope always encourages Catholic institutions to educate the mind of their students, he puts more emphasis in this talk on persuading Catholic students to know and love their faith. “It is no exaggeration to say that providing young people with a sound education in the faith represents the most urgent internal challenge facing the Catholic community in your country.” With respect to the shaping of hearts at the university level, Pope Benedict goes on to say that chaplains and teachers of religion cannot succeed in this work by themselves. All members of the university community must “challenge students to reappropriate their faith as part of the exciting intellectual discoveries which mark the experience of higher education.” This means that all faculty, administrators, and staff must find a way to help students live the faith in their everyday lives. For example, business faculty

should not hesitate to inject the teaching of ethics into all their business courses, especially after the economic crisis of 2008. I recently heard a professor of finance at a prestigious non-Catholic university explain that after the 2008 crisis she now feels obliged to impart an ethical education in her finance courses. She was especially appalled to hear from her students that they would have no qualms about taking unfair advantage of anyone in their business dealings. This kind of example could inspire faculty at Catholic institutions to explain how the Catholic faith should influence business behavior. Catholic faculty in other disciplines will also be able to shape the hearts of their students, if they are attentive to the opportunities that present themselves during the course of a semester.

On 14 June 2012 I heard the president of the Catholic University of America (CUA), John Garvey, explain at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN, what he is doing to help students reappropriate and live their faith. He is planning to put chapels in all dorms, encourages priests and religious men and women to live in the dorms, and he is gradually converting all residences into single-sex dorms. He is doing the latter because research shows that there is more binge drinking and “hooking up” in coed dorms. Professors applying for tenure will have to explain what they have done to promote the Catholic identity of CUA. No faculty member will be hired without the approval of the provost and the president after receiving recommendations from the various departments.

Just a few years ago, talk about shaping the hearts of undergraduates was regarded in many Catholic institutions as inappropriate. It probably still is in a number of places, but more people are recognizing that a Catholic education may not be worth the sacrifice if students don’t graduate with the knowledge and will to integrate the Catholic faith into every aspect of their lives. ✠

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AN INVITATION TO MEMBERS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

Beginning in 2013, we will observe the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the sixteen documents produced by the Second Vatican Council. One of the contributions that our organization can make would be to offer scholarly studies of various kinds on these documents. I would invite you to consider preparing a submission for the *Quarterly*. One might, for instance, want to write about the significance of one or another of these documents, especially in light of the reception they have received in the past half century. Or perhaps one might want to treat some important problem or issue, such as the proper understanding of the text or some issue of proper translation or implementation. Please consider undertaking the study of these important matters and sharing the fruits of your scholarship with the members of our association. Listed below are the sixteen documents from the Council and their dates of appearance.

Fr. Joseph Koterski SJ
President, Fellowship of Catholic Scholars

1. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963.
2. *Inter Mirifica*, Decree On the Means of Social Communication, 1963.
3. *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution On the Church, 1964.
4. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Decree On the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite, 1964.
5. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism, 1964.
6. *Christus Dominus*, Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops In the Church, 1965.
7. *Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree On Renewal of Religious Life, 1965.
8. *Optatam Totius*, Decree On Priestly Training, 1965.
9. *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration On Christian Education, 1965.
10. *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration On the Relation Of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, 1965.
11. *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation, 1965.
12. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree On the Apostolate of the Laity, 1965.
13. *Dignitatis Humanae*, Declaration On Religious Freedom, 1965.
14. *Ad Gentes*, Decree On the Mission Activity of the Church, 1965.
15. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree On the Ministry and Life of Priests, 1965.
16. *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution On the Church In the Modern World, 1965.