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THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Upcoming Extraordinary Synod

by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.

Fordham University

President, Fellowship of Catholic Scholars

The upcoming Extraordinary Synod on “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization” is drawing much attention. Some of that attention is coming for the right reason—the need to defend marriage and the family today against social forces that would gladly destroy these institutions. The Synod is right to focus on the role that protecting and promoting the Church’s understanding of marriage and family need to play in real evangelization and catechesis. The forces today arrayed against the Church (especially those in favor of homosexual unions) try to cast the Church as guilty of prejudice and bias. Usually this position reduces marriage to a personal profession of love or affection. It would be a tragedy for the Church to acquiesce in the mounting pressure to abandon its defense of the traditional understanding of marriage.

But much of the attention that the Synod is getting seems to come for the wrong reason—pressure from within to have the Church radically change her teachings on family and marriage. There are many who want the Church to accommodate herself to the moral values promoted by secular modernity (for example, the acceptance of contraception and same-sex unions). Some have labored to fuel expectations that there will be shifts in the Church’s teaching, just as some tried to create an expectation in 1968 that there would be a shift on contraception in response to the report of the birth-control commission set up Pope John XXIII and used by Pope Paul VI before issuing his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae vitae*.

One of the leading voices in the agitation for radical change is Cardinal Walter Kasper, whose address to the Consistory of Cardinals on 20 February 2014 included two specific proposals for the divorced and remarried. His remarks were published first in Italian as “Bibbia, eros e famiglia” (*Il Foglio*, 1 March 2014) and then as a small book in both English and German: *The Gospel of the Family*, translated by William Madges (New York: Paulist Books, 2014) and *Das Evangelium von der Familie: Die Rede vor dem Konsistorium* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Heder, 2014).

Cardinal Kasper’s first proposal arises from the claim that the marriages of couples who “lack faith in the mystery that is signified by the sacrament” are not valid even if they had

correct ecclesial form. His remedy is the use of “other more pastoral and spiritual procedures” rather than the use of “a juridical path.” His second proposal is the readmission to Holy Communion of those who find themselves “truly sorry to have failed” in “a valid and consummated marriage between baptized individuals, for whom the marital life partnership is irreparably broken and one or both partners have contracted a second, civil marriage.”

The arguments provided by Cardinal Kasper, however, fail to address the central objection to any such proposals, namely, that our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament that signified his spousal love and unbreakable fidelity to the Church (Eph 5:32). Those who marry someone else after divorcing their legitimate spouses commit adultery (Mk 10:11-12). It has been the constant teaching of the Church that a marriage between two baptized people that has been ratified by the consent of the parties and truly consummated can never be dissolved—not even by a pope. Admittedly, having the courage to maintain Christ’s teachings on adultery and divorce is difficult in our own age, just as it has always been in the past. But it would be better to conclude that such difficulties simply provide yet another reason for the Church to promote conversion of hearts and minds in its evangelization and catechesis.

That there is already definitive teaching on the indissolubility of sacramental marriage is clear. After citing a long series of statements by his predecessors, John Paul II clearly taught that the point is settled (“Address to the Roman Rota,” 21 January 2000). Likewise, it is quite clear that private judgments or an individual’s personal views (e.g., that one’s earlier marriage was invalid) cannot be the basis for setting aside the validity of that marriage. The *Code of Canon Law* makes quite clear that the judgment about the validity of a sacramental marriage belongs to the Church alone (c. 135, §3 and c. 1085).

When proposals like those of Cardinal Kasper try to shift the assessment about the validity of marriages into the subjective sphere of conscience and private judgment, they fail to appreciate that marriage is essentially a public reality. Marriage of any kind is a contract between spouses that requires several witnesses. It involves duties for the spouses and gives them various rights and benefits (including the fidelity of the other party, the assurance of help in good times and bad, and cooperation in the raising of their children). Marriage is also a public reality because of the way in which the procreation and education of children contribute to the common good of society. Further, the sacrament of marriage is a public sign of Christ’s fidelity and love for his Church, and

those who are sacramentally married are obliged to give witness to the relation between Christ and his Church in their married lives.

Much of Cardinal Kasper’s argument seems to turn on the notion that a poorly catechized couple (Catholic only in name and without a real engagement with the Faith) lack what is needed for their marriage to be sacramental even when such people give their consent in a valid marriage. But this argument cannot be right. After all, the Church holds that a sacramental marriage bond of an indissoluble sort can be established between Catholics and baptized non-Catholics who do not profess the Catholic faith in its complete integrity. Likewise, the Church teaches that the marriage of a Protestant couple who become Catholic is sacramental and indissoluble even if they did not believe marriage to be a sacrament at the moment of their wedding.

It is the explicit teaching of the Church that a valid marriage only requires that a person intend the natural goods of marriage (“Address to the Roman Rota” by John Paul II on 30 January 2004). In matrimony, the spouses are the ministers of the sacrament. As the Church has made clear since at least the time of the Donatist controversy in the fourth century, the validity of the sacraments does not depend on the minister being in the state of grace but on the correct form and matter of the sacrament. If spouses are not in the state of grace, they may not be in a position to benefit from the graces conferred by the sacrament, but the sacrament itself is valid, presuming that they exchanged valid consent and intended to do what the Church does (see “Address to the Roman Rota” by Benedict XVI on 26 January 2013).

Sometimes there is considerable grouching about the Church’s annulment procedures, but the origin of the problem generally seems to reside in a failure to follow proper procedures in the courts of first instance. The best guarantee that marriage cases will truly be handled justly and efficiently is to follow faithfully the procedural norms of canon law as well as the substantive norms that the Code derives from the Church’s doctrine. It is a false distinction to set a pastoral approach in opposition to a canonical one. The proper adherence to canonical procedures will in fact be deeply pastoral, precisely because the laws have been written to reflect sound moral teaching. In every context in which the *Code* discusses annulments, the Code also makes clear what is needed for the conversion of hearts. This is authentically pastoral.

As we look ahead to the Extraordinary Synod, we need to pray that the participants will have the courage to withstand the pressures they will face and to uphold the truths of our faith. ✠

Stories Are Not Enough: The Church's Choice to Make Use of Greek Philosophy

by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.

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Christian evangelization has always involved retelling the story of the life of Christ within the larger history of the life of Israel and the fulfillment of God's promises to the chosen people. For Christianity, this story must be at the heart of all missionary work as well as at the center of the religious life of its members. In every age believers need to read and pray over the gospel accounts and there learn how to model their lives on his life.¹

For the transmission of the faith both to subsequent generations of believers and to those who choose for themselves to embrace Christianity, there can be no doubt about the importance of constantly retelling the story of Christ's life. The question is, however, a question about whether stories are enough. In its long tradition of insisting upon the integration of faith and reason,² the Church has regularly resorted to philosophy in numerous ways, but without ever allowing Christian faith to be reduced to being just one more philosophy among others. Even with such precautions in place, it is not rare to find complaints about the pernicious influence on the gospel from Hellenistic philosophies and the resultant distortions of the gospel's purity when Semitic categories were supposedly made to conform to the alien framework of a Greek worldview.³

Could the retelling of the story of Christ have been alone enough for the spread of the gospel and the communication of the faith? A full response to the question would need to be multi-pronged, reaching out in various directions far beyond what I will try to consider here. This paper will discuss only a few of aspects of this problem as a way to situate the contributions of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) to this topic in his captivating treatise on the Apostles Creed, entitled *Introduction to Christianity*.⁴

The Truth of Stories

One set of questions relevant to this problem concerns the truth of stories. A well-told tale can be deeply enchanting. By the artistry of its creator (not to mention the skill of someone telling a story live), the integrity of its plot, the realism of its characters, and the depth of its meaning, a story can often get across a point and elicit belief far better than many a carefully crafted lecture or textbook. Within the history of philosophy, one need only think about the difference between, say, Plato and Aristotle to appreciate the differences between communicating through a story and through a treatise. But whatever the tactical advantages of one route over the other (the liveliness of human conversation and the dialectic interchange of dialogue, for instance, in contrast with the added clarity of the definitions, distinctions, and demonstrations possible through writing and rewriting something), one of the abiding questions facing any story is whether the story is true or "just a story."

To note this difference is not, of course, to suggest that one should believe anything true simply because written in treatise-form or to urge that everything in story-form is mere fiction. It is simply to acknowledge that, whatever a story gains from its historical details or from the liveliness of its particulars, it can risk losing in regard to universal cogency and general applicability. The details of a given story may be true or false, but we always find it interesting to learn that this film or that novel was based on the actual course of people's lives. To the extent that a story recounts historical events, however, the possibilities of its general applicability can begin to wane, whereas the applicability of what is presented as a tale (with or without an explicit moral) easily rises in generality. In this way it is quite possible for something entirely fictional to bear witness to various sorts of truth without being a "true story." While there may be no claim at all that the details of the story ever historically occurred, the story could well convey

some genuine insight of a general sort.

As Cardinal Ratzinger notes in his *Introduction to Christianity*, Christian missionaries and apologists from the earliest days needed to ask themselves questions about their ways of presenting the faith, for such questions would have been very likely to occur to their auditors. Are the stories about God the Father in the Old Testament like the stories about Zeus? Are the stories about Jesus like the stories about Apollo or Hermes? Are the stories about the creation like the stories about the demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*? Are such stories in the realm of mythology? Or philosophically erudite illustration? Or historical accounts?

This type of question about the truth-status of stories is applicable not just to biblical stories, of course, but to any story whatsoever. The issue of the truth of stories is particularly pressing, however, in regard to their use in Christian evangelization, for Christians have always been insistent on the historical veracity of the stories about Christ that constitute the gospels. From the beginning, biblical interpreters have been alert to the fact that *midrash*, parables, and the like make claims to truths without being historical accounts. But so much of the Christian story depends on a claim of historical veracity that the question recurrently arises. Under the pressures of modern historical scholarship, fresh questions have frequently been raised about the historicity of the gospel accounts. Modern scriptural exegesis, for instance, has made us aware of the various levels of redaction likely to have been involved in the production of the gospels. This approach has sometimes put into question whether a given story is true as we find it. Or perhaps better put, the modern exegetical approach has raised the following questions: In what sense is the account true or is the account something that the community wanted to be true? There have been considerable advances in regard to the investigation of these questions as the result of applying to the scriptures the principles of the historical-critical method. These methods have proven their value over time by the wealth of insights that they have yielded about biblical texts. Sometimes, however, it appears that there were certain philosophical assumptions of a skeptical nature in play that risk missing what is in fact historically accurate in the gospel stories, as well as assumptions of an historicist character that challenge the possibility that these texts have timeless truths to communicate.⁵

Among some scripture scholars there has recently been increasing recognition that most of what could be

achieved by the historical-critical method in this regard has now been achieved by its rigorous application for many decades.⁶ They now increasingly urge that it is time to return to the work of biblical theology and take a different kind of approach from that of the historical-critical method, and this is likely to mean the cultivation of an appreciation for the various uses of stories (historical and otherwise) included within the texts of scripture. Along with these developments there has also been a fairly strong recovery of confidence about the remarkable historicity of the gospels.

By contrast, however, a considerable group of theologians working today remain committed to the basic thesis of historicism.⁷ In this view, one needs to assign great importance to the specific context of any statement or truth-claim, whether the context be the historical period, the geographical place, or the local culture. In emphasizing the traditions involved in the origination and transmission of texts, historicist approaches tend to be hermeneutical in placing great significance on caution and rigor through contextualized interpretations of any texts, and they are suspicious of any universal, timeless, and immutable interpretations. As a result, these scholars tend to be generally skeptical about claims that any text should be read as communicating a timeless truth and they show great caution when trying to ascertain the meaning of texts, given the time-bound human language in which they must invariably be stated. In particular, there has been hesitation about treating statements in the Christian creeds as timelessly true, for they understand such statements to be as time-bound as any other proposition.

Yet another aspect of the problem is a question about the translatability of truths expressed in the patterns typical of one age or culture into the idioms of later ages and other cultures. Questions of this sort have been raised, for instance, about the inclusion of a limited amount of philosophical vocabulary in the creeds even when that terminology was employed only to ensure the preservation of biblical faith.⁸ These are authentic questions here that need to be taken seriously, both in general and in specific cases. While philosophical texts have also been subject to critique by historicist thought, it is often the case that it is precisely a philosophical approach—especially one that makes use of traditional philosophical categories for carefully attempting to state things in a universal way that is applicable always and everywhere—that can be useful for providing suitable ways to state timeless truths, and thus for expressing general moral truths that one can abstract

from the particularity of stories and specific events.

The issues are thus multi-faceted and complex, but highly suggestive as an approach to one of most important of the pre-papal writings of Pope Benedict, namely, his consideration of Christianity's adoption of philosophical thought as part of its self-presentation. My project in this paper more specifically is to reflect on the thought of Joseph Ratzinger as found in his *Introduction to Christianity*. At one point in that volume, for instance, he is reflecting on Acts 16:6-10, where the Holy Spirit forbids St. Paul "to speak the word in Asia" and where the Spirit of Jesus refuses him permission to enter Bithynia but shows him a vision in which a Macedonian says: "Come over to Macedonia and help us." For Ratzinger, "[T]his mysterious text might well represent something like a first attempt at a 'theology of history,' intended to underline the crossing of the Gospel to Europe, 'to the Greeks,' as a divinely arranged necessity."⁹ Ratzinger thus sees in the details of the biblical story not only Paul's claim to have been divinely directed as to his missionary journeys but also the hint of a divine plan to make use of Greek philosophical culture for the spread of the faith. Speaking more generally on this matter, Ratzinger sees the Christian appropriation of Greek thought as part of the design of divine Providence:

Understanding grows only out of belief. That is why theology as the understanding, *logos*-like . . . discussion of God is a fundamental task of Christian faith. This context is also the basis of the inalienable right of Greek thought to a place in Christianity. I am convinced that at bottom it was no mere accident that the Christian message, in the period when it was taking shape, first entered the Greek world and there merged with the enquiry into understanding, into truth.¹⁰

In this passage the Cardinal uses unusually strong language in asserting "the inalienable right of Greek thought to a place in Christianity." For him, the claim is based on his conviction that it was not merely an accident of history but a wise and deliberate decision made by the Church and under the influence of divine guidance, so that the early Church chose to adopt what she needed from the heritage of ancient philosophy, while making crucial adaptations in this philosophy where necessary so as not to risk any distortions of the gospel in the course of carrying out this project.

Ratzinger's Handling of This Question

Within his *Introduction to Christianity* Ratzinger handles this question in two distinct ways. First, within his sustained reflection on the nature of faith that begins this volume he analyzes the decision sometimes to use nonbiblical (namely, philosophical) expressions in order to explain and defend biblical faith.¹¹ Second, in chapter 3 he makes an historical argument about the prudential choice of the Church to undertake this strategy, under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In the first section of *Introduction to Christianity* Ratzinger works toward his thesis about seeing the use of Greek philosophical culture as part of the plan of divine providence, by a sustained analysis of the distinctive place of faith within the Christian religion. This thesis, he argues, rests on a general observation about Christian doctrine as true in any age and not just in the patristic era. In the course of reflecting on the typical stumbling-blocks and difficulties that face anyone considering the commitments of faith, Ratzinger notes that not all religions have required of their adherents an explicit profession of faith (that is, a creed of some sort) that includes claims alleging many facts about God's intervention within history. Ancient Roman paganism, for example, concentrated upon the precise execution of rituals, regardless of what one personally believed. Even religions like Judaism that do explicitly expect faith in God and that have had a strong sense of the divine deeds that created and preserved the Chosen People do not demand in so many words the profession of a creed beyond the *shema*.¹² Judaism was and is a religion centered upon *Torah*, that is, upon Law. Somewhat further afield, Asian religions are proving curiously attractive to many people, especially because they take a rather contemplative stance toward the mysterious eternal and permit an adherent to disregard any parochial worries about the "scandal of particularity," that is, the "embarrassing" claims of an historical sort that single out the uniqueness of Christianity, such as the claim that there is only a single messiah rather than a series of avatars, a unique virgin birth, the miraculous multiplications of bread and fish, the exorcism of evil spirits, or the institution of sacramental practices.

It is also possible to find hesitation about the historical claims of Christianity in texts from the social gospel tradition with its great veneration for some of

Christianity's moral claims. Such views operate out of a more or less secularized viewpoint that regards moral views as the only really acceptable portion of religion. A stance like this is the result of an intellectual demythologization of traditional Christian religion with its various historical claims. For such perspectives, what is needed is sincerity and a readiness to act for certain moral convictions rather than a requirement of faith in God or the profession of a creed that makes historical truth-claims about the interventions of the divine into history.

What has, by contrast, marked genuine Christianity (taken in a full sense of the word, and thus including but not limited to a vigorous social teaching) is the demand for faith in a God who is always both deeply involved in human history and who transcends the sensible order, that is, an eternal and omnipotent God who is always unseen and yet who sent his only Son into the world to redeem us by his suffering, death, and resurrection. Such faith, Ratzinger reminds us, always entails a genuine leap beyond what can be empirically or logically proven, a faith that is full of quite particular historical truth-claims that will never be able to be reached any sort of formal philosophical demonstration, let alone be reducible to some construction of our own devising.

The question, however, is how to integrate philosophical concepts with the historical truth-claims typical of the Christian story. Certain philosophical approaches such as that typical of traditional Thomism integrate faith and reason by regarding both as possible sources of genuine knowledge and by envisioning a certain overlap between them, that is, a certain set of truths that can in principle be reached by both methods. While certain other points (the doctrine of the Trinity, for instance) may only be known by faith in what has been revealed, the very existence of God is thought to be accessible by proofs generated through careful human reasoning that proceeds from the contingent nature of the cosmos back to the existence of God in order to provide an adequate explanation for what is known to us experientially. In this way, Thomism attempts to respect the fact that certain points of the faith can only be known by trusting in the truth of revelation. But by providing convincing reasons for other aspects of the faith, the *praeambula fidei* can help to make the rest of the creed seem more plausible, and in this way can help to open a path for belief. Yet the core of Christian faith can never be the result of any logical demonstrations, and faith always retains something of the quality of a leap, an act of will. What the articulation and defense of the *praeambula fidei* can do is to help to clear away certain roadblocks to the faith.¹³

A large portion of the first chapter of *Introduction to Christianity* is given over to a consideration of those recent ages and cultures that have been far less inclined to give credit to metaphysical reasoning or to the doctrine of the *praeambula fidei*, and that have been more inclined to replace the traditional high esteem for metaphysics and its concern with contemplating the truth about being—*ens qua verum*—with a higher regard for human accomplishments and historical facts than for the nature of things (*verum qua factum*), or later, with a strong penchant for questions of feasibility (*verum qua faciendum*) and a veneration for power over nature, and even over human nature that is the essential feature of a technological culture. As Ratzinger's view of the history of modern thought recalls, history was, for a long while, queen of the disciplines, only to be replaced by the empirical sciences and especially their technical arts. In Ratzinger's judgment, one can detect in modern intellectual history a shift in what has been regarded as the source of conviction—from reverence for the speculative use of theoretical reason to pride of place for the technical use of practical-productive reason in a variety of its forms. He discusses all these things with not a hint of Luddite opposition to technology, but simply with an Augustinian sense of the hierarchy of value.

In his analysis of the assumptions prevalent in the modern scientific worldview, Cardinal Ratzinger notes that, for certain legitimate methodological purposes of its own, this view tends to limit reality to phenomena, to what is evident and can be empirically grasped. The problem, however, is that people often treat this methodological restriction as if it were an ontological limit, as if the very nature of things were unfathomable and as if the limit of what is real is the possibility for something to be able to be grasped within some useful set of categories. What is needed then is that we bear in mind the relevant distinction, and not treat a methodological principle as if it were a metaphysical one. In this regard, the situation is much like that of empirical sciences like biology or chemistry that need to confine their search to the realm of material explanations rather than to look for spiritual forces. Doing so is crucial to their progress, but they have no standing whatsoever to deny the reality of the immaterial. Put more generally, a methodological materialism should not be interpreted as if it were a metaphysical materialism. The problem is that without the guardrails provided by the distinction between methodology and metaphysics, it is easy for traffic to stray into the other lane. For Ratzinger, there is much to praise about the concentration of

these disciplines upon facts and feasibility, but not to the exclusion of philosophy and theology. It requires disciplines of another sort to put appropriate focus on the nature of things and on their significance as bearing a meaning that discloses their Creator's intent. One sees here, perhaps, an ongoing appreciation for the semiotic metaphysics and the sign-bearing character of all reality that are typical of Bonaventure and Augustine, on whom Ratzinger has meditated since at least the time of his doctoral dissertation.

The reasons for Ratzinger's worries about the unwarranted extension of a justifiable methodological restriction to a broad ontological claim include, of course, certain dangers for human dignity. For some, it may seem merely sentimental to worry that human nature may be degraded by allowing human beings to be thought about as merely a chance occurrence of material development. Believing that human beings have no intrinsic and inalienable dignity (of the sort that believers find to be rooted in the claim that human beings are unique by virtue of being made in the image and likeness of God) allows for the view that human nature may be redesigned by human ingenuity. Ratzinger sees this prospect to hold dire possibilities.

The seemingly hopeful prospect of looking to our future with an ability to refashion ourselves in significant ways easily gives way to the horror of subjecting individuals to utilitarian calculations without regard for their personal good. By contrast, Ratzinger reminds us, there is a venerable view associated with ancient and medieval metaphysics as well as with biblical religion, that all being bears within it a meaning and can (at least in principle) be understood in its nature, precisely because that being and that nature were thought up and loved into existence by the Creator. From this viewpoint, human thinking should be used in the service of humanity but should not be used arbitrarily to impose a new order on the world. For Ratzinger, our reason shares (admittedly, on a smaller and more limited scale) in divine reason and is therefore capable of "rethinking" (that is, understanding) the being and nature of those entities whose reality is the result of being thought up by the divine reason in the first place. In the form of scientism rather than genuine scientific inquiry, the methodology of the empirical sciences has in some quarters shifted to a wholly different concept of truth, namely, to the notion that all that we can really and true know is what we ourselves have made.

In his elucidation of this theme, Ratzinger reflects at length on Vico and on the then novel notion of *verum*

qua factum. By privileging the logic of analysis and the results of human accomplishment, this view holds that we can really know as true only what we have made. But this focus on facts and historical knowledge eventually came to be replaced by a reliance on empirical science, technology, and calculative reasoning—in general, the correlative notion of *verum qua faciendum*—that is, on feasibility. When this trend becomes predominant, he finds, the goal of human life comes to be identified as doing whatever we choose to do or whatever we choose to make.¹⁴ The accent is on the importance that we give to various things by our choices, and not on the intrinsic importance of things that are the ultimate reason and justification for their being chosen. One finds this trend ubiquitous in contemporary culture.

Where earlier (especially ancient and medieval) thought regarded the arts as a propaedeutic to real knowledge, which consisted in reflection on being itself, the newer views make *techne* into the predominant form of knowledge. In explaining the evolution of these shifts, Cardinal Ratzinger notes the pressure of the quest for certainty: not just the famous Cartesian resort to the mathematical for the sake of analytic certainty but also the quest for certainty by means of power and control that is the source of technological culture. In passing, Ratzinger notes that in this reevaluation of cognitive fields, even philosophy sometimes became historicist. One can, of course, still see this trend in philosophical conferences that are dominated by questions asking what was true for one philosopher or for another, without engaging the question of what is simply true. In a comparable development within the field of theology, recent decades have seen the rise of subdisciplines like political theology as well as in the political appropriation of religion, whether by the nationalist movements of nineteenth-century political absolutists, the Marxist liberation theologians with whom Ratzinger contended while he directed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or some of the promoters of a secularized version of the social gospel that excludes supernatural claims. In his handling of liberation theology, for instance, Ratzinger identified and criticized certain Marxist attempts to incorporate the attitude of belief into its own program of a self-created future as the very purpose or meaning of human existence. Yet not even Marxism can manage to turn the idea of the "makeable" as if it were the very purpose of life into something that can be known; it can only promise that this is the case and then leave the decision to belief. What allowed history to yield primacy among the disciplines to *techne* was the

realization that history was not amenable to objectivity and utter conclusiveness (“an absurd abstraction”). Historical observation remains disputable, subject to reconstruction, reinterpretation, and ambiguity. There is no such thing as pure fact. Rather, the only thing really knowable is what is repeatable under experiment and manipulable by our design and redesign.

Ratzinger sums up the first part of this argument about the nature of Christian faith by observing that, in contrast to these other trends on which he has been reflecting: (1) Christian belief really is concerned with the *factum* (that is, with history and with a number of crucial historical claims); (2) Christian belief involves claims that connect these facts with the being of God who is always greater, *semper maior*, than the world that he has entered; and (3) Christian belief really does have something to do with changing and shaping the world (despite the Marxist attempts to reduce belief to this one point), for it is only by virtue of attachment to God that our lives and choices have ultimate meaning. To consign belief wholly to the realm of *factum* or of *faciendum* would be to miss what *credo* really means. The act of believing does not belong to the relationship of “knowing and making” so much as to the relation of “stand and understand.”

Faith as Standing Firm and Understanding.

Commenting on the famous text of Isaiah 7:9, (translated very literally from the Hebrew as “If you do not believe (hold firm), you will have no hold”), Cardinal Ratzinger notes that the root (“mn, as in our word “Amen”) includes the meanings truth, firmness, firm grasp, ground, loyalty, truth, taking one’s stand, belief, and so on. Belief in God is a matter of holding on to God, so as to have a firm hold for one’s life—taking a stand trustfully on the ground of the Word of God.

The claim is often made as part of the problematic that we discussed at the start of this paper that the rendering of this phrase in the Septuagint as “If you do not believe, you will not understand” was a distorting Hellenization, as if it intellectualized belief and thereby distorted things—that is, as if it changed the idea from “standing on firm ground, the reliable Word of God,” to a notion of belief in terms of understanding and reason, and thereby removed faith to some other sphere. In fact, argues Ratzinger, this translation may change the

imagery, but it nonetheless preserves the essential meaning; “standing” (he says) really does have something to do with understanding. Belief, he explains, is not a matter of “making” or of “feasibility,” but a matter of entrusting oneself to what has not been made by oneself and never could be made, but to that ultimate source of being that supports and makes possible all our making. Belief is not something that we produce but something to which we are invited and that gives us a ground for what we make of this life and this world.

Invoking Heidegger’s distinction between *calculative* and *reflective* thought as dual models of rationality, both of which are legitimate and necessary, but neither of which can be absorbed into the other, Ratzinger urges that belief is not some incomplete kind of knowledge by calculation of probability. Rather, it is an essentially different kind of intellectual attitude, one concerned with meaning. The vast successes of calculative thought today can make us forget to be reflective about human existence and to discover its meaning. Belief does not pertain to the domain of the malleable but to the domain of the basic questions that man cannot avoid answering. For Ratzinger, the form in which answers must come is belief.

Belief, he maintains, is a way of “taking a stand” and is much more related to understanding than to knowing by our own calculations. It is a way of relating to the totality of being and experience that cannot be reduced to any knowledge that we do produce and is incommensurable by such knowledge. It is the bestowal of meaning, without which one’s calculation and action would be impossible, without which earthly comfort, even in abundance, would be of no help. But, needless to say, there is an important caveat: meaning is not something we manufacture. Meaning cannot be made. It must be received. To believe as a Christian is to entrust oneself to the meaning that supports me, to the firm ground on which I can stand fearlessly.

To believe as a Christian means understanding our existence as an answer to the Word that bears all things up. It means affirming that the meaning that we do not make but can only receive is something already granted to us, so that we have only to entrust ourselves to it. In this regard, receiving is prior to making—this does not reduce the sphere of making in value at all, but it does show the independence of one order with regard to the other. Christian belief means opting for the view that what cannot be seen is more real than what can be seen, that is, the true ground of all things. The dependence of faith here on metaphysics and contemplation of being

beyond what is able to be disclosed to the senses is opposed to any form of phenomenism that invites us to confine ourselves to the visible and apparent.

The second part of Ratzinger's meditations on these questions concerns the Church's decision to make use of philosophical notions of God when articulating the demands of faith in a creed. People learn new things by noting the likenesses and differences between what is being presented and what one is already familiar with. He finds that in some respects the situation of the Church in its earliest proclamations of the gospel was like the situation of Israel when it came to know God as "El" and "Yah" (and eventually "Elohim" and "Yahweh") rather than "Moloch" and "Baal": it was an environment "teeming with gods" in which the Christian faith had to state which god it really had in mind. The Church's policy, faithful to the hand of God that was disclosed during the struggle that is recounted in Deutero-Isaiah and the Wisdom literature, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament that we call the Septuagint and the writings of the New Testament (especially the gospel of John), is a choice "for the God of the philosophers and *against* the gods of the various religions."

When the question arose in the Church's early missionary efforts, "To which god does the Christian God correspond (to Zeus, perhaps, or Hermes, or some other)?"—the answer the Church chose to give was this: "To none of them. To none of the gods to whom you pray, but solely and alone to him to whom you do not pray, to that highest being of whom your philosophers speak." In this way the Church fearlessly and resolutely dismissed the entire worldview of all ancient religions, holding it to be deceitful and illusory (we can readily hear this precise tone in *De civitate Dei*). The Church insisted upon a high philosophical tone: "When we say God, we do not mean or worship any of this; we mean only Being itself, what the philosophers have exposed as the ground of all being, as the god above all powers—that alone is our God."¹⁵ Speaking more broadly, Ratzinger comments: "The choice thus made meant opting for the *logos* as against any kind of myth; it meant the definitive demythologization of the world and of religion."¹⁶

Ratzinger's argument that this choice by the Church was the right one depends in particular on his prolonged reflection on the inner development of the biblical concept of God (see chapter 2, not reviewed here). It also includes Ratzinger's sense of the dilemma that faced the ancient pagan world subsequent to the rise of philosophy: "Between the mythical gods of the

religions and the philosophical knowledge of God, there had developed in the course of history a stronger and stronger tension, which is apparent in the criticism of the myths by the philosophers from Xenophanes to Plato, who even thought of trying to replace the classical Homeric mythology by a new mythology appropriate to the *logos*."¹⁷ Although the philosophical criticism of the myths of Greece and the prophetic criticism of the gods in Israel have completely different assumptions and entirely diverse aims, there is an amazing—a providential—parallel chronologically and in regard to the demythologization being directed by *logos* against *mythos* in favor of monotheism. In pagan cultures, piety and reason drew apart, with the collapse of ancient religion as a result. The problem within pagan antiquity was precisely the question of truth and meaning. Ancient philosophy, in effect, worked to destroy myth and yet at the same time to "legitimize it afresh as religion.... [I]t treated religion as a question of the regulation of life, not as a question of truth."¹⁸ Ratzinger notes that Paul's letter to the *Romans* (1:19–23) echoes the comments in chapters 13–15 of *Wisdom*: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.... Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him ... [but] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles."

Ancient religion refused the way of *logos* but lingered in myths that had already been shown to be out of conformity with reality. Its decline followed from its separation from truth and its coming to be seen more as part of the furnishings of a comfortable culture that caters to people's feelings, while a political theology looked after the good of the state, and Neoplatonic philosophy articulated the myth symbolically. By contrast, Tertullian shows how different a stance Christianity took when he insists: "Christ called himself truth, not custom."¹⁹ Rome had made its own customs into a self-sufficient code of behavior, satisfied with outward ceremonial that can be interpreted to mean anything one likes. Christianity challenges this picture by putting itself resolutely on the side of truth and makes a claim to uniqueness.

What reason would there have been for Christianity to have expected any other fate? Looking ahead to our own times and to the questions with which we began this paper, namely, the charges made by some contemporaries that the gospel was sullied when it allowed philosophy to mingle with its basic story, Ratzinger comments:

The Christian religion would have to expect just the same fate if it were to accept a similar amputation of reason and were to embark on a corresponding withdrawal into the purely religious, as advocated by Schleiermacher and present, paradoxically enough, in a certain sense in Schleiermacher's great critic and opponent, Karl Barth.²⁰

For Ratzinger, the struggle faced by the Church meant resisting both of the strategies that pagan polytheism had employed:

On the one side we have the retreat from the truth of reason into a realm of mere piety, mere faith, mere revelation; a retreat which in reality bears a fatal resemblance, whether by design or accident, and whether the fact is admitted or not, to the ancient religion's retreat before the *logos*, to the flight from truth to beautiful custom, from nature to politics. On the other side we have an approach which I will call for short "interpreted Christianity": the stumbling-blocks in Christianity are removed by the interpretive method and as part of the process of thus rendering it unobjectionable its actual content is written off as dispensable phraseology, as a periphrasis not required to say the simple things now alleged, by complicated modes of exposition, to constitute its real meaning.²¹

The choice to explain the demands of faith in philosophical terms (rather than in just the language of story) did not, of course, mean accepting the philosophical picture without adaptation. There is a crucial transformation that the Church needed to make, and the Church embraced this project. Much of the subsequent sections of *Introduction to Christianity* gives evidence of the details, as Ratzinger moves through the lines of the Apostles Creed. He gives evidence of what the Church adopts of philosophy, what it adapts and transforms—not only the introduction of a nonbiblical word like *homoousios* to preserve biblical faith, but also the use of negative theology to ward off the misunderstandings of the Trinity (subordination and modalism)—in short, a history of both/and—of story and of the philosophical elucidation—never allowing philosophy to replace the authority of the story of Christ, but holding philosophy close at hand, to make a case where needed against some inappropriate constructions of the story, to give a plausible account of why anyone of right mind and good will should see and hold some of the truths that the story teaches by its own authority, and to make distinctions by which to help to understand the story and its applications. ✠

Endnotes

- 1 See Paul M. Quay, S.J., *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in Christ* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).
- 2 The encyclical *Fides et ratio* by Pope John Paul II continued a tradition that includes not only a series of such encyclicals in the modern period of the papacy (e.g., *Aeterni patris*, *Humani generis*) but also countless writings from the patristic and scholastic periods.
- 3 For a scholarly review of the allegations and their assessment, see Ramsay Macmullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
- 4 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1968), trans. J. R. Foster as *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990). The latter will be cited here.
- 5 For Benedict XVI's own sense of these trends, see his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* ("The Word of the Lord") of September 30, 2010, available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html.
- 6 See the essay by Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., included within this collection, "Benedict XVI and the Interpretation of the Bible."
- 7 Among the many examples that could be cited, see Roger Haight, S.J., *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2005).
- 8 The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, for instance, uses the Greek term *homoousion* (*consubstantialem*, in Latin), which tends to be rendered by such phrases as "one in being" or "consubstantial with." This admittedly philosophical term is the only nonbiblical phrase within the creed, but it is employed there precisely to preserve biblical faith about the perfect equality of the Divine Son with God the Father, against interpretations of the scriptures that were vulnerable to subordinationism.
- 9 *Introduction*, 46–47 n. 16.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 11 I have considered this problem elsewhere, for instance, in "Boethius and the Theological Origins of the Concept of Person" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78, n. 2 (2004): 203–24.
- 12 "Hear, O Israel: the LORD Our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4).
- 13 On this topic, there are many fine books, including Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).
- 14 In many respects Ratzinger's remarks in this section run parallel to the illuminating discussions of Hannah Arendt on the difference between conceiving authority in terms of respect for tradition and the past and conceiving authority in terms of regard for power and interest in controlling the future.
- 15 *Introduction*, 95.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 19 Quoted at *ibid.*, 97.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 98.

How Can We Save Catholic Higher Education?*

by Wolfgang Grassl
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First of all: welcome to my home at St. Norbert College! I thank the Northeastern Wisconsin chapter of Legatus very much for this honorable invitation to share some thoughts with you today. I was first in your midst two years ago as the guest of Bob Atwell, who nearly violated the Eighth Commandment when he so generously introduced me today. I know that I am addressing a group of what I call *intentional* Catholics—members of our faith who also know *why* they are Catholic and *what it means* to be so. You are in many ways opinion leaders in your parishes and in our diocese, and even more so in your businesses and in the wider public. I regard this as an opportunity to share some ideas that I hope will resonate with you. God knows, the topic is of some urgency. If you think it's not, and will suffer from boredom, maybe a German accent *will keep you awake*. It always works with my students. If this doesn't, let me appeal to your own interest as parents or grandparents, employers, alumni, teachers, trustees, or donors to Catholic higher education. After all, Catholic universities are part of the Church, of *our* Church; they are *not external* to us, but are an important part of the Body of Christ into which we are all incorporated and through which we hope to find salvation. This is exactly the point I will make: that Catholic universities must, in Christ's own words, "be *in* this world but not *of* it" (Jn 17:14-15).

The structure of my talk will be very simple. I will first ask *why* Catholic higher education needs saving. What is so precious about it, and isn't it in a good state of health anyway? I will limit myself to the situation in the United States. Secondly, I will address the question of *how* we can save Catholic higher education. What can each one of us, in our various vocations as parents, business people, teachers, politicians, priests, and individual faithful do to strengthen what I will argue is an indispensable part of our Holy Mother Church? I'll start with a historical snapshot and will later make a small sidestep into business studies, to demonstrate to

you that a thoroughly Catholic view of reality knows no boundaries by disciplines but is based on a seamless marveling at the beauty and complexity of all of creation. So, what has been the journey of Catholic higher education?

In the beginning, which here means around the end of the eleventh century, at the time when the protector of this campus, St. Norbert of Xanten, was born, a great movement of renewal was underway in Christendom. Pope Gregory VII, who was to become one of the most important pontiffs in history, though he had been born as the son of a humble blacksmith, was involved in an epic battle over the proper roles of Church and state. He had won against the emperor and was now the sole person to invest bishops. But this was not the ultimate goal of Gregory VII. His vision was much broader—not to dwell on his great victory but to use it as a springboard for reforming the Church. The foundation of a new order of canons regular in Prémontré, France, by St. Norbert, a German itinerant preacher and subsequent archbishop, was one piece in the mosaic of this reform movement.

The fundamental contribution Pope Gregory made to Christendom was his understanding that all the necessary reforms of parishes and dioceses, monasteries and forms of popular devotion, would be for naught if the Church did not also develop new thinking that would make them permanent, because they could be justified by scripture, reason, and Christian tradition. The newly won superiority of the Church, too, had to find a foundation in law, and ultimately in theology. Thus under Gregory's rule great strides were made toward developing canon law, and the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament was reaffirmed. It was this belief in transubstantiation—that the substance of the bread and the wine used in the sacrament of the Eucharist is changed, not merely as by a sign or a figure, but also in reality, into the substance of the Body and the Blood of Jesus—that stood at the beginning of the modern university. Gregory VII challenged Christendom to come to grips with this mystery not only by simply *trying to believe*,

* Literal and abbreviated text of a talk given to the Northeastern Wisconsin Chapter of Legatus on November 7, 2013 at St. Norbert College.

but also by *trying to understand* what it means for us and for our salvation. In short, in the phrase made famous by St. Anselm of Canterbury, this was the program of *faith seeking understanding*. This side of eternity, we will of course never understand transubstantiation fully, but all attempts to approach it from the viewpoints of scripture, of theology, and of philosophy have had a wonderful and unexpected side effect—the birth of the university. Transubstantiation was certainly not the only subject of study, though it gave rise to much of medieval philosophy. In Bologna, canon law and Roman law were studied, in Paris theology, in Salerno medicine, and somewhat later in Oxford, the sciences. Universities were thoroughly Catholic in the multiple meanings of this term—striving toward a comprehensive vision of God, man, and the world; uniting instead of dividing the branches of knowledge, with theology, the “queen of the sciences,” being at their core; teaching that morality and politics ultimately depend upon religion; and seeing this entire intellectual enterprise as nothing but a humble service to God and to the Church that is his Body. St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the most impressive and influential philosophers and theologians in history, who with his great skill in logical argument still baffles us today, represented the ideal of Catholic intellectual life better than any other. Having written thousands of pages of philosophical proofs, commentaries on the books of the Bible, treatises and sermons, while also teaching at the University of Paris and advising popes, this giant of thought in his last years remarked that all his work seemed just “like straw” to him. Earthly knowledge was worth nothing in comparison with what he really wanted to know—God. Aquinas was one of the truly great minds of all times; but he was an equally great man of prayer. His abiding devotion to the Eucharist and to the Blessed Trinity made him write the hymns we still sing at Adoration and Benediction today. Analytical thinking and a comprehensive knowledge of the classics went along well with the humble faith in revelation and the pious devotion characteristic of a truly great scholar.

The momentous reform movement that started under Pope Gregory VII and that culminated nearly 200 years later in Aquinas has thus generated something new and very beautiful—the vision that reason and faith, freedom and morality, grace and nature, are not opposites but belong together. This was the founding principle of Catholic education. It does not pull the world apart into sections which are then studied separately; it always retains a view of the whole, of the

entire web of reality as God has created it, in which nature informs morality and in which the moral life, since it conforms to what we are *meant* to be as creatures in God’s image, is also beautiful.

Fast forward now to Pope John Paul II, who expressed the principles of the intellectual life as it should be cultivated in Catholic higher education in his great encyclical letter *Fides et ratio* (1998) on the relationship between faith and reason. Consider only the first sentence: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.” This great pope, who was an influential professor of philosophy in Poland before being made a bishop and whose sainthood will be declared in April of 2014, expressed in a single sentence the project of Catholic education—to understand the truth about ourselves and the world around us by understanding God in whose image we have been created. So the goal of all our studying is to know the truth about man, the natural world, society, business, our political life, and lastly about God. He has ordered our perceptual reality in a particular way; we want to understand the laws that rule it in order better to serve him and our fellow men. Education then has a *clear purpose*. Consider now a second sentence, also by John Paul II, from the Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1990): “A Catholic University’s privileged task is ‘to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth.’” This pronouncement takes papal teaching one important step further—not only must we search for the truth, but also we already *know* where to find it: in Jesus Christ, who Himself *is* the truth (“I am the way, the truth, and the life”—Jn 14:6). This, then, is the full project of Catholic education: being Catholic by researching all we can know about everything that merits knowing; being Catholic by standing in a tradition that originates with Jesus Christ and, through him, reaches back to the Old Covenant; being Catholic by passing on our findings to future generations in the best way we can, where some methods (such as memorization and acquiring skills in reasoning, writing, and speaking) will be permanent and others (such as the use of laboratory instruments and of electronic publishing) will complement them;

being Catholic by turning to our Lord as the fount of all truth; and being Catholic by carrying out this noble task within the community of the Church, which herself is called to be the guardian of this entire enterprise.

This is the lofty ideal. As men and women of faith, and even only as thinking people of good will, we should immediately realize *why* this vision, which our ancestors have maintained for nearly a thousand years, is worth saving; it fits our calling; it fits our limited intellects that yet try to understand the infinite; it fits our sinful lives that can still be turned into something better; it fits our desire to know more about our world despite our weak senses; and it fits our frail nature that yet harbors a divine spark. It is a vision that is suited for man yet centered on God at the same time, and no other model of education can truly claim this. Its success is manifest: under this model, the greatest discoveries, inventions, and artistic creations in history have been made. Generations of hungry minds were given worldly and spiritual nourishment, and the necessary connection between the two became clear to them. Western civilization, which until the Reformation was largely identical with Catholic culture, and which has at least been dominated by it until recent times, was built under this very model. Many of the old Catholic universities, such as my former employer, Queen's College at Oxford, still show signs of their Catholic foundation, such as quadrangles modelled on monastic cloisters, kneelers attached to the wood paneling in fellows' quarters, Gothic architecture, and numerous chapels. They remind us that the two orders we inhabit, the temporal and the spiritual realm, must be united for us to achieve wholeness as human beings and for our societies to reflect, however dimly, what it means to live in the household of God (1 Tim 3:15; Eph 2:19).

How do we apply all this in everyday education? Consider an example from a field which on the surface seems to be rather far from the Catholic tradition, namely, the study of business. The two challenges John Paul II described—finding the truth while already knowing its fount—can easily be applied to teaching and research in business administration. Let me try to explain this.

There are objective truths about business, what works and what does not, what is good and what is bad. They are rooted in human nature. Here are three examples from marketing:

- To increase the price of a product substantially without increasing benefits for consumers works

only if competition is weak; otherwise consumers will simply leave.

- New products have a higher chance of success on the market if they have gone through product testing and test marketing before being launched.
- Customers are less motivated by product features alone than by the benefits these features offer them.

All of these are rather commonsense principles. They reflect truths about how consumers and producers think and act. We can discover many more such principles and find out which business practices work best under which conditions. We thereby uncover the laws of human perception, thinking, and valuation. This requires admitting that there is a reality to business as a human practice in the first place that is not dependent on our arbitrary arrangements and that therefore is outside the sphere of the human will. The realm of business, too, is well ordered, and it is possible to find out which decisions are *better* and which are *worse*. But being better or worse not only refers to their effects. Here we must add another insight from the treasure trove of the Catholic tradition: decisions we make in business as in everyday life are *good* or *bad* not because they have particular consequences such as producing more revenue or reducing our risk. They are good because they are made by people of *virtue* who direct them toward a *good end*. It is a good end to develop and sell products that make the life of consumers easier, that allow our children to learn, that facilitate communication among friends across continents, that save us time we do not have to spend on chores but can devote to our families and neighbors, and that serve our role as stewards of God's very, very good Creation.

And this is where the fount of truth comes in. The right end of our actions in business is to grow into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Business must in this sense not be isolated from our family, personal, and spiritual lives. Yes, we have our jobs to do—to manage a bank, sell automobiles, produce packaging material, or develop logistics strategies—and thus to make our world better in manifold ways, for customers, employees, and society at large. But to *perform best* at our jobs we need to know the *standard of goodness*, and for Christians this is simply Christ. Executives and managers who know and follow our Lord's teachings, live within the Church, and abide by the morality that revelation, the natural law, and our reason itself makes manifest to

us, *will be better at their jobs*. They may or may not be more effective, but they will always be better by creating more value. Every decision we make in business thus has not only an ethical but also a religious aspect, and it reveals who we are as persons in our relationship not only to one another but also to God.

What is the point of this excursion into business? To prove that here, too, the search for truth cannot be divorced from the fount of truth. Catholic universities must study how business is best conducted; but in referring to goodness, it must not only go by our human values but also consider what standards God has set for us. Why, then, not begin a new semester, even in courses on as mundane a subject as marketing or international business, the prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas for Scholars, which places all our learning and research, teaching and advising, into the loving grace of God, who has created the world we seek to study, including the world of commerce?

What now is the present reality of Catholic higher education, in a brief but truthful synthesis? Alas, we have strayed, woefully strayed from the ideal that has gradually developed since the time of Pope Gregory VII and that has been the backbone of Western civilization. Let me just list some facts:

1. Our universities have abandoned the unity of knowledge in favor of an extreme specialization into disciplines that continue to break down into subdisciplines. Most of the big questions that were the mainstay of the intellectual enterprise are no longer being asked, and if they are, they are answered no differently from how they are at secular universities.
2. Faith has been, and continues to be, driven out of Catholic campuses. The power of liturgy as a tool first to build a community and then to help it grow in religion is mostly ignored. Catechesis and evangelization are anathema; ecumenism rules supreme, even at the cost of withdrawing traditional Catholic identity. Instead of an institution as such being Catholic in every aspect of its life, faith has been relegated to small islands just to satisfy the dwindling numbers of inveterate Catholic students. "Yes, we are Catholic, we offer Mass on campus every Sunday and have a Peace and Justice Center" is the slogan of many Catholic universities. The unity of faith and reason that John Paul II and Benedict XVI advocated is at best confined to mission statements.

3. Curricula no longer aspire to engage students in the perennial questions about nature, mankind, history, morality, the meaning of life, society, death, and God. They certainly do not dare give Christian answers, for this would amount to propagating a "hegemonistic" worldview. Catholic universities have deliberately cut off links to their rich tradition of bridging faith and science. They are not only in this world but also of it.
4. Catholic faculty members have become a disappearing minority, and those who remain are no longer able or willing to integrate their faith into their classes, their research, their service, and their advising. The few remaining hold-outs are becoming lonely, increasingly isolated from the centers of influence in their institutions, and sometimes even embattled.
5. Theology has long lost its role as the "queen of sciences" that should integrate and guide what we are doing in the various disciplines. In some Catholic universities, the theology requirement can be fulfilled by taking a course on Buddhism, on the Bible as literature, or on "constructing gender."
6. Catholic students show no difference from others in their attitudes toward life and morality. Several studies have shown that on questions such as abortion, homosexuality, and sexual conduct, they are slightly more permissive than the average American student. According to one recent survey among Catholic students at 128 Catholic colleges and universities, 60 percent said abortion should be legal; 60 percent said that premarital sex is not a sin; 57 percent said that same-sex "marriage" should be legal; but only 23 percent were drawn to the sacraments. Not all of this is, of course, attributable to influences while at the university; high schools, parishes, and families must share the blame.
7. God has largely been driven out of the academic enterprise. With few exceptions, Catholic universities do not encourage students, faculty, and staff to pray together, particularly at Mass, do not display symbols such as the crucifix or statues of the Virgin Mary or of saints anywhere outside the chapel, and do not make any effort to bring campus members to the faith or to strengthen it. In most cases, the Christian message is no longer regarded as intellectually reputable and worthy of consideration. Too many Catholic universities are now Catholic in name only.

In case you are wondering: alas, St. Norbert College shares in most of these developments. It is, without betraying too much insider information at which the Securities and Exchange Commission might look askance, *not* the worst offender; but it is also *not* a shining example for Catholic higher education. Our college rather goes with the flow, and the flow goes away from the lofty ideal I sketched earlier. I invoke St. Norbert of Xanten, this great supporter of the religious and intellectual flourishing that started under Pope Gregory VII, to pray for us.

But why, oh why, has Catholic higher education strayed *so much* that many parts are no longer recognizably Catholic? This is obviously a complex question, and yet it can be reduced to one simple answer: Instead of convincing the secular world that we Catholics have something *profound, good, beautiful*, and, most of all, *true* to offer that can enrich all aspects of all lives, we have accommodated—thoroughly and pitifully accommodated—to the secular fashion of the day. Over the past decades in this country, there have been a guiding principle of thought and a guiding principle of practice that have trumped all others. In thought, it has been—and still is—relativism in its many forms. Catholic universities have become anxious not to dwell on the idea that there may be truths to be known about biology, society, or God; it is all a matter of perspective, of opinion, of individual feeling. Many professors in Catholic universities no longer admit that there *is* a reality that exists independently of us, since everything—including our sex—is held to be “socially constructed.” Based on this all-pervasive relativism, the guiding principle of all public life has been that of increasing diversity. The categories of diversity have changed, but whatever the diversity *du jour* may be—at the moment it is homosexuality—there is no foundation for it in Christian thought, and particularly not in Catholic thought, which is by its very name “directed at the whole.” Hundreds of times have I explained to students and to faculty colleagues, typically not to the delight of the latter, that Catholics always want more diversity than even the most obstinate, left-leaning, Yale-trained sociologist: we strive toward a diversity of one, the most radical form, because we see each and every human being of whatever race, class, sex, or nationality as a God-breathed individual: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Nonetheless, relativism (sometimes disguised as pluralism or whatever

else) and diversity by groups are now the mantras of Catholic universities just as much as of state-run ones, cause what canon law calls scandal. On the other hand, Catholic universities contribute precious little to what the Church now regards as its most pressing task, namely the New Evangelization. Which Catholic university has offered their bishop its faculty in theology, philosophy, or any of the other disciplines, to go out and spread the Good News by the power of their arguments and the strength of their personal witness?

It is often said that it takes a community—and not only the parents alone—to raise a child, which in no way belittles parental rights but emphasizes that what the good parents do can easily be offset by evil influences coming from the wider community. By analogy, let me say: *it takes a Church to raise a Catholic university*. We all have, in different senses and to varying degrees, the responsibility for the present state of Catholic higher education. Our sins of omission—what we have failed to do—are often more serious than our sins of commission—what we have done. Catholic families can be blamed for no longer sending their children to Catholic universities and thus withdrawing financial resources from them. Administrators can be blamed for blindly following secular models of education, as the supposedly “best practice,” in order to gain respectability and move up in university rankings published by two or three magazines. Sponsoring religious institutes can be blamed for having failed to exercise proper oversight, often because they have withdrawn from campuses due to falling membership. Bishops can be blamed for not devoting the attention to Catholic higher education that this important sector of the Church deserves and badly needs. However this may be: *Finger-pointing is not a solution, it only aggravates the problem*. We are all frail, imperfect, pusillanimous, erring, sinful beings. I blame myself for not having done more, with my limited means, to have given the roughly 2,000 students I must have served by now, at several universities in seven countries, a *better* education. “Better,” as I said earlier, pertains not only to laws of economics, methods of statistics, or facts of business, but also to the purpose and meaning of it all. Now that I teach at a Catholic institution, why do I, even though I may be the only one to do so, *not* have the courage to start every lecture with a short prayer calling upon the Holy Spirit to guide us as we try to understand man’s options to do God’s work, in business as elsewhere? Why do I sometimes find it more convenient to refer a student who seeks my advice on personal troubles to some expert instead

of offering my time, sympathy, experience, and prayer? Why do I never talk with my colleagues about God? If Catholic universities have gone astray, I have done some of the straying. The holy sacrifice of the Mass, as we all know, starts with the *Confiteor*; and it brings us back into communion with God.

Let me return to the beginning of my talk and arrive at a conclusion on how Catholic higher education can be saved. At the time of Gregory VII, in the second half of the eleventh century, the Church was in a state of dissolution. The Gregorian Reform was highly successful by establishing order within the Church, thereby strengthening its position in the world and vis-à-vis the emperor, not by discipline alone, and certainly not by military might, but by giving a new impetus to Catholic culture through education. Scholars were to find new forms of presenting and defending the faith through reason and argument; subsequently, scientists were to discover unknown areas of reality and describe the laws that govern them; and teachers were to pass on what we know about God, man, and the world to future generations. The process that started nearly a thousand years ago is by no means completed; in fact, it will never be completed in *this* world. Ironically, today this model of Catholic education is still not surpassed; yet it has largely been abandoned. To recover it, we need a new Gregorian Reform—or maybe a Franciscan Reform. Dead branches may need to be cut off the tree of Catholic education for the living parts not to be deprived of sap. The healthy branches may need extra propping to develop faster and more bountifully. And since it takes a Church to raise a Catholic university, Catholic higher education must seek reintegration into the Church instead of continuing along the path of increasing autonomy that it has taken over the past fifty years. Concretely, here are some suggestions what this reform may require, although I will not present a complete recipe book:

- The Church should dissociate itself from universities which are Catholic in name only and have no

will to change their course. It is better to have a smaller number of committed institutions than a larger group whose composition only confuses the Catholic faithful.

- Of those universities that are willing to remain Catholic, a greater commitment to the priorities of the Church, and to Catholic doctrine and morality, can be expected. This will apply to student enrollment, hiring and promotion, residential life, and the curriculum.
- The Catholic faithful must be expected to support these universities to a greater degree than they have done over recent years. Universities need students, faculty, staff, and the financial means to render the service to the Church to which they are uniquely called. But it is not only money that will be necessary for continuing on the grand journey of a thousand years. It is also referrals, media coverage, networking with civic organizations and with companies, internships and jobs for graduates, and simply interest in the work of Catholic universities that every faithful can bring to the table. It takes a Church.
- The pastors and the hierarchy of the Church must be invited into academe rather than being treated as unwelcome bystanders. *Ex corde ecclesiae* specifically states that the local bishop is not an “external agent” but an integral part of the life of a Catholic university (*Ex corde ecclesiae*, Part I, 28).
- Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is the understanding that Catholic higher education has a clear mission that comes from Christ himself: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). The Catholic university of the eleventh century understood this mission and was faithful to it. Since that time the Catholic university has been one of the greatest achievements of Western civilization. Let us not abandon it. ✠



Revelation and Authority

Preamble of Faith and an Epistemology of Testimony

CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE WITH G. C. BERKOUWER

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Abstract:

The Christian faith presupposes certain truths of reason and of history. These presuppositions figure into the meaning of the notion of *praeambula fidei*, and hence raise the question of the relation between the authority of revelation and human reason. The Thomistic tradition, where this notion figures prominently in its account of the rationality of the Christian faith, is typically charged with rationalism. In this article, I refute this charge against Thomism, and the Catholic tradition, which is made, for one, by the great Dutch master of dogmatic and ecumenical theology, G. C. Berkouwer (1903–1996). Additionally, the theological epistemology of the Catholic tradition holds that certain revealed truths are believed to be true, not because we perceive their intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason (no, they are not evident to the human mind), but because of the authority of God himself. This claim has often been charged with an authoritarian view of divine revelation and a corresponding heteronomous view of faith, that is, a so-called positivism of revelation. Here, too, Berkouwer makes these charges. I refute his charges by developing an epistemology of testimony as integral to a theology of faith. It is my contention that Berkouwer’s careful and nuanced examination of Catholic theology—as well as possible responses to his critiques—offers important clues for the contemporary ecumenical project.

Introduction

Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903–1996) was a great master of dogmatic and ecumenical theology, a Reformed Protestant thinker, with roots in Dutch neo-Calvinism, and a holder of the Chair in Dogmatics (1945–1974) at the Free University, Amsterdam, a position previously held by his two illustrious neo-Calvinist predecessors, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). He was also the author of an eighteen-volume work, *Dogmatische Studiën* (1949–1972), and of a highly regarded study and trenchant critique of Karl Barth, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (1954). Barth himself describes Berkouwer’s study as “a great book on myself and the *Church Dogmatics*.”

Lastly, Berkouwer wrote five substantial studies on Catholicism. Before Vatican II, he wrote *The Struggle with Roman Catholic Dogma* (1940), *Conflict with Rome* (1948; ET: 1957), and *New Perspectives in the Rome-Reformation Controversy* (1957). Furthermore, he wrote a major study on the Second Vatican Council in 1964, during his participation at the Council as a personal guest of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and another study in 1968 examining the documents of the Council. The former study, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* (1964; ET: 1965), was published midway through the council and gave a Reformed theological assessment of the influence of the *nouvelle théologie* (De Lubac, Congar, Daniélou, Chenu, and others) on Vatican II. The Dutch historian of the Reformation and Reformed theologian Heiko Oberman (1930–2001) describes Berkouwer’s first book on Vatican II as “breathtakingly important.” The second study, *Retrospective of the Council*, examines the Council as a whole and its definitive

decisions as expressed in its various documents (Constitutions, Decrees and Declarations).

Although I refute Berkouwer's charges against the Catholic tradition, it is nevertheless my contention that Berkouwer's careful and nuanced examination of Catholic theology—as well as possible responses to his critiques—offers important clues for the contemporary ecumenical project. Ecumenical dialogue requires the mutual understanding of the views of the parties in dialogue. "Study is absolutely required for this, and should be pursued with fidelity to truth and in a spirit of good will," Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, rightly states. One of the aims of this article is to understand Berkouwer's Reformed analysis of the relation between revelation and authority and hence his objections to the Catholic tradition. Doing so will help us to express the Catholic faith in a way that is not only faithful to the Catholic tradition but also helpful to dialogue with Reformed theologians such as Berkouwer.¹

Preamble of Faith

Berkouwer considers the question regarding the reasonableness of assenting to biblical authority. He explicitly resists the charge that "faith's response to God's revelation is nothing more than a *blind* submission, a *blind* trust without any insight into what is believed and accepted."² On the one hand, Berkouwer holds that there is no place in our understanding of faith for sacrificing the intellect when that means eliminating human thought and insight. How, then, on the other hand, was the idea of sacrificing the intellect ever taken seriously?

Limiting myself to Catholic theology, in answering "the question *why* something is believed" a distinction is made in this tradition "between the motive of credibility (the reason for holding that the witness is sufficiently credible and that he in fact testifies to something) and the real motive of faith, that is, the sole authority of God, who is truth itself, incapable of deceiving anyone when he reveals himself."³ In this light, we can answer Berkouwer's question of why the sacrifice of the intellect was ever taken seriously. The answer to this question is, briefly, that one believes on the authority of God the revealer and not on the basis of reason. So, then, on the other hand, "[t]he answer to this question depends on the fact that in the arena of faith people did not intend to exclude all thought and reflection, but that they definitely did *not* want faith as

accepting, embracing, and affirming the truth to depend on rational insight, but on the authority of revelation itself."⁴ The point here is a familiar one, and Vatican I clearly makes it. Regarding the mysteries of faith, divine truths, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atoning Work of Christ, the Church, and so forth, the supernatural virtue of faith, which is the beginning of man's salvation, is required. "Whereby," the Dogmatic Decree of Vatican I adds, "inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that the things which he has revealed are true; not because of the intrinsic truth of the things, viewed by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who reveals them, and who can neither be deceived nor deceive."⁵ In other words, these truths are not evident to the intellect; they are true and we can know them to be true by faith, and the real ground of faith is the authority of the God who reveals himself.

The Council approaches the question of faith accepting certain things to be true from the perspective of an authoritative revelation, upon which the acceptance of those truths is grounded. Says Berkouwer, "Submission can only be correlated with divine revelation. There can be no thought whatsoever of any critical verification in light of this *a priori* authority. The first Vatican Council expressed the matter in a way that made clear that people are entirely dependent on God and that their '*ratio creata*' is completely subordinate to eternal, uncreated truth."⁶ The real ground and motive of the act of faith is the authority of the God who reveals himself and not the external motives of credibility that provides reasons for faith. The authority of God grounds the act of faith rather than being just one additional external motive of credibility. Brownsberger correctly notes, "The authority of God is that by which one believes, not that in consideration of which one believes."⁷ Therefore, adds Berkouwer, "Faith is bound to revelation and submission and therein is faith's acceptance based on that alone, '*propter auctoritatem*.'"⁸

Still, Berkouwer remarks critically that the problem of authority and reason is not resolved here because the Council decree states that the submission of faith to the authority of the revealing God is in *accordance with reason*. Yes, a Catholic theology of the act of faith holds that this act is essentially supernatural, but it is also reasonable. Clearly, then, the Council Fathers were concerned to legitimize—in avoidance of fideism—the credibility of the historical revelation of the Christian faith from the viewpoint of human reason. *Dei filius* states the need for the external motives of credibility

because “the assent of faith is by no means a blind impulse of the mind.” Thus, “it was God’s will that there should be linked to the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit external indications of his revelation, that is to say divine acts, and first and foremost miracles and prophecies, which clearly demonstrating as they do the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are the most certain signs of revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.”⁹ The role of these exterior proofs or signs is that a historical apologetic establishes these signs of credibility as signs of God’s revelation. What signs of credibility does the Council have in mind?

Well, clearly a miraculous event like the Resurrection of Jesus would count as a sign accrediting God’s testimony. But how does one establish the judgment of credibility that this event is indeed a “sign” as such provided by God’s historical revelation? Although the Council decree leaves that question open, I venture to say that a historical apologetic would suffice that establishes the historicity of the events, such as the burial of Jesus, the empty tomb, Jesus postmortem appearances, and the genesis of the disciples’ belief that God had raised Jesus from the dead, as that which undergirds a historical inference to the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection.¹⁰ Of course these signs are facts bearing meaning; otherwise we would just have sheer facticity, and so the content of revelation to which they testify is itself the original theological meaning of the signs themselves. John Paul II explains, “These signs also urge reason to look beyond their status as signs in order to grasp the deeper meaning which they bear. They contain a hidden truth to which the mind is drawn and which it cannot ignore without destroying the very signs which it is given.”¹¹ In sum, revelation presents the resurrection as a historical event with metahistorical meaning, to paraphrase Aidan Nichols.¹² Consider the description of event-plus-theological-interpretation, which is the wider significance inhering in the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection, given by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The question remains to be asked regarding the relation between the judgment of credibility and the act of faith. For to judge rationally that the historical events are credibly to be seen as signs of God’s revelatory acts in history is “*not yet to make the act of supernatural faith.*”¹³ “Faith is supernatural because it is only made possible by a supernatural interior grace.”¹⁴ Thus, there is also the necessity of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit since “no man can assent to the Gospel teaching, as is necessary to obtain salvation, without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all men sweetness in assenting to and believing in the truth.”¹⁵ These two elements are, then, essential to the act of faith: the exterior sign and the interior grace by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The epistemological significance of the Holy Spirit is not that this illumination and inspiration is an additional cognitive source of revealed truth. Rather, since the external motives of credibility on their own cannot move a person toward faith, the inward certainty regarding the truth of divine revelation is accomplished only by the Spirit of God “who moves us inwardly by his grace.” As Aquinas explains: “Because it is not only exterior or objective revelation which has a power of attraction, but also the interior instinct impelling and moving me to belief, therefore the Father draws many to the Son by the interior instinct of the divine operation moving the heart of man to believe.”¹⁶

The judgment of credibility regarding the external signs of revelation history belongs to the *praecambula fidei*. We may speak here of a “historical faith” but not yet of “saving faith.” There should be no opposition between these two. For of course the latter logically presupposes the former so that we can say that saving faith includes not only historical knowledge but also the saving knowledge that “if Christ has not been raised from the dead, my faith is futile and I am still in my sins” (1 Cor 15:18). Now, Berkouwer rejects the claim that saving faith is *preceded* by “the preliminaries or presuppositions of faith” that here pertain, in the first place, to the historical faith that rests upon the judgment of credibility regarding the signs provided by the history of revelation and that accredit the testimony of revelation. “It is out of the question that there first has to be an act of *assensus* in which there is total assent—following historical verification, if necessary—to a kind of historical faith (*fides historica*) which would

then expand into a saving faith (*fides salvifica*), and that the two *together* would then form the one Christian faith.”¹⁷

In this passage, Berkouwer rejects the idea that the saving knowledge of God’s acts in history is *preceded* by historical knowledge of the external signs of salvation history as preambles of faith. The point here is *not* that Berkouwer denies the fundamental significance of history for faith, say, that the resurrection actually happened in space and time. Rather, Berkouwer denies that faith rests upon historical evidence that establishes the historicity of the events, such as the empty tomb, Jesus’ postmortem appearances, and the genesis of the disciples’ belief that God had raised Jesus from the dead, as that which undergirds a historical inference to the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection, which then results in an acceptance of this fact, indeed, this “sign” of revelation history, that is called historical faith. But how can the distinction between the resurrection “actually happened” and yet “cannot be grasped historically” be upheld?¹⁸ It cannot be upheld. This is not because my acceptance of the resurrection would follow from my fashioning an historical apologetic that establishes the credibility of the signs of God’s revelation. Rather, it is because the truth of the resurrection could not stand if it were definitely disproved that Jesus rose from the dead. It is the possibility of being open to falsification that we find the source of the believer’s interest, as believer, in the external motives of credibility.¹⁹

Why does Berkouwer oppose the claim that the external signs of revelation history belong to the *praeambula fidei*? The answer to this question can be found in Berkouwer’s theology of faith. He refers us to Lord’s Day 7, Question 21, of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, which asks, “What is true faith?” The answer the *Catechism* gives is as follows: “True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, (a) but also an assured confidence, (b) which the Holy Ghost (c) works by the gospel in my heart; (d) that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, (e) are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”²⁰ Berkouwer then remarks:

The “faith” in the prophets that Paul presupposes Agrippa has (Acts 26:27) is not *half* of that knowledge and trust concerning which the Catechism talks in explaining true faith. This acceptance is not an isolated pre-supposition of faith to which the “*pro nobis*” is then *added* as application. This is true because the

“informative” dimension itself of this knowledge is not given as an isolated “announcement” of a brute fact, but as the disclosure of the meaning and inherent aspect of the saving event itself. So, the interpretation is not something added that factually ought not to be tied to the events themselves. Paul talks about the death of Christ *for our sins*—according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3), so that one can say that people do not know the *fact*—in an act of assenting, accepting—if they separate or isolate it from this aspect.²¹

Berkouwer’s theology of faith consists in giving an account of faith as an integral act involving knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*). In the concluding sentence of this passage, Berkouwer seems to deny any rational access to the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus as an event of history. The reason for this denial is that Berkouwer rejects as rationalistic any attempts to ground faith historically in an objective event. In other words, such attempts would make faith dependent on reason.²² The issue here is *not* that Berkouwer denies that the Christian faith rests on the truth of a historical revelation, of events that actually happened, with the act of faith involving, logically if not temporally, assenting (*assensus*), knowledge (*notitia*), and acceptance of certain historical truths. Rather, the issue is that this approach that distinguishes historical faith from saving faith results in the treatment of the signs of credibility as essentially extrinsically related to the content of revelation to which they testify. In other words, a judgment of credibility, according to Berkouwer, leaves us with historical information of “brute facts,” meaning thereby facts without significance. Berkouwer rejects the extraneous nature of this connection between historical judgment and the act of faith that makes possible the knowledge that the revelation is itself the inherent meaning of the signs, what the signs signify. Since the revelation is itself the significance of the signs, we cannot know the fact of Jesus’ resurrection without seeing its intrinsic relation to that revelation.

Whenever faith is considered as assent, knowledge, and holding something to be true, it is impossible to isolate or highlight these aspects in abstraction from the central reality of the heart’s assent. Without this central reality, acceptance, assent, holding something to be true, loses its specifically Christian character. Christian faith is only rightly understood in terms of the connection between the informative and inherent meaning of saving events because this is the way the gospel’s call is extended to people—one could say as assent, adherence, cognition, trust, and obedience.²³

But it seems to me that Berkouwer misunderstands the external motives of credibility. The historical judgment purports to establish not only that events such as the resurrection actually happened, brute facts, as it were, but also that they are indeed “signs” of credibility regarding revelation history to which they testify. In other words, these signs of credibility establish not only “the historical actuality of the fact of revelation” but also “the meaning of its content.”²⁴ So they are not in danger of losing their specifically Christian meaning, as Berkouwer suggests in the above quotation. Yes, *pace* Berkouwer, it is historical reason which initially established the status of these events as signs, and not just as things that merely happened—though one must not underestimate the value of this historical evidence for faith—but “these signs also urge reason to look beyond their status as signs in order to grasp the deeper meaning which they bear.” “They contain a hidden truth to which the mind is drawn,” John Paul II adds, “and which it cannot ignore without destroying the very signs which it is given.”²⁵ This, too, is Berkouwer’s point in the above quotation. But unlike Berkouwer, John Paul thinks—in line with Vatican I and II—that we can show that the act of faith is reasonable because of the external motives of credibility: there is historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. For Berkouwer faith’s knowledge of the resurrection is “excluded altogether from the domain of proof, of evidence and hence of rationality.”²⁶ But Berkouwer cannot consistently posit such a break between faith’s knowledge that something actually happened and historical evidence regarding the resurrection, since if that knowledge is making assertions about objective reality, as he surely holds it is, then, it must be open to falsification by historical evidence. Hence, the import of using historical evidence to build a reasonable case supporting a judgment of credibility that we have here a sign provided by revelation history.

Positivism of Revelation

There is another reason to consider why Berkouwer opposes the external motives of credibility. He understands that the grounds of credibility do not prove faith itself but rather establish its credibility by showing that the consent to faith is reasonable. Berkouwer gives a clear explanation as to why the external motives of credibility do not bring into question the authority of God himself. He writes:

Vatican I also concludes from this “*propter [auctoritatem ipsius Dei revelantis]*” against holding to *blind* faith, but involves itself with the issue of the *why* of faith. Certainly, God’s authority as “*summe verax*” [perfectly truthful] is of decisive significance. But granted this genesis of faith, people then go on to reflect on the credibility of revelation [motives of credibility]. In other words, they go on to reflect on the nature and content of revelation, illuminating it within the horizon of human existence. In this way, one can distinguish between the actual foundation for faith (divine authority) and the issue of *faith’s credibility* that does play a role in believing. People cannot rest completely on the concept of formal authority [*“propter auctoritatem ipsius Dei revelantis”*], arriving automatically at a closer reflection on the necessity for ‘the light of faith’ that in turn produces acceptance of divine revelation. Rather, in their concrete situation, people realize that they are confronted with a unique authority that calls them to make a definite choice.²⁷

Now, since supernatural faith does not rest on human testimony of the judgments of credibility but rather on divine testimony, namely, the authority of the God who reveals himself, the question raised by this view of divine authority as expressed by Vatican I, says Berkouwer, is that the assent of faith seems “severed from the content of the message of salvation: it has no inner affinity with this message.”²⁸ Yes, the decree makes clear that there are motives of credibility showing that the “assent of faith is by no means a blind action of the mind.” These motives of credibility establish the rationality of believing and hence the credibility of these signs as God’s revelation. But those motives only justify the reasonableness of believing *that* something has been revealed and *why* it should be believed—in short, its formal authority; they do not provide, however, an “inner conviction” regarding *what* has been revealed, its material authority, namely, “the object and content of faith to which man is called.”²⁹ In short, Berkouwer is raising here an objection that held the attention of some of the best minds in Catholic theology of the early twentieth century (Maurice Blondel, Ambroise Gardeil, and Pierre Rousselot), namely, the “signs of credibility seem essentially extraneous to the revelation to which they testify.”³⁰ As a consequence, Berkouwer argues, faith is, then, reduced to the act of assenting to the truths that must be blindly believed and accepted on authority. This is a treacherous route, he claims, not because the authority of God and of his revelation has an inappropriate significance in the correlation between

faith and revelation, but rather because “the formal and material authority of revelation are separated, and faith is placed in the framework of an abstract acceptance of authority.”³¹ *Deus dixit*, and that settles it. Berkouwer’s critique of Vatican I focuses on what he regards, following Bonhoeffer, as a *positivism of revelation* and the corresponding act of faith, understood as the mere assent and acceptance of incomprehensible and equally significant truths, “a necessary part of the whole, which must simply be swallowed as a whole or not at all.”³² Throughout his post-1968 writings he often cites Bonhoeffer’s critique of Karl Barth’s “revelation positivism.”³³ What is the point of this criticism?

Now, whenever Bonhoeffer talks about the “positivism of revelation,” a conception of faith is indicated—resulting in the dogmatic methodology—in which various “truths” are accepted on the basis of *revelation* and not on the basis of ecclesial authority. . . . In this sort of faith-appropriation, according to Bonhoeffer, “*ein Gesetz der Glaubens*” is created: one is simply *compelled* to accept various truths. In this critique, Bonhoeffer is concerned about not only a dogmatic view of “the faith,” but also sees in the positivism of revelation—embracing a number of revealed truths in a leveling manner—the positing of a world that is left to itself; “*das ist ihr Fehler*” because *that* kind of embracing of truths does not involve the *world* with which it is *immediately* and *actually* connected. . . . A dualism arises that can no longer find a way to the world. . . . In the background of Bonhoeffer’s critique there is a leveling “acceptance” of the truths of revelation without the “*Stufen der Erkenntnis und Stufen der Bedeutsamkeit*” [“substance of discernment and the substance of meaning”], and therefore, on the basis of *the quality of such authority*, may not be doubted or questioned. Bonhoeffer sees *such* truths obviously functioning as impediments, as stumbling blocks. Here there is no thought of understanding *meaning* and therefore of a direction giving relatedness to such truths. The “*prop-ter auctoritatem [ipsius Dei revelantis]*” is in danger of becoming purely formal because an understanding of the truth is erased, and faith assumes the function of “accepting truths,” that is, faith as *assent*.³⁴

In the above passage, Berkouwer is arguing that the view of authority represented by Vatican I is a heteronomous view of authority with a corresponding authoritarian view of faith. “At issue is the notion of faith as an assent to certain truths. We are dealing with a concept of faith that makes the object of faith heteronomous, foreign to man’s nature, and remaining foreign while

one keeps believing.”³⁵ In short, faith on the basis of authority seems to leave us, Berkouwer adds, with a “formal authority that can and must be believed no matter what words are spoken.”³⁶ We are left, then—and this is the upshot of Berkouwer’s critique of this authoritarian view of faith—with truth being understood as an irrational “foreign body” in the world, without “testifying, appellative, and verifying force.”³⁷ Berkouwer’s problem is not that some people “speak of the authority of God and of the definitive meaning of his revelation, but rather that they separate the formal and material [“content”] authority of revelation and then place faith in a framework where it is taken to mean acceptance of authority isolated from the content of revelation.”³⁸ Berkouwer, therefore, concludes that this view of biblical authority leaves us with a mere formal authority, a heteronomous power, or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it, a “positivist doctrine of revelation which says, in effect, ‘Like it or lump it,’”³⁹ whereby man is reduced by God’s Word (“*Deus dixit*”) to passivity, blind submission, and in which a concept of faith is rendered as a sacrifice of the intellect, blind faith, not allowing any insight, understanding, or response on man’s part. Berkouwer is right that this view entails a “dangerous view of faith.”⁴⁰ The only question is whether his critique of Vatican I is accurate, namely, that basing faith’s knowledge of God on authority is heteronomous.

Let me be clear that Berkouwer is not questioning Vatican I’s emphasis on God’s authority. In other words, he, too, holds that theological faith is based on that authority as its ultimate motive and formal object. Berkouwer’s position on authority and experience does not imply a “subjectification of authority, which might only become reality through acknowledgment.”⁴¹ Rather, he says, “faith is not founded on human reliability but on the explicit authority of God himself, the deep foundation of all apostolic authority.”⁴²

Let me also make it clear that Berkouwer does not reject a propositional view of faith—as long as we do not understand faith *first and last* to mean only holding certain propositions to be true, then Berkouwer has no difficulty taking the act of “faith’s assent-function to mean that it must believe and accept certain truths.”⁴³ Says Berkouwer, “There is no reason to reject the words ‘assent’, ‘acceptance’, or ‘hold to be true’. All these terms are meaningful and legitimate as long as they are maintained in the right framework, which is to say as long as they are not separated from the content of revelation.”⁴⁴ Put differently, Berkouwer agrees (in my own terms) that theological faith involves

holding certain propositions to be true, holding them to be divinely revealed, and holding them because we believe God who reveals them. In short, faith therefore believes what is revealed because of who reveals it.

Still, Berkouwer objects to Vatican I's view of authority because it bases faith's knowledge of God on authority, and on this view the object and content of faith is heteronomous. "For faith," says Berkouwer, "would then be called to a decision without inner conviction regarding the object and content of the faith to which man is called." Berkouwer seeks to counteract this view of God's authority by arguing that "this authority does not exclude experience and man is freely part of it; but *in* the experience the authority is acknowledged and confessed. Scriptural faith is part of this acknowledgment and is manifested in submission and the obedience of faith."⁴⁵ Elsewhere he expresses the correlation between faith and understanding to be such that this correlation is grounded in the unique authority of scripture rather than in that view in which this authority is made to rest on man's insight and understanding, which results in the subjectification of biblical authority.⁴⁶ He adds, "It is the deep dynamic of faith in the authority of Scripture that is daily confirmed *in* understanding and *in* listening." This deep dynamic of faith involves "a faithful listening—*ex auditu Verbi*—that more deeply understands what it hears and therein finds rest."⁴⁷

In this biblical vision, faith is never and nowhere portrayed as an irrational acceptance of the objective content of faith on the basis of authority, whereby the emphasis is more on the "that" than the "what" of revelation. Rather, says Berkouwer, "[r]evelation may never even for a moment be abstracted from the self-revealing God." Indeed, God's gift of himself in revelation involves man "being called to his communion, called to walking in his way, to a faithful listening to his Word. Without this context, faith loses its deepest meaning."⁴⁸ In God's calling humanity to faith, he is called to be "transformed by the renewing of [his] mind" (Rom 12:2). In other words, faith's acceptance of biblical authority means that he

is persuaded [to respond to the gospel] through the reality of the proclaimed content of the gospel so that he is not led to a sacrifice of the intellect but to renewal of his thought (Rom 12: 2), born in the freedom of faith and issuing in gratitude and adoration. We are dealing here with a faith that is not subject to rational yardsticks and needs no approval of rational verification and yet cannot be separated from insight. . . . This faith is no less full of certainty."⁴⁹

But what then is the ground of faith's certainty?

Well, given the distinction between the real ground and motive of faith on the one hand, and the grounds of credibility on the other, we already know that faith's certainty is not derived from the latter. Berkouwer recognizes this distinction's importance in Vatican I's theology of faith. But he charges the Council with a heteronomous view of faith, namely, "faith on the basis of *authority*."⁵⁰ Berkouwer charges that this is a positivist doctrine of revelation's authority, which says, in effect, "Like it or lump it." Walter Kasper has rightly questioned this interpretation of *Dei filius* of Vatican I. He writes:

The Constitution [*Dei filius*] speaks not of *auctoritas Dei imperantis* [God's commanding authority], but of *auctoritas Dei revelantis* [authority of God revealing]. It is not, in other words, a question of pure authority as such. We are not told that God has revealed something and that is that. This kind of [revelation] positivism with regard to faith and this kind of obedience are not in accordance with the teaching of the Church. The certainty of faith is rather based in the evidence and authority of the truth of God. This means that problems of faith cannot be reduced—as they often are nowadays—to problems of obedience. We do not, then, believe the Church. We believe because we are convinced of the truth of the God who reveals himself.⁵¹

Kasper is correctly arguing in this passage that the problem with Berkouwer's interpretation is his understanding of how a person believes on the authority of God. I agree with William Brownsberger that the Council did not "close off discussion about how this authority is to be understood."⁵² As Berkouwer himself rightly remarks, "We must not get caught up in an emotional reaction against such phrases as 'believing on authority.' Everything depends on the character of the authority and the character of believing."⁵³ I will now argue that we can best understand the nature of this authority and the corresponding act of faith in terms of an epistemology of testimony in order to rebut Berkouwer's charge that Vatican I's view of authority is heteronomous. Pared down for my purpose here, I will sketch an account of testimony's role in the acquisition of knowledge, showing that authority is not a "dark-some power that compels us to subject ourselves without reason."⁵⁴

In the concluding sentence of the above quotation of Kasper, he claims that we believe a statement to be

true, and hence possess the certainty of faith, “because we are convinced of the truth of the God who reveals himself.” What does this conviction mean? In other words, what convinces us of the truth of the God who reveals himself? Well, it cannot be that I see for myself the truth of the statements to be believed. Rather, we believe because of the authority of the God who reveals himself. This means that God himself is the source of the credibility of what he reveals and that he is thereby the guarantor of that truth.⁵⁵ What accounts then for our conviction of credibility? Mouroux answers this question: “we *meet* with a person—that explains the certainty of faith.”⁵⁶ In other words, with faith I accept the truth of what God says about himself, and in doing so I not only share in his self-knowledge but also accept the Person who reveals himself through his divine testimony.⁵⁷ This statement needs some unpacking.

What is the nature, place and value of testimony in acquiring knowledge? Helpful in this connection is Kevin Vanhoozer’s succinct definition of testimony, which holds also for our convictions grounded in divine testimony. Enlisting his definition, we can say that testimony is “a speech act in which the witness’s very act of stating *p* is offered as evidence ‘that *p*,’ [is true] it being assumed that the witness has the relevant competence or credentials to state truly ‘that *p*’ [is true].”⁵⁸ This fundamental question is about whether each man should confine himself to what he knows in virtue of what he could in principle find out directly for himself by means of personal experience, insights, and grasp of the truth without relying on anyone else for acquiring knowledge.⁵⁹ As Paul Helm asks, “Besides the things which we get to know for ourselves, are there not many things for which we must rely on others? What about the testimony of others?”⁶⁰ Aquinas already answered Helm’s question regarding human testimony by arguing that human faith, meaning thereby trust in another, is necessary.

And because in human society one person must make use of another just as he does himself in matters in which he is not self-sufficient, he must take his stand on what another knows and is unknown to himself, just as he does on what he himself knows. As a consequence, faith is necessary in human society, one person believing what another says.⁶¹

Elsewhere Aquinas writes in the same vein: “If one were willing to believe only those things which one knows with certitude, one could not live in this world. How could one live unless one believed others?

How could one know that this man is one’s own father? Therefore, it is necessary that one believes others in matters which one cannot know perfectly of oneself.”⁶² Independent verification is, then, not the basis of treating testimony as credible. One person believing what another says, trusting the word of another, involves an element of participating and sharing the knowledge of another.

What is the meaning here of believing what another says? Says John Paul, “‘To believe’ means to accept and to acknowledge as true and corresponding to reality the content of what is said, that is, the content of the words of another person . . . by reason of his . . . credibility. This credibility determines in a given case the particular authority of the person—the authority of truth. So then by saying ‘I believe,’ we express at the same time a double reference: to the person and to the truth; to the truth in consideration of the person who enjoys special claims to credibility.”⁶³ Credibility, then, is “*the property of a testimony*.”⁶⁴ This means that trusting testimony is not an irrational act of faith. For it is the person to whose testimony the assent is given in view of his special claim to credibility, resulting from his possession of the relevant credentials or competence to state truly the truth of the statement.⁶⁵ So, faith does not merely mean believing a proposition, believing that *p* is true, but rather believing a person that what he says about that *p* is true. Faith necessarily involves both a propositional attitude and an attitude toward a person. This, too, is Aquinas’s view. “Whoever believes, assents to someone’s words; hence in every form of belief, the person to whose words assent is given seems to hold the principal place and to be the end, as it were, while the things by holding which one assents to that person hold a secondary place.”⁶⁶ Hence, for Aquinas, “it belongs to faith to believe something and in someone.”⁶⁷

Trusting in the word of another—testimony—by which I participate and share in his knowledge is true of virtually all knowledge, scientific, historical, moral, theological, and many others.⁶⁸ In John Paul’s own words, “there are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification.”⁶⁹ In the case of acquiring knowledge through the testimony of God in his written Word, revelation, here, too, credibility is not separated from testimony. Here, too, I share in God’s knowledge that comes to me from others, but this sharing in the knowledge of another “is more personal than the knowledge I share with the technician or specialist.”⁷⁰ As John Paul rightly notes,

“In knowing by faith, man accepts the whole supernatural and salvific content of revelation as true. But at the same time, this fact introduces him into a profound personal relationship with God who reveals Himself.”⁷¹ Therefore, our knowledge of God is essentially based on faith, on a trust that is participatory of “what another has *seen*.”⁷² Ratzinger explains, “Christ is there, at the very center of history, as the great man who sees, and all his words flow from his immediate contact with the Father. As for us, the word that refers to our situation is: “He who has seen *me* has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). In its innermost essence, the Christian faith is a participation in this act whereby Jesus *sees*. His act of seeing makes possible his word, which is the authentic expression of what he sees. Accordingly, what Jesus sees is the point of reference for our faith, the specific place where it is anchored.”⁷³ Ratzinger’s point that our faith is anchored in what Jesus *sees* brings us back to the question regarding the certainty of faith. What explains the certainty of faith? “Faith is certain, and thus I am sure of possessing what is true; yet I do not see it.”⁷⁴ In other words, I do not see for myself the truth of statements, such as “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). “Why then am I sure?” Mouroux insightfully replies by appealing to what another has *seen*. “Through Christ, our connection with God is assured”:

Because I am united to Someone who sees. Faith is certain, not because it comprises the *evidence of a thing seen*, but because it is the *assent to a Person who sees*. This is just what we would expect. If the essential in faith is not primarily the fragmentary truths, but the person to whom we tend through these truths—“Him to whose word we assent”—it is quite clear that our certitude will be based on this Person. For it is this Person, and he alone, who sees the truths, and who can therefore give our knowledge a solid foundation. As St. Thomas puts it in an extremely precise formula: the full affirmation does not proceed from the vision of the believer, but from the vision of Him in Whom one believes, *non procedit ex visione credentis, sed a visione ejus cui creditur* [*Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. xii, a. 13, ad. 3; cf. *Summa contra gentiles*, III, 154, init.], Faith is an assent to the First Truth, that is to an Infallible Person.⁷⁵

Lastly, *pace* Berkouwer, this act of faith is not heteronomous because it essentially involves the “act of entrusting oneself to God,” of the gift of giving oneself, meaning thereby a “fundamental decision which

engages the whole person.”⁷⁶ Hence, in the act of faith I become a sharer in the knowledge of God that comes to me from the divine testimony of his Word, the gospels. Furthermore, this act is not a *blind* faith, a *blind* trust, a leap in the dark; no, it is a form of knowledge, not merely involving an assent to the truth of a proposition, but also to “*the person to whose words the assent is given*,”⁷⁷ resulting in a personal knowledge containing an element of participation, where by means of trusting God, I share in his knowledge, in the knowledge of the Person *who sees*, and by God’s grace I am permitted *to see*. Thus, in conclusion, as Ratzinger puts it following St. Thomas: “When we put our confidence in what Jesus sees and believes in his word, we are not in fact moving around in total darkness. . . . ‘The light of faith leads us to see. [For] in the living encounter with [Jesus Christ], faith is transformed into knowledge.’”⁷⁸

Conclusion

In sum, Berkouwer charges the Catholic tradition with rationalism and a heteronomous view of faith. I have refuted both these charges by giving an account, on the one hand, of the relationship between the motives of credibility and the authority of revelation: The real ground and motive of the act of faith is the authority of the God who reveals himself and not the external motives of credibility that provides reasons for faith. On the other hand, I have refuted his charge that the Catholic tradition has an authoritarian understanding of revelation and, by implication, a heteronomous view of faith by developing an epistemology of testimony as integral to a theology of faith. ✠

Endnotes

- 1 This article is adapted from chapter 3 of my book, *Berkouwer and Catholicism, Disputed Questions* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013). An earlier version of this adaptation was given in Gavin D’Costa’s Graduate Research Seminar, University of Bristol, England, November 5, 2013. It was also presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, Baltimore, Maryland, November 19, 2013.
- 2 G. C. Berkouwer, “Sacrificium intellectus?” *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 68 (August 1968): 177–200, and at 177.
- 3 Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, ed. Cornelius Ernst, O.P., trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), 168. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 156. See also Vatican I, 1870, *Dei filius*, chapter 3, *Faith*, in Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), §3013.
- 4 “Sacrificium intellectus?” 179–180.
- 5 Denzinger, §3008.

- 6 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 181.
- 7 William Brownsberger, "The Authority of God and the Act of Faith," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73, n. 1-2 (February 2008): 148-63, and at 156.
- 8 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 182.
- 9 Denzinger, §3009. See also the First Vatican Council canon 3, *de fide*: "If anyone says that divine revelation cannot be made credible by external signs and that therefore men should be drawn only by their personal internal experience or by private inspiration, let him be anathema."
- 10 William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. M. J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 142-76; idem., "Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection," *Philosophia Christi* 10 (2008): 293-301. In addition to Craig, apologists such as N. T. Wright, Gerald O'Collins, Richard Swinburne, and Gary Habermas follow the same historical argument in defending the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. See Glenn Siniscalchi, "Early Christian Worship and the Historical Argument for Jesus' Resurrection," *New Blackfriars* 93, n. 1048 (November 2012): 710-32.
- 11 *Fides et ratio*, 13.
- 12 Aidan Nichols, *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 176.
- 13 Aidan Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI: Faith and Reason in Modern Catholic Thought* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2009), 183.
- 14 *Theological Dictionary*, 168.
- 15 Denzinger, §3009.
- 16 St. Thomas Aquinas, *In iohannem* c.vi, lect. 5, n. 3, as cited in Jean Mouroux, *I Believe: The Personal Structure of Faith*, trans. Michael Turner (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959), 21.
- 17 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 195.
- 18 Roger Trigg, "Can a Religion Rest on Historical Claims," in *Rationality and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 91-112, and for these phrases, 94.
- 19 Ralph McInerney, "Philosophizing in Faith," in *Being and Predication* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 244.
- 20 *Heidelberg Catechism*, 1563, Lord's Day 7, Question 21, available at: <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.html>.
- 21 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 196-97.
- 22 "Can a Religion Rest on Historical Claims," 95.
- 23 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 195-96.
- 24 *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 187. As Germain Grisez explains, "revelation also requires a distinctive signal; it must include elements—words and deeds—which cannot reasonably be interpreted as anything except divine communication. This is to say that it necessarily includes signs and wonder: states of affairs brought about by God without the usual conditions which, if present, would dispose people to regard these happenings as part of the normal course of events" (*The Way of the Lord Jesus, I, Christian Moral Principles* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983], 479-80).
- 25 *Fides et ratio*, 13.
- 26 "Can a Religion Rest on Historical Claims," 98.
- 27 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 182. "Because of the authority of the revealing God" is the meaning of "*propter auctoritatem ipsius Dei revelantis*."
- 28 Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift I-II* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966-1967). ET: *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975). Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 422 [352]. Berkouwer is not directing his critical remarks against Vatican I's view of divine authority. Rather, he is questioning a notion of formal authority (*why* something is believed) that is separated from material authority (*what* is believed).
- 29 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 419 [349].
- 30 *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 187. Nichols give an instructive account of how Catholic thinkers from Blondel to Balthasar dealt with that objection in chapter 9, "The Dispute over Apologetics: From Blondel to Balthasar," 173-96.
- 31 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 188.
- 32 *Een Halve Eeuw Theologie*, 219 [155].
- 33 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 192-193, 196; idem., "De Achtergrond," 13; idem., *Een Halve Eeuw Theologie*, [155].
- 34 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 192-93.
- 35 Berkouwer, *Een Halve Eeuw Theologie, Motieven en Stromingen van 1920 to Heden* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1974), 220. ET: *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives*, trans. and ed. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 156.
- 36 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 424 [353].
- 37 Berkouwer, "De Achtergrond," in *De Herleving van de Natuurlijke Theologie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1974), 3-17, and at 16.
- 38 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 424 [353].
- 39 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 157. Bonhoeffer actually said in German, "frisz, Vogel ober stirb!" which literally translated mean, "Eat, bird or die." This is taken to express the authoritarian call that "alle 'openbaarde waarheden' op gezag aan te nemen" ["all revealed truth should be accepted on authority"] ("Achtergrond," 13). Hendrikus Berkhof writes that Bonhoeffer's "words about Barth's 'positivism of revelation' ('Take it or leave it') struck like a bomb. These words were exceedingly painful to Barth. One can say that the post-Barthian period really starts with the publication of this position of Bonhoeffer. It arose directly from his analysis of the new cultural epoch. In the anthropocentric age in which Barth had sought his way as a theologian, his starting with God as the subject of faith and theology was a liberating new beginning. In Bonhoeffer's time this point had already become self-evident in theology. But in the period which he foresaw, such a starting point would be completely unintelligible. For the people for whom the working hypothesis 'God' would be a total redundancy, the authority of the Word of God' would only constitute a double enigma: first, because they would accept nothing on authority anymore and, second, because they could not handle the idea of 'speaking God.' Since Bonhoeffer's time countless preachers, pastoral-care workers, and theologians experienced that they had to work under these conditions and—whatever they may have believed and thought for themselves—found themselves unable to start in their work where Barth did" (*Two Hundred Years of Theology*, trans. John Vriend [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989], 209-10).
- 40 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 422 [352].
- 41 *Ibid.*, 418 [348]. It is hard to see how Francis Schüssler Fiorenza avoids the "subjectification of authority" in the following statement of his position on the authority of divine revelation in his 1987 Presidential Address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, Vol. 41 ("Foundations of Theology: A Community's Tradition of Discourse and Practice," 107-34; online: <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/view/3403>). He rejects the approach to revelation and faith that emphasizes "the authority of revelation and the relation of this authority to the truthfulness of God." He holds, instead, that "the authority of revelation is an authority that needs to be gained through the interpretation of what is revelation" (114).
- 42 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 419 [349].
- 43 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 188.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 419 [349].
- 46 "Sacrificium intellectus?" 198.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*, 187.
- 49 *De Heilige Schrift*, II, 422 [352-353].
- 50 *Een Halve Eeuw Theologie*, 220 [156].
- 51 Walter Kasper, *Introduction to Christian Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 63.
- 52 "The Authority of God and the Act of Faith," 160 n. 45.
- 53 *Een Halve Eeuw Theologie*, 224 [159].

- 54 *Ibid.*, 223 [158].
- 55 *Fides et ratio*, 13.
- 56 *I Believe*, 59.
- 57 It would take us too far afield to discuss Richard Bauckham's claim "that we need to recover the sense in which the Gospels are testimony." Suffice it to say that his development of this claim comports well with what I am arguing here about an epistemology of testimony. First, to say that the gospels are testimony "does not mean that they are testimony *rather than* history. It means that the kind of historiography they are is testimony. An irreducible feature of testimony as a form of utterance is that it asks to be trusted." Second, he adds, "this need not mean that it asks to be trusted uncritically, but it does mean that testimony should not be treated as credible only to the extent that it can be independently verified. . . . Trusting testimony is not an irrational act of faith that leaves critical rationality aside; it is, on the contrary, the rationally appropriate way of responding to authentic testimony. Gospels understood as testimony are the entirely appropriate means of access to the historical reality of Jesus." In short, "we need to recognize that, historically speaking, testimony is a unique and uniquely valuable means of access to historical reality" (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006], 5).
- 58 Kevin Vanhoozer, "Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony," in *First Theology: God, Scriptures and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 257-74, at 269.
- 59 Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., develops this question in his, *Insight, A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1958), 703-706.
- 60 Paul Helm, *Faith and Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 19.
- 61 Thomas Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology*, questions 1-4 of his *Commentary on the De trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), q. 3, a. 1, 65-66.
- 62 Thomas Aquinas, *The Catechetical Instruction of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Joseph B. Collins (Manila: Sinag Tala, 1939), 4.
- 63 John Paul II, *A Catechesis on the Creed*, Vol. I, *God: Father and Creator* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996), 31. For a gem of a philosophical tract by a Catholic philosopher on an epistemology of testimony, see Josef Pieper, *Belief and Faith*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).
- 64 *I Believe*, 57.
- 65 Aquinas states, "Other things being equal, sight is more certain than hearing; but if (the authority) of the persons from whom we hear greatly surpasses that of the seer's sight, hearing is more certain than sight . . . and much more is a man certain about what he hears from God who cannot be deceived, than about what he sees with his own reason which can be mistaken" (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 4, a. 8, ad 2).
- 66 *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 11, a. 1.
- 67 *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 129, a. 6.
- 68 Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 40-43.
- 69 *Fides et ratio*, 31.
- 70 Benedict XVI, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 103.
- 71 *A Catechesis on the Creed* 1:44.
- 72 *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 104.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 104-105.
- 74 *I Believe*, 54.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 54-55.
- 76 *Fides et ratio*, 13: "This is why the Church has always considered the act of entrusting oneself to God to be a moment of fundamental decision which engages the whole person. In that act, the intellect and the will display their spiritual nature, enabling the subject to act in a way which realizes personal freedom to the full." See also Pius XII, *Humani generis*, 32-33.
- 77 *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 11, a. 1.
- 78 *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 110.



Divine Causality and Human Freedom

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A perennial challenge to Catholic theologians has been how to affirm the universal causality of God regarding every good action, while also affirming human freedom in performing good actions. Disputes about how grace was fully compatible with human free will began to develop among various schools of theologians in the first centuries of the second millennium of Catholicism in Europe (for example, Thomists, Augustinians, Franciscans, and so on). Eventually Pope Clement VIII set up the Congregatio de Auxiliis to monitor the discussions and debates between Dominicans and Jesuits on divine grace and free will.

Finally, after twenty years of public and private exchanges, along with eighty-five conferences in the presence of the popes, the question was not solved but an end was put to the disputes. Pope Paul V's decree communicated on 5 September 1607, to both Dominicans and Jesuits, allowed each party to defend its own doctrine, enjoined each from censoring or condemning the opposite opinion, and commanded them to await, as loyal sons of the Church, the final decision of the Apostolic See. That decision, however, has not been reached, and both orders, consequently, maintain their respective theories as theological opinions.

Given the prevalence of this problem in modern theological circles, the young Bernard Lonergan was curious as to why divine causality and human freedom was not a problem for Aquinas. Did the theoretical theological achievements of Aquinas provide perspectives that were later lost? Lonergan decided to do his doctoral dissertation on operative and cooperative grace in Aquinas.

This essay explores two important aspects of Bernard Lonergan's work reaching up to the mind of Aquinas in order to understand why he did not have a problem with grace and freedom. I shall refer to the published version of his doctoral dissertation entitled *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*. The first part of the essay will follow

Lonergan's discussion on the theory of operation in general terms, explaining what causation is for Aquinas, how to understand causation in time—the ideas of promotion, application, universal instrumentality, and the analogy of operation. This provides the theoretical foundation for why Aquinas did not have the problem that has haunted the de Auxiliis controversies. After laying a foundation through these topics, the second part of the essay will examine Lonergan's approach to the question of divine transcendence and human liberty. Here the analysis will sketch Lonergan's theoretical analysis of such topics as the freedom of the will, divine action on the will, the possibility for contingent acts, and how to understand the possibility of sin in relation to human freedom.

Part One: Theory of Operation

How Does Aquinas Understand Causation?

Lonergan notes that “causation is the common feature of both operation and cooperation,” and as such, knowing what Aquinas means by causation is imperative in a study of Aquinas's discussion of grace and freedom.¹ Lonergan proposes three possible understandings of causation in an attempt to explicate what Aquinas might have in mind. Firstly, he asks if the act of causing something, causation for short, is some flux or thing in between the cause and the effect. While noting that Aquinas is quite explicit that this is never the case in the divine activity of causing any effect, he is not so clear on this lack of a flux or thing between a created cause and effect.

For example, in the discussion on creation Aquinas states, “[C]hange is a kind of medium between the mover and the moved.”² However, Lonergan clarifies this and other similar examples in Aquinas by showing that they are merely modes of expression and do not posit causation as something “in between” cause and effect. This is because if what is in between cause and effect is something, it “must be either substance or accident; but causation as such can hardly be another substance; and if it were an accident, it would have to

be either the miracle of an accident without a subject, or else, . . . an accident in transit from one subject to another.” And since Aquinas denies this latter possibility in the *De potentia dei*,³ it is clear that causation even in creatures cannot be something that is between the cause and its effect.

The second view that Lonergan addresses is whether “causation is simply the relation of dependence in the effect with respect to the cause.”⁴ This view is the Aristotelian position, which Aquinas appropriates and defines in specific terms. Lonergan addresses the key points that he pulls from Aquinas. First, Lonergan notes that this discussion excludes the conception of a mover being moved accidentally. Next he identifies that when there exists a cause and effect, “the emergence of a motion or change involved the actuation of both the active potency of the cause and the passive potency of the effect.”⁵ By this he means that the one action brings about a change from potency to act in both the cause and the effect, active in the case of the cause, passive in the case of the effect. This change in both mover and moved requires only a single act. The one act exists in both the agent and the patient as the one acting and the one acted upon.⁶ Now since causation is a motion, if it were something that inhered in the cause there would necessarily be one of two results. Either this motion would inhere in the causing subject without the subject being moved, or every causing subject, that is every mover, would itself be moved. The first possibility is contradictory since it would claim that motion inheres in a causing subject without the subject being moved.⁷ If it were the second possibility, if every mover was itself moved without exception, there could be no unmoved mover, which would simultaneously result in an infinite regress and eliminate the possibility of God as unmoved mover.

Now if it is the case that the one act of motion that actuates the potencies of both cause and effect cannot inhere in the cause, and as we already noted, cannot be something between cause and effect, then this one act must necessarily be in the effected object. Thus Lonergan states, “[T]his act is the motion produced in the object moved.”⁸ Furthermore, this clearly answers in the negative the third possible understanding of Aquinas that Lonergan proposes: that causation is some entity added to the cause as cause. For as Lonergan shows, “causation is not inherent in the cause but in the effect.”⁹ Lastly he notes that the action and passion of the one act are different notionally, but not in reality. They both are the one motion that inheres in

the object coming from the cause (action) and received in the effect (passion).¹⁰

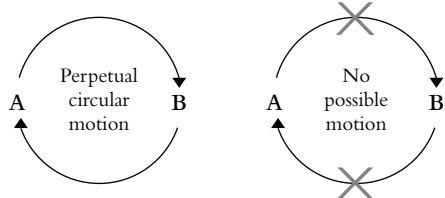
Now while Aquinas appropriates Aristotle’s understanding of causality in some of his works, Lonergan notes he is not always consistent if we look at some texts in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and in the *Summa theologiae*. In these texts it appears that Aquinas may adhere to a notion contrary to the understanding that in causation action and passion are one and the same reality. However, Lonergan continually points out that ultimately the apparent differences are not of great consequence. In the Aristotelian view, “action is a relation of dependence in the effect,” while the Thomist view identifies action as “a formal content attributed to the cause as causing.”¹¹ However, Lonergan also notes that though the action is attributed to the cause, it is done so in a way that understands that there is no real change in the cause.¹² Thus, while the Aristotelian and Thomist views look opposed, Lonergan holds that they both state the same fundamental position: “causation must not be thought to involve any real change in the cause as cause.”¹³ In both cases it can be said that the movement from potency to act is brought about with no necessary change occurring in the cause, only in the effect.

What Brings about Causation at a Given Time?

Generally when we think of cause and effect, we do so by isolating one cause and one effect and examining their correlation. However, when an effect is brought about due to a cause that occurs in time, the question can be expanded beyond asking which subject caused the given effect. One can further ask why the effect was brought about by the cause at a certain time. What impeded the cause from causing earlier, or how did it come about that it began causing now, and not later? Thus Lonergan paraphrases the argument from Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Physics*: “A motion taking place at a given time presupposes more than the existence of mover and moved, else why did the motion not take place sooner? Obviously there must have been some inability or impediment to account for the absence of motion. With equal evidence this inability or impediment must have been removed when the motion was about to take place.”¹⁴ This “impediment” can be thought of as one term referring to both the removal of a negative restriction or conversely a positive change resulting in motion. Thus if I hold a book out in front of me, my grasp on it restricts gravity from causing it to fall to the ground, but

if I let go of the book—eliminating the impediment that restricted gravity from moving it—then the book will fall (the effect) because of gravity acting on it (the cause). This works as well in a sense of positive change. If it is lunchtime and I become hungry, I might make myself a sandwich and eat it. This did not occur earlier because I was not hungry, but, in the positive change of becoming hungry, I was moved by hunger to make a sandwich. These are really two sides of the same event. For it could also be said that the desire to make a sandwich was suppressed by lack of hunger, and when the impediment of lack of hunger was removed—resulting in hunger—I made a sandwich. The key point is not whether we understand there to be the removal of a negative restriction, or some form of positive initiation, but that a cause that happens in time comes about due to some change that results in the cause causing.

However, if when a cause acts in time, there must be in some form an initial motion that initiates the cause to cause, this initial motion must also be a real motion. Lonergan writes: “though St. Thomas did not use the term, we may refer to this prior motion as a promotion.”¹⁵ But such a promotion cannot come about without having a cause. If we say there is a promotion, we must also say that “the promotion necessarily involves a pre-mover, and, if the problem of causation in time is to be solved, the pre-mover must be distinct from the original mover and moved.”¹⁶ This last necessity, that of the pre-mover being distinct from the original mover and moved is the only way that a cause can be temporal. For if the pre-mover was not distinct from the original mover and moved, there would result some form of perpetual circular motion. For example if we say that A causes B in time, and if we further said that B was somehow the pre-mover that caused the promotion initiating A’s cause of B, then there are only two possibilities, perpetual motion, or no motion whatsoever. For if we posit that A does cause B, then B must have first moved A, and you have a circular regress requiring that the causation could not have begun in time. But on the other hand, if one posits any point in time where either A or B was not causing, then there would be no pre-mover to initiate either A or B and no cause would result in an effect ever coming about. The same



problem would occur if for A to cause B, A was its own pre-mover.

The next question to arise is that, if a pre-mover moves the subject that is causing, and the pre-mover is neither the subject nor effected object, what moves the pre-mover? Obviously the danger is that in avoiding a circular regression, one falls into an infinite serial regression. Lonergan tells us that this apparent challenge is actually the evidence needed for Aquinas to prove in the *Contra gentiles* that “God applies all agents to their activity.”¹⁷ Most simply put, the only possibility of avoiding an infinite regress is to have an uncaused cause as the ultimate first mover. This also explains why it not only makes sense for God to be outside of time, which he created, but it is actually necessary. For if God were in time, then his causation would need a pre-mover that was not himself, and God would not be an uncaused cause.

How Can One Understand the Idea of Providence?

Aquinas explains the definition of providence as follows: “Since . . . God is the cause of things by His intellect, and thus it behooves that the type of every effect should pre-exist in Him, . . . it is necessary that the type of the order of things towards their end should pre-exist in the divine mind: and the type of things ordered towards an end is, properly speaking, providence.”¹⁸ Providence is simply the ordering of events toward their created end. Now Aquinas is quite clear that divine providence is certain and cannot be frustrated. This is due to the fact that God is the universal cause who causes all other causes.¹⁹ For as Aquinas tells us, “it is possible for an effect to result outside the order of some particular cause; but not outside the order of the universal cause. The reason for this is that no effect results outside the order of a particular cause, except through some other impeding cause; which other cause must itself be reduced to the first universal cause.”²⁰ Thus while the particular cause of gravity in general would cause a book to fall, when I hold the book the resultant effect is the book does not fall, which is outside of the general causation of gravity. But my holding the book is also a cause and would also have a promotion which would ultimately trace back to God as the uncaused cause. “Therefore as God is the first universal cause, not of one genus only, but of all being in general, it is impossible for anything to occur outside the order of the Divine government; but from the very fact that from one point of view something

seems to evade the order of Divine providence considered in regard to one particular cause, it must necessarily come back to that order as regards some other cause.”²¹ As the uncaused universal cause, God’s providence is certain, and furthermore, as not being part of the created order, his providence is beyond the categories of necessary and contingent causation.²² So while any individual cause may be impeded by other causes, because all causes originate in the one universal cause, who is God, the providence of God is always certain. In freely causing creation, every event, all the myriad particular things and events, are present in the divine act of creation. There is no “before” or “after” but all of the past, present, and future are present in the one divine cause. So, for Aquinas, divine providence and divine governance order the whole with wisdom and certainty.

The Topic of Universal Instrumentality

To understand this, Lonergan analyzes instrumentality where “a lower cause [is] moved by a higher so as to produce an effect within the category proportionate to the higher.”²³ Since all causes in time are moved to cause, and this premotion traces back to God as the unmoved mover, then in this respect all causes are instruments of God as the highest cause.²⁴ However, Lonergan goes on to note that “if the instrument is to operate beyond its proper proportion and within the category of the higher cause, it must receive some participation of the latter’s special productive capacity.”²⁵ Universal instrumentality means, for Aquinas, that God moves all created causes to participate in the providential plan of God, while they are moved in accord with their proper natures.

It is proper to an instrument to be moved by the principal agent, yet diversely, according to the property of its nature. For an inanimate instrument, as an axe or a saw, is moved by the craftsman with only a corporeal movement; but an instrument animated by a sensitive soul is moved by the sensitive appetite, as a horse by its rider; and an instrument animated with a rational soul is moved by its will, as by the command of his lord the servant is moved to act, the servant being like an animate instrument, as the Philosopher says (*Polit. I, 2, 4; Ethic. VIII, 11*). And hence it was in this manner that the human nature of Christ was the instrument of the Godhead, and was moved by its own will.²⁶

For God does not create rational beings without intending their movement apart from their rational nature. Lower causes are moved through universal in-

strumentality by God’s design and in accord with the nature of each lower cause.

This also brings up the notion of fate. Fate is very closely tied to providence. Lonergan states the distinction: “[The] divine plan has a twofold existence: primarily it exists in the mind of God, and there it is termed providence; secondarily it exists in the created universe and there it is termed fate.”²⁷ Put another way, in providence God in himself ordains all things that are, and in the created order this divine plan is brought about, which we call fate. Thus all causes outside of God are caused causes, and in each case God applies the cause to act to bring about the effect. Thus if we understand fate to be the order of secondary causes, in this sense it can be understood that all things “cannot but act because of fate.”²⁸

So it can be said that God applies each cause to act. Application, as Lonergan defines it, “is the causal certitude of providence terminating in the right disposition, relation, [and] proximity between mover and moved: without it motion cannot take place now; with it motion automatically results.”²⁹ Fate then can be said to be the employment of application to creaturely causes to bring about the divine plan that exists in providence. In this Aristotle and Aquinas are quite close in what they say of how things are moved. While they both hold that God is the ultimate mover, “Aristotle held that God moved all things by being the object of love for the intelligences,”³⁰ while for Aquinas, “God was more—a transcendental artisan planning history.”³¹ So while Aristotle focused on God moving everything as a final cause, Aquinas includes God’s movement of the created order through universal instrumentality.

How to Understand Divine and Created Operation

Lonergan begins his discussion of operation by elucidating Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Sentences*. He notes that “every power proceeds from an essence,”³² but because operations proceed from a power, then it is both the power and the operation that proceed from the essence. Taking this further, if a being has its essence from another, then by necessity the power and operation of that being must also be dependent upon another.³³ Now in God essence and power are identical with his simple substance. But in creatures there is no such identity or Pure Act. There is a difference between the creature and the power by which the creature himself acts. Therefore, the operation of God is

not from another, but entirely his own, while the operation of creatures, though belonging to them, is itself operated by a power outside of the creature. Lonergan explains this through an example: “Suppose Peter to stand sword in hand and then lunge forward in such a way that the sword pierces Paul’s heart. In this process there are two products: the motion of the sword and the piercing of Paul’s heart.”³⁴ But even with only two products there are three causes, for there is the caused cause. Thus Peter causes the sword to move, the sword causes the piercing of Paul’s heart, and thirdly “Peter causes the causation of the sword, for he applies it to the act of piercing and he does so according to the precepts of the art of killing.”³⁵ In this example Peter uses the sword as an instrument, causing its causation. Here the secondary cause, that of the sword piercing the heart of Paul, is brought about only by the power of the first cause, that of Peter moving the sword. In an analogous way, when God applies creatures to act instrumentally, he is the cause of their causation.

Now Aquinas says that the secondary cause is really the cause of the effect that it brings about, but that the secondary cause causes the effect as premoved by God as the first cause. So though they both cause the effect, “to be cause of the effect belongs first to the first cause and secondly to the secondary cause.”³⁶ It is clear then that all creaturely causation requires the divine motion of application and universal instrumentality. Lonergan sees this as foundational to the thought of Aquinas: “As Newton affirmed a ‘law’ of gravitation, as Einstein affirmed a ‘theory’ of relativity, so too St. Thomas affirmed the analogy of operation, namely, that the causation of the created cause is itself caused; that it is a procession which is made to proceed; that it is an operation in which another operates.”³⁷

This marks the end of Lonergan’s discussion on the general understanding of the theory of operation. We have looked at what causation is according to Aquinas noting that causation results in no change in the one causing. We have discussed the conception of pre-motion and that all causes that exist in time must themselves be caused by another. We have examined application and instrumentality to see how it is that God as universal cause moves man, and we treated the topic of operation identifying that all operations that do not originate in the essence of the operator have their power of operation in another. With this foundation laid we can move further to examine why divine causality and human freedom was not problematic for St. Thomas Aquinas in Lonergan’s analysis.

Part Two: Divine Transcendence and Human Freedom

What Is Needed for the Will to Be Free?

Lonergan notes that for the will to be free it must not be coerced, nor may it be moved purely by necessity, for as Aquinas says, then it would be stripped so naked of its action that it could neither merit nor demerit.³⁸ Instead, the will, which moves the intellect and all other potencies, is itself moved by the intellect. And while both the intellect moves the will and the will moves the intellect, Lonergan says that Aquinas avoids the problem of a potential infinite regress by ultimately affirming the intellect as the first mover.³⁹ This can be further nuanced by distinguishing between the specification and exercise of the will. “The specification is caused by the intellect; the exercise, by the self-motion of the will.”⁴⁰ Thus the intellect judges something to be good and specifies it as the object of the will, but then the will moves itself to will the means to attain the good specified by the intellect.

This self-motion of the will however can never be self-initiated by the will. This Aquinas explains with the same form of discussion we noted earlier concerning causation in time. “For everything that is at one time an agent actually, and at another time an agent in potentiality, needs to be moved by a mover. Now it is evident that the will begins to will something, whereas previously it did not will it. Therefore it must, of necessity, be moved by something to will it.”⁴¹ So while it moves itself to the act of willing the means through willing the end, it cannot do this without some exterior motion that applied the will to its first motion.

With regard to the freedom of the will to act, Lonergan identifies four foundational presuppositions that are required in order for the will to act freely:

1. “A field of action in which more than one course of action is objectively possible.”⁴²

This first requirement safeguards the possibility of choice. However, it is not merely choice itself that safeguards the freedom, but what is implied by any ability to choose. For without there being a possibility for choice, there could be no deliberation about what to choose and so counsel would not exist. Furthermore, consent could be lost as well, for when the requirement is said to be for more than one course of action, this does not preclude nonaction as a course of action. Thus if the field of action were to do A or not do A,

this would still be considered more than a single course of action, and both freedom and consent to act would exist. However, if even this is eliminated, then the *only* possibility is doing A, and thus there would be no freedom, only simple necessity.

2. “An intellect that is able to work out more than one course of action.”⁴³

The second requirement follows fairly clearly from the first requirement. Since the will must have available to it more than one course of action to be free (as noted in the previous point) coupled with the fact that the will is moved in regards to specification by the intellect (as noted earlier), then, if the intellect cannot distinguish more than a single course of action, the will would be restricted to being specified to this single action. This would result in only one possible course of action as subjectively available to the will even if this is not objectively the case. The effect on the will ends up being the same as with one single objectively possible action, and thus the will would not be free.

3. “A will that is not automatically determined by the first course of action that occurs to the intellect.”⁴⁴

Obviously if the will were to be necessarily determined by the first course of action that occurred to the intellect, then it would be virtually no different than if the intellect could not work out more than a single course of action. For in reality it matters not how many courses of action the intellect can offer to the will, if somehow the will was automatically determined to one and only one of them. Without any other possible courses of action, the will would remain determined in the same way that it would if there was only a single course of action available.

4. “A will that moves itself.”⁴⁵

The fourth requirement for the safeguarding of the freedom of the will is that the will moves itself. This is not to say that it is not moved to act by an exterior cause, but that in the act of willing, the will itself acts in concord with other causes, rather than being moved solely by exterior causes. Lonergan expresses this in both a negative and positive fashion. Negatively it can be said that the will must not be determined by the intellect, and positively that “the will moves itself and in this self-motion is always free to act or not act,”⁴⁶ never being moved by necessity in regard to the exercise of the act.

Lonergan notes that Aquinas asserts all four are necessary for the will to be free.⁴⁷ Furthermore, he notes that all four are interrelated in the levels of causes of free actions. “Thus, the first cause is the objective possibility of different courses of action [requirement 1]; the second cause is the intellect that knows this objective possibility [requirement 2]; and the proximate cause is the will that selects, not because [it is] determined by the intellect [requirement 3], but through its own self-motion [requirement 4].”⁴⁸ All four are closely related, but each one is needed in conjunction with the others for the will’s free action.

How God Moves the Will

In his discussion of the will Lonergan next moves to the topic of how it is that God can move the will while it yet remains free. Now according to Aquinas “there is no distinction between what is from free will and what is from predestination, as there is no distinction between what is from a secondary cause and what is from the first cause.”⁴⁹ Therefore, what is from the will is also from predestination. Furthermore, since as we said above the first cause is more the cause than the secondary cause, Lonergan also notes that Aquinas holds that God is more the cause of the will’s free act of choice than the will itself.⁵⁰

Now God can move the will by grace, but this movement is not restricted to the movement of habitual grace. Thus God has the power to change the will of man by taking away one inclination of man and replacing it with another. People pray for such an act of God when they ask for a “change of heart,” or ask that a disordered desire would be taken from them. The Lord’s Prayer itself, with the phrase “thy will be done” implicitly asks that one would no longer desire one’s own will but instead what God wills. Now God can manifest such a change in man either through the infusion of a habit, or directly by simple motion. When individuals find themselves entrenched in sin through a vicious habit, or through an inclination toward a certain evil, God can still bring about change in them either by infusing a new habit, or by removing the inclination toward evil and replacing it with another inclination orientated toward the good through actual graces.⁵¹

Now as we noted earlier, the will must proceed to the first movement of willing through causation of some external mover.⁵² Furthermore, Aquinas writes that “God moves man’s will, as the Universal Mover,

to the universal object of the will, which is good. And without this universal motion, man cannot will anything.”⁵³ However, this does not eradicate man’s free will, but moves man in conjunction with his will. Thus Aquinas continues, “Man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is either a true or an apparent good. Nevertheless, sometimes God moves some specially to the willing of something determinate, which is good; as in the case of those whom He moves by grace.”⁵⁴ And in so doing he may move man by habitual or actual graces.⁵⁵

How God Can Bring about Contingent Causes

Lonergan brings up the question of contingency with respect to God’s efficaciousness. He observes that while Aquinas maintains that all terrestrial activity is free and contingent, he simultaneously affirms “God’s eternal knowledge to be infallible, his eternal will to be irresistible, and his action through intellect and will to be absolutely efficacious.”⁵⁶ But the problem is that the latter would seem to contradict the former, making all actions necessary and precluding the possibility of contingency. However, Lonergan points out that Aquinas held both, and explains why this can be so. The apparent problem can be summarized by four fallacies, and through the solution of these fallacies one can see why divine causality and human freedom was not problematic for Aquinas.

The first fallacy misconceives God’s eternal presence. While creatures are bound by time, God is not. The whole of time, past, present, and future events are present to him in an eternal now.⁵⁷ So while it may seem to some that God’s certain knowledge of all things future, causes things to come about by necessity, this is not the case. If God knew certainly all things as *future* things, they would indeed necessarily come to be. Rather, Aquinas makes clear that God does not know things as future, but as *present*, even those things that are future to us.⁵⁸ Thus God’s knowledge does not prohibit the contingency of acts.

The second fallacy supposes that God’s knowledge, will, or operation in regard to the creature is dependent upon the creature’s existence. But God is immutable; when he freely creates his knowledge and will are part of his simple substance and are without any change in his Pure Act, or *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*. Creation does not “add” something to God’s Infinite Pure Act.⁵⁹ This is further answered by the response to the first fallacy, for though the creature begins in time,

God transcends time, and therefore it is not possible to say there was a time when God did not know the creatures created in time, as if there were a “before” and “after” in God.

Thirdly, Lonergan notes the fallacy of confusing hypothetical with absolute necessity. Something can be hypothetically necessary in itself, but given that it occurs, it absolutely occurs. Thus what is hypothetically necessary, “absolutely may be either necessary or contingent.”⁶⁰ Aquinas gives the example that “if Socrates runs, he necessarily runs”—this is contingent necessity. Similarly contingent causes are in and of themselves contingent, but if God has ordained that they come about, they necessarily come about. Thus, while God could have brought about the salvation of man by any means, given that he preordains that it is done through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it does not come about in other ways.⁶¹

The fourth and final fallacy of note is the failure to “grasp that God is not some datum to be explained, that he is absolute explanation, pure intelligibility in himself.”⁶² Thus one should not attempt to reconcile apparent contradictions that are part of God himself, for if there are contradictions apparent, they must be in appearance only with the failure being in the one understanding, not the one understood. Thus one cannot rectify contradictions in God, as he has no contradictions.

Ultimately Lonergan provides one last piece of the puzzle for answering the objections, which is “God produces not only reality but also the modes of its emergence.”⁶³ Therefore, while it may appear that contingent acts are in opposition to the divine will, this is not the case. “Certain effects are said to be contingent as compared to their proximate causes, which may fail in their effects; and not as though anything could happen entirely outside the order of Divine government. The very fact that something occurs outside the order of some proximate cause is owing to some other cause, itself subject to the Divine government.”⁶⁴ That is to say, things can be contingent in relation to their proximate cause, and yet still preordained through providence. This is because “what providence intends to be contingent will inevitably be contingent.”⁶⁵ That is to say God can choose to cause necessarily or contingently, through necessary or contingent causes.

How Man Can Be Free to Sin without God Causing Man to Sin

The issues of grace and freedom involve also how Aquinas maintains that God does not cause humans to sin. Lonergan indicates how Aquinas avoids certain difficulties that arise with both Banez and Molina. He first notes Banez's proposition that says that what God effects comes about, and what he does not effect fails to come about. Thus if a man falls into sin, it happens that God did not move him otherwise. While this upholds an understanding that God does not cause man to sin, it could imply that whenever humans sin this is due to God's inaction. Secondly, Lonergan criticizes Molina who says that God foreknows all possible choices that creatures would choose in given situations, and he therefore brings about the given circumstances that result in man sinning or not sinning as he chooses based on his foreknowledge. However this leads to the problem of God being constrained by what man will do, which is to say that God would be determined by man.⁶⁶

The position of Aquinas is more nuanced. Lonergan tells us that his approach distinguishes three possibilities: "what God wills to happen, what he wills not to happen, and what he permits to happen."⁶⁷ Thus God neither causes sin nor withholds the cause of righteousness; rather, he permits man to sin. "God therefore neither wills evil to be done, nor wills it not to be done, but wills to permit evil to be done."⁶⁸ Through permitting evil to be done, God does not cause evil, but he allows the sinner to choose to withdraw from divine governance. Thus the cause of sin is in man, not God.

Man chooses sin for some apparent good, but not a real good. For the "possibility of our understanding anything is ultimately due to the object's commensurability to the divine intellect," but in the falsity of an evil it is this commensurability that is lacking.⁶⁹ This is why all sin is by its nature irrational, for it is "a departure at once from the ordinance of the divine mind and from the dictate of right reason."⁷⁰ Furthermore, if it is a departure from the ordinance of the divine mind it is not something ordained by God. It does not have a cause in God, nor would it be right to say that it is brought about by some lack of cause in God that makes the sin inevitable. Instead, sin is due to the sinner alone, permitted by God, but neither caused by God nor willed by God.

Conclusion

Reaching up to the mind of Aquinas is no easy task. The young Bernard Lonergan pursued why divine causality and human freedom were not problematic for Aquinas as they subsequently became in the *de Auxiliis* controversies. Through the second half of Lonergan's recovery of Aquinas we have seen why and how Aquinas affirms both the certainty of divine causality and that God, and God alone, in moving the human will, does so that it moves freely. Since divine causality implies no change whatsoever in the Pure Act who is God, then the truth of any statement that God moved a human being to a good action requires the *ad extra* term of the human actually performing the good action. This, as we saw, is the analogy of contingent predication in the universal instrumentality of all created movers in the natural and historically redeemed universe.⁷¹

This follows from the four standard requirements of Aquinas that are necessary for a free will: objective possibility for various courses of action, an intellect capable of discerning multiple acts, indeterminacy of the will and a will that moves itself. For Aquinas, predestination and fate act on the will, moving it to act as an exterior or *ad extra* cause. This indicates the possibility of contingent acts in relation to God's efficacy, for God can will to cause contingent acts contingently. Finally, this indicates how one can understand sin in relation to free will and divine causation such that while man can sin, God permits it in such a way as not to be the cause of man's sin. When a human being judges a disordered act or object as an apparent good, thereby attempting to rationalize a disordered act, such a one is the cause of evil and sin as a privation. Yet all the forces of darkness and evil cannot derail the return of the universe to God from whom it proceeded. As Aquinas wrote, echoing St. Augustine, God and only God can bring goodness out of evil, life out of death. Thereby he redeems through the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ the beauty and symphony of the spiritual and material universe the triune God created.⁷²

These were achievements of immense importance, both for the further reaching of Bernard Lonergan up to the mind of Aquinas in his *Verbum* studies, and for a renewal of the theoretical interiority so fundamental to meeting the issues facing both the Church and culture in our times and recovering the lost wisdom of the Angelic Doctor for whom divine causality causes human free will. "As Newton affirmed a 'law' of

gravitation, as Einstein affirmed a ‘theory’ of relativity, so too St. Thomas affirmed the analogy of operation, namely, that the causation of the created cause is itself caused; that it is procession which is made to proceed; that it is an operation in which another operates.”⁷³ ✠

Endnotes

- 1 Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 67. I wish to thank Fr. Matthew Lamb for assistance in contextualizing Lonergan’s work.
- 2 *Summa theologiae*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1981), I, q. 45, a. 3, ad 2.
- 3 *Quaestiones disputatae: De potentia dei* 3.7.
- 4 *Grace and Freedom*, 68.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, 76.
- 18 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 22, a. 1.
- 19 *Grace and Freedom*, 79.
- 20 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 103, a. 7.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Cf. *Grace and Freedom*, 81.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 83.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Summa theologiae* III, q. 18, a. 1, ad 2.
- 27 *Grace and Freedom*, 85.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.* 87.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*, 88.
- 36 *Super librum de causis*, lect. 1, sec. 24, 88 (Lonergan’s translation).
- 37 *Grace and Freedom*, 90.
- 38 Cf. *De malo*, 6.1.
- 39 *Grace and Freedom*, 96.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 4.
- 42 *Grace and Freedom*, 96.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *Ibid.*, 97.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 49 Lonergan’s translation of *Summa contra gentiles* III, c. 70, 99.
- 50 *Grace and Freedom*, 98.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 100.
- 52 *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 4.
- 53 *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 *Grace and Freedom*, 104.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 61 Cf. *Summa theologiae* III, q. 46, a. 2.
- 62 *Grace and Freedom*, 106.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 64 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 103, a. 7, ad 3.
- 65 *Grace and Freedom*, 109.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 111.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 112.
- 68 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 9, ad 3.
- 69 *Grace and Freedom*, 115.
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 Bernard Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 95–105, along with relevant sections in part one of this essay.
- 72 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3; Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, 27.
- 73 *Grace and Freedom*, 9.

Unity and Diversity

The Definition of Culture of T.S. Eliot¹

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In 1948, Thomas Stearns Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. That same year he published *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. At the time he was sixty years of age and had not lost his enthusiasm or his urge to continue working. His progressive approach to the European continent, without giving up his American heritage, made T. S. Eliot want to rethink the true sense and meaning of the nation that welcomed him in 1927 after marrying his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood. This is how *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* came about, which can be both described as the first major work of his last period ending with his death in 1965, as well as a way to settle his commitment with England, the country that took him in for years. It should also be taken into consideration that when the author talks about Europe, he goes beyond the territory he is formally referencing. Europe is for him a metaphor of the modern Western culture and the spread of this culture across other countries.

Throughout the six chapters of this work, and in an atmosphere of marked confusion and difficulty invading Europe and the rest of the world after the terrible experience of what had happened during the Second World War, Eliot proposes the antidote of a new social order and a Christian-based cultural reform. As the author acknowledges two years after publishing his book, with his work he attempted to reflect the discontent he felt toward the way in which the war had been lived and the way peace was being lived:

The chapter could not pretend to any unity or structure other than that of enumeration, and perhaps its chief function was to appease the feeling of irritation with a good deal of nonsense that had been talked and written in England during the war years. Having relieved the emotions with which my mind—or my liver—was charged, I felt much better.²

If it is true that the truth about man and his deepest manifestations are in culture, to show interest in culture is to take an interest in the human being. Culture is what makes life worth living,³ and if it breaks

down, it will be very costly to mend: “the disintegration of culture is the most serious and the most difficult to repair.”⁴ Culture tells us who we are and where we are going, so it is very closely linked to religion: “that no culture can appear or develop except in relation to a religion.”⁵ All cultures have a religious basis, while, at the same time, one same religion can be present in several cultures. For Eliot, both culture and religion are different aspects of the same things, so they can’t happen separately. Furthermore, both concepts, culture and religion, should not only be present in a society, but society should actively strive to develop and nurture them.⁶ As a matter of fact:

So, while we believe that the same religion may inform a variety of cultures, we may ask whether any culture could come into being, or maintain itself, without a religious basis. We may go further and ask whether what we call the culture, and what we call the religion, of a people are not different aspects of the same thing: the culture being, essentially, the incarnation (so to speak) of the religion of a people. To put the matter in this way may throw light on my reservations concerning the word relation.⁷

Religion manifests itself in culture, and culture is the reincarnation of religion. It is in the cultural field where artists fit. Art has an aesthetic-ethical purpose,⁸ while religion is the answer to the question about the meaning of human existence. Thus, separating the artistic field from religion would imply an impoverishment of sensibility and the loss of the longing for the infinite and the hereafter every man has. Life without art would not be properly regarded as life; it would lose richness and affect all of humanity: “And deterioration on the higher levels is a matter of concern, not only to the group which is visibly affected, but to the whole people.”⁹ Art and religion should complement one another to respond to the needs of human beings: “The artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility, the religious by its separation from the artistic.”¹⁰

Separation between art and religion is not only a worrying symptom of times of spiritual drought, but it can also lead us to make incorrect assertions about

that historic moment. To avoid this mistake and face criticism on decadence, Satanism, or the nihilism that characterizes the art of the disoriented and chaotic post-war society or society in crisis, we must previously gather our aesthetic and spiritual perception. We must go beyond the facts, the mere appearance: “Aesthetic sensibility must be extended into spiritual perception, and spiritual perception must be extended into aesthetic sensibility and disciplined taste before we are qualified to pass judgment upon decadence or diabolism or nihilism in art.”¹¹

As Menand points out, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* designed a road to make “tradition” with meaning in a pluralistic age.¹² If in this work Eliot reminds us of one of his most important poems, *The Waste Land*, this is not by chance or a coincidence. Twenty-five years after publishing the poem, the author still uses its symbolic strength to highlight the contrast between those who live authentically and those who don’t; between those who seek fullness and those who are routinely apathetic. This contrast is noticeable, according to him, in both agnostics or the indifferent as well as in atheists: “Many people live on an unmarked frontier enveloped in dense fog; and those who dwell beyond it are more numerous in the dark waste of ignorance and indifference, than in the well-lighted desert of atheism.”¹³

When we defend our religion we defend our culture, and vice versa.¹⁴ In the creation of a culture, religion is the unifying force among the different peoples. Therefore, although a European or someone who is part of the modern Western culture may be atheist, as European, whether conscious of this or not, he has a language and activities arising from the Christian heritage. Eliot’s intention is not so much converting Europeans to Christianity but recovering the elements of the Christian tradition that have made Europe and other countries become what they are, giving them their content and meaning, their identity: “An individual European may not believe that the Christian Faith is true, and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all spring out of his heritage of Christian culture and depend upon that culture for its meaning.”¹⁵

In regard to the existence of different social classes, Eliot insists that among primitive societies, the more developed ones showed more marked differentiations between their members than the less developed; that the division of roles according to how highly they were regarded encouraged class division, being one of the functions of the higher social class to maintain that part

of the world culture, encouraging the cultural health of all peoples. Maintaining a high cultural level thus benefited not only the people in charge of such mission, the privileged social class, but also the entire society, since it allowed the survival of the culture.¹⁶

Eliot then added that this society divided in classes was not the perfect model, however, and that it was evident that in a progressive society the division of classes should be abolished, which is a duty incumbent on all of us. This does not mean there are no capable individuals who lead public life, taking charge of the positive functions of the old social classes and avoiding their unfair privileges.¹⁷ Select individuals make up a structure of elites based on their areas of work, and their mission is to lead public life in all aspects related to the social needs: “There will be groups concerned with art, and groups concerned with science, and groups concerned with philosophy, as well as groups consisting of men of action: and these groups are what we call élites.”¹⁸

With the purpose of improving the world and the behavior of human beings, Eliot proposes the creation of groups of individuals to preserve excellence in society. These groups would be necessary and make up a minority of elites, who would contribute to social improvement and serve as examples for the rest of the citizens concerning what can be done or not. Eliot proposes these elites not only in the arts, but also in science and philosophy, and he also points out the need of collective leaders dedicated to action, or in other words, to organization and management. As Kojecky summarizes, the author’s proposal intends, in essence, to establish a system in which intelligence governs social life.¹⁹ The ultimate goal of this division is that all job positions generated are filled by individuals who genuinely deserve them and who have the best qualities; in a word, a doctrine of elitism. “Superficially, it appears to aim at no more than what we must all desire—that all positions in society should be occupied by those who are the best fitted to exercise the functions of the positions.”²⁰

But the leaders of the future will not be the same as the ones of the present. And using the idea of tradition as something that is always part of mankind, making possible its advance, Eliot hopes that the elites of tomorrow will be capable of recovering what was good from the past and improving upon it:

It is obvious, that while in the present state of society there is found the voluntary association of like-minded individuals, and association based upon common material interest, or common occupation or profession, the élites of the future will differ in one

important respect from any that we know: they will replace the classes of the past, whose positive functions they will assume.²¹

Furthermore, the author highlights the importance of family as an element that favors culture: “The primary channel of transmission of culture is the family.”²² Family, understood as something that exists beyond the present, is like tradition, in that it brings together the ones who were, the ones who are, and the ones who will be, generating a bond, giving rise to a genealogical tree in which everyone occupies a place and performs a function: “But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than this: a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote.”²³

The intention is not so much to restore a lost culture or to revive a culture on its way to extinction, as it is to make a contemporary culture arise from its old roots.²⁴ At its origins, the greatness of a region or nation consists in fitting in and enriching its culture with the culture of neighboring regions or nations. Harmonizing cultures means discussing, organizing, and smoothing rough edges, and not assuming that which does not correspond to us: “The absolute value is that each area should have its characteristic culture, which should also harmonize with, and enrich, the culture of the neighboring areas.”²⁵

Further defining “culture” as a concrete way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, Eliot insists that the protection of its language is fundamental to the transmission and preservation of a culture. Safeguarding the language is the best way we have to protect a nation, to preserve it while it evolves. This mission falls especially upon the poets, who are in charge of keeping it as a literary language, of including artistic values that cannot be extinguished by the simple spread of education:

But it must be remembered, that for the transmission of a culture—a peculiar way of thinking, feeling and behaving—and for its maintenance, there is no safeguard more reliable than a language. And to survive for this purpose it must continue to be a literary language—not necessarily a scientific language but certainly a poetic one: otherwise the spread of education will extinguish it.²⁶

These poetic values will allow its constant renewal and the literary creativity of those who use it and which requires, as mentioned above, the language’s ability to receive and assimilate external influences while always remembering its roots and learning from

them: “Now, the possibility of each literature renewing itself, proceeding to new creative activity, making new discoveries in the use of words, depends on two things. First, its ability to receive and assimilate influences from abroad. Second, its ability to go back and learn from its own sources.”²⁷

At the same time, Eliot emphasizes the importance of language as a poet’s working tool, which he uses and at the same time enhances: “The truly great poet makes his language a great language.”²⁸ Although you have to bear in mind that not all languages are equal, so the poet must take into consideration the intrinsic nature of his own: “I simply say that the English language is the most remarkable medium for the poet to play with.”²⁹

Nevertheless, when speaking about literature, it is impossible for a country consistently to produce works of universal value. In order to produce the best, it is necessary sometimes to operate at lower levels, producing second-class literature. This is not problematic or troubling, for it is simply part of the natural development, of the slow progress of the language and literature of a nation. Additionally, less productive periods are useful fallow times that serve as breeding grounds for what will come later. These are times of preparation and preludes to better creations. We must wait for the emergence of a great poet who also takes the past into account, raises his own language and literature with this originality, and influences both his country’s as well as all the neighboring territories’ future poetry:

In poetry at least, no one country can be consistently highly creative for an indefinite period. Each country must have its secondary epochs, when no remarkable new development takes place: and so the centre of activity will shift to and fro between one country and another. And in poetry there is no such thing as complete originality, owing nothing to the past. Whenever a Virgil, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Goethe is born, the whole future of European poetry is altered. When a great poet has lived, certain things have been done one for all, and cannot be achieved again; but, on the other hand, every great poet adds something to the complex material out of which future poetry will be written.³⁰

Similarly, we must bear in mind that a national culture is the sum of different local cultures, just as the sum of national cultures results in a world culture. A process of cultural inclusion and increasing unity does not necessarily imply a uniform world culture, however. In anticipation of decades of globalization and its attendant danger of loss of identity, Eliot insists that,

for the culture not to become something artificial and mechanic that produces a dehumanized uniformity in which we are all equal, we need to take into consideration and include the smaller local cultures. World culture must be a creative, living sum of all the existing languages and traditions. And for this process we need great poets who experience and communicate people's feelings, and who are the only ones capable of lifting up their own language and culture. Great poets also influence other languages and cultures, thus contributing to the creation of a nonreductionist world culture: "For it must follow from what I have already pleaded about the value of local culture, that a world culture which was simply a uniform culture would be no culture at all. We should have a humanity de-humanised. It would be a nightmare."³¹

The need of tradition is evident, not only because the possibility of survival of all local and national cultures depends on its strength,³² but because it enables great poets to achieve that lost unity which Eliot establishes as a goal; they can create, at an international level, the unity of what should be united: "but in the practice of every art I think you find the same three elements: the local tradition, the common European tradition, and the influence of the art of one European country upon another. I only put this as a suggestion."³³

For Europe to be truly "healthy," each country must have a unique culture, which in turn must be susceptible of being influenced by others³⁴ until it creates that unique culture. The key is to have an inclusive poetry that allows us to acknowledge the common legacy to which we belong. A European or world culture is possible only if we go back to our roots, if we are able to incorporate Greece, Rome, and Israel. In other words, if we can combine the Greco-Latin culture with Christian religion: "If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes."³⁵ ❖

Endnotes

- 1 Translation by Camartis Institute, Inc. Translator Karen Hutchins. Original title: "Unidad y diversidad: La definición de la cultura de T. S. Eliot."
- 2 T. S. Eliot, "To Criticize the Critic," *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (1965; Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 62.
- 3 T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, London, 1962), 27.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 8 For T. S. Eliot a work of art not only triggers emotions, but also has an ethical function. For him, poetry must guide the right attitudes and behavior patterns of human beings, and it is thus a sort of ethics manual beautifully written.
- 9 *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, 26.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 12 Louis Menand, "Afterword, 2007. Anti-modern Eliot," in *Discovering Modernism T. S. Eliot and His Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 175.
- 13 *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, 72.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Roger Kojecky, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 114.
- 20 *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, Faber & Faber, London, 1962, 37.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 111-12.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 32 Arantxa Fuentes, *La revisión modernista del pasado: Antonio Machado y T. S. Eliot* (Vigo: Academia del Hispanismo, 2009), 211.
- 33 *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, 114.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 122.

Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012. x + 388 pages. HB. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Kenneth D. Whitehead

This was a book I went out and bought as soon as its publication was announced. I had read other works by University of Virginia historian Robert Louis Wilken, and had been impressed with his insights, erudition, and irenic spirit, especially with regard to the history of the early Church. I found that he often threw interesting light on familiar subjects, and just as often made points and cited sources he had researched that were not necessarily all that familiar.

In these respects this book generally does not disappoint, although, as will become clear, it turned out to be disappointing in another way. As its title indicates, it is a wide-ranging history of the first thousand years of Christianity. It is composed of thirty-six relatively short, readable chapters, each one usually covering a particular topic. The topics vary, focusing on an event such as the early persecutions, the Council of Nicaea, or the rise of Islam; or on a particular Christian leader such as Origen of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, or on Christian emperors such as Constantine, Justinian, and Charlemagne; or else on distinctive features of Christianity such as monasticism, architecture and art, or music and worship; and, finally, on doctrinal issues such as Christology or Iconoclasm—although this book pays comparatively less attention to doctrine than to some other issues. The author also makes a special point of focusing on geographical areas where Churches grew up, beginning in Jerusalem, and including not only Egypt, Ethiopia, and Syriac-speaking communities in the Near East, but also the ancient Christian missionary effort that extended into East Asia. The book makes a claim to be a “global” history, after all, and on this claim the author generally delivers. This is most distinctly *not* a “chronological history,” but rather a collection of vignettes covering many aspects of Christian history.

The extent and variety of the Christianity of the first millennium is evidently the author’s favorite subject, and he makes a point of dwelling much more on the non-Latin and even the non-Byzantine traditions than one generally finds in comparable histories. Professor Wilken has also consulted an unusually large number of ancient sources, and even specialists will find material

that seems new and fresh in what is perhaps otherwise a broadly familiar story. After all, the first millennium of Christianity has long been almost exhaustively written about, and so it remains the case that any author who takes up the subject again almost necessarily has to try to be selective in what he decides to cover and emphasize. However, what one selects does have a bearing on the overall picture that is presented.

In the present case, and where this history in spite of its many merits seems less than satisfactory, in the opinion of this reviewer, lies in the subject of what may be called the “ecclesiology” that apparently underlies the narrative; nowhere does the author describe, explain, or defend this apparent “ecclesiology,” however; it has to be gathered from the way the author selects and presents his various topics; and meanwhile he fails to convey, I think, all the implications of the fundamental fact that, in committing his revelation of himself to the world, henceforth to be part of human history, Jesus Christ founded a single specific institution, a *Church*.

Of course Professor Wilken has professedly *not* written a history of Christ’s Church. As his title indicates, he has written a history of “Christianity” as manifested in its first millennium. But Christ did not found “Christianity”; he founded a Church. Does this make a difference? Does the focus on Christianity completely do justice to what Christ did and intended?

Anyway, did Christ, in fact, establish a single, specific Church? The Catholic Church believes and teaches that he did; and that, moreover, while granting authenticity to elements of what unhappily very soon became a divided Christianity, she also believes and teaches that she herself continues to be today that very same Church founded by him, having descended in an unbroken line of bishops succeeding one another going all the way back to the apostles of Jesus. Jesus himself, indisputably, as in Matthew 16:18 and elsewhere, spoke specifically of “building [his] Church,” not just of founding a generic “Christianity.”

Professor Wilken is assuredly fully aware of this, and at least to some extent takes it for granted, and even adverts to many aspects of it in the course of his narrative. However, that in founding a Church, Christ intended that the primary and typical expression of “Christianity” in the world would come through the belief and actions of his followers gathered into this specific institution, the Church, does not seem to be central to Professor Wilken’s understanding of “Christianity.” He prefers to write about “churches” in the plural rather than about the “Church” in the singular, and sometimes he even

speaks of “communities” instead, as when he writes that Paul’s preaching in Thessalonica “led to the formation of a Christian community.”

And even when he does speak about a “Church,” he sometimes employs the term “the Christian Church,” although he must surely know that this designation was neither current nor common in ancient times, and indeed throughout the first millennium, if it was ever used at all. Even today the term “Christian Church” only properly applies to a modern Protestant denomination. In employing the term to describe the Church of Christ of the first thousand years, however, the author seems to identify himself with a modern school of thought, that represented, for example, by the authors of the well-known reference work, *The Oxford Book of the Christian Church*.

But surely those who today use this term to designate Christ’s Church as she existed and functioned in an era in which this term was virtually never used owe us an explanation as to why they have decided to employ what surely amounts to an anachronism here.

For to utilize this term to designate the Church of the first millennium is already to misread, at least to some extent, the ecclesiastical history of that era. Except for the breakaways in the East which followed the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, the first thousand years of Christianity, which it is the author’s declared aim to describe, was the era, precisely, of what has often been called the “*undivided Church*.” And this undivided Church was universally known by its proper name as—“the Catholic Church”!

At one point Professor Wilken even documents the fact that in ancient times the proper name of the Church of Christ was indeed nothing else but “the Catholic Church.” He correctly notes and documents that this proper name was first mentioned in one of his letters by St. Ignatius of Antioch in the very first years of the second century, and the same proper name, of course, also appears in the Creed which issued from the Council of Nicaea. What this Creed expressly and precisely affirms is nothing else but what it itself in its own words says is the belief of “the Catholic Church.”

Yet this distinguished author seems strangely reluctant to employ the term. He actually speaks at times of “Nicene Christians” rather than “Catholics” (although he does also slip occasionally, as when he mentions the “Catholics” taking over a church from the “Arianizers”). Probably inevitably, though, in a history of this length and scope, he cannot avoid mentioning Catholics and the Catholic Church, and he does, as, for example,

when speaking of the opposition of the Donatists to the Catholic Church. Still, his apparent reluctance at times to specify this ecclesiastical entity by its proper name is sometimes quite palpable.

The same thing is true of his treatment of the popes and the papacy. On a number of occasions, he speaks only of the “the bishop of Rome,” where one would have expected that he might plainly have specified “the pope.” Again, in a history of this length and scope dealing with the first millennium of Christianity, he manifestly cannot avoid treating of the popes and the papacy, even quite frequently; and he includes a specific chapter dealing with “The Bishop of Rome as Pope.” But he does not seem to see or treat the popes as essential, or in fact central, to the history of the first thousand years of Christianity, as most other histories of the Church necessarily do. He correctly speaks of the Church as based on a “succession of bishops”; yet in a rather lengthy treatment of the major second-century writer, St. Irenaeus, for example, he never mentions the latter’s famous list of *popes* down to his own day, recording, as Irenaeus correctly understood, the most important “succession” of all in that period. But this list merits only a one-sentence mention in a later chapter.

Similarly, Professor Wilken downplays other evidence from the early part of the first millennium that the bishop of Rome understood himself, and was widely understood by others, to enjoy special status as the successor of Peter. For example, he speaks of the early effort of Pope Victor (189-198) to establish a uniform celebration of Easter, including in the East, as “the first instance of an attempt on the part of the bishop of Rome to intervene in the affairs of churches outside Rome”—as if this “intervention” was some kind of illicit power grab by Victor, whereas the action can just as easily be interpreted as indicating that Pope Victor at this early date clearly believed that he possessed the authority to intervene in the matter as he did, and, moreover, it was widely accepted at the time by others, including in the East, that he indeed did have that authority.

In any case, this was not the first “attempt” by the popes to “intervene” in the affairs of Churches outside Rome, as is actually quite well known. Earlier there was, for example, the famous instance of the Letter to the Corinthians of Pope St. Clement (c. 91-c. 101), which Professor Wilken strangely neglects to mention in this connection. Yet this admonitory letter from a Roman bishop to a distant Church was actually for quite some time greatly respected and even treated as “Scripture” in parts of the early Church. Yet it rates only a one-sentence

mention in another chapter by Professor Wilken.

It is true, of course, that the evidence from the early centuries is sparse for what later got defined as the primacy of the bishop of Rome; but it is also possible, if not actually quite probable, that other concrete evidences of the special position and role of the bishop of Rome in the first three centuries got lost because of the persecutions of the Church during those same centuries. A great deal *was* lost in those years. Most of the popes in those years died as martyrs, in fact. However that may be, the instances of Pope St. Clement and Pope Victor nevertheless do remain and represent solid evidence of the later primacy that the popes indisputably came to possess. In Pope Victor's case, he was persuaded to draw back from his "attempt" to standardize the celebration of Easter—although the Roman practice did eventually become that of the Church generally.

Again with regard to Professor Wilken's treatment of the papacy generally, Christ's original commission to Peter gets only a few quick paragraphs; and only two of Christ's three famous charges to Peter—to be the "rock" on which the Church is to be built (Mt 16:18), to "strengthen [his] brethren" (Lk 22:32), and to "feed [Christ's] sheep" (Jn 21:17)—only two of these three scriptural charges even rate mention, the charge to "strengthen" the other bishops being left out. And this treatment in any case rather quickly and rather oddly becomes transformed into an account of a dispute between the bishops of Rome and the bishops of Carthage over the rebaptism of lapsed Christians—where the Roman practice again, significantly, became the practice of the Church generally.

Again, however, the author fairly consistently leaves the impression that what later became known as the Roman primacy only became fully accepted in the West. He belittles, for example, the action of the (nonecumenical) Council of Sardica (modern Sofia) in 343, which explicitly recognized Roman authority over the whole Church; and later, in his chapter on the papacy, when discussing the actions of some of the popes engaged in consolidating Roman authority, he leaves the distinct impression that while the popes may have claimed supreme authority, their claim was not necessarily always recognized and honored, particularly in the East. Even when recounting instances where appeals were made to Rome, as when St. Augustine and the North African bishops appealed to Pope Innocent I, he does not consider that this was perhaps a regular practice. Nor does he limit his observations on this subject to observing that papal authority was not always and universally

honored; at one point he even thinks it pertinent and important to observe that the infant Church in Spain tended to look to the Church of Carthage rather than to the Church of Rome for guidance, as if the primacy was somehow thought by some to reside *there*.

In espousing this line, the author leaves out other important evidences that the position of the Roman See was in fact widely recognized and accepted in the first millennium. For instance, in discussing the key ecumenical Councils of Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451, he pays slight attention to the crucial role that the papal legates played at both councils. There is no mention either of the Roman legate Philip's well-known and uncontested statement at Ephesus that the Roman primacy had been "known now for centuries," or of the equally famous acclamation of the bishops (including the Eastern bishops) at Chalcedon that "it is Peter who says this through Leo. This is the faith of the apostles."

Similarly, in two different chapters which mention Pope Hormisdas (514–523) and the Acacian Schism of that day, the author fails to bring out the importance of the document known as the Formula of Hormisdas, which was drawn up by the pope and subscribed to by all the Eastern bishops as the price of the settlement of the Acacian Schism. Although little known, and sadly neglected today by some historians, the Formula of Hormisdas would seem to be an exceedingly important element in the first thousand years in attesting to the Roman primacy over the whole Church. In view of its importance, I believe a quotation from a book of my own is called for and fully justified here. I ask the indulgence of the reader for the following somewhat lengthy quotation from my 2009 book *The New Ecumenism* (St. Paul's/Alba House), but what it states *is* important. Consider, then: the case of the Formula of Hormisdas in the early sixth century, when it would seem from a Western and Catholic point of view that the Eastern Orthodox Churches formally, willingly, solemnly, and with conviction *accepted* the Roman primacy on terms that surely do not exceed what the Catholic Church would be obliged to require of them today as the price of a restored unity.

The main facts of the case were these. In 519, the Byzantine Emperor Justin I, Patriarch John of Constantinople, and a large majority of the Eastern bishops all signed and subscribed to a Formula required by Pope Hormisdas as the price of a reunion following a temporary schism *then*. This Formula included language affirming the intention of "living in unity . . . in the Catholic religion [which] has always been preserved without blemish in

the Apostolic See.” In this Apostolic See—Rome—the Eastern bishops solemnly agreed, “resides, whole and true, the firm foundations of the Christian religion.”

Some of the language of this Formula of Hormisdas was repeated word for word in Vatican I’s definition of the primacy of the pope. By subscribing to this Formula, the Eastern bishops surely *committed their Churches* to the positions they were agreeing to. If the solemn pronouncements of synodally assembled Christian bishops mean anything—as the Eastern Orthodox certainly believe they do in the case of the first seven ecumenical councils among other cases—then the formal acceptance by the Eastern Christian Churches of the Formula of Hormisdas ought to mean that the East *did* formally and officially accept the Roman primacy. From a Catholic and Western point of view, those Eastern Orthodox who today hold that the primacy has to entail something less than what the Formula specified would seem to have receded from a position once solemnly accepted and proclaimed by their Churches.

The Formula of Hormisdas, in other words, went far beyond the mere “primacy of honor” that the Eastern Orthodox ascribe to the bishop of Rome today. The fact that it was received and subscribed to by virtually all of the Eastern Orthodox bishops in the sixth century surely belies the proposition that the primacy of the pope was neither accepted nor operative in the first millennium of Christianity. This and similar instances needed to be more adequately treated in this book in order to validate its ambition to present a complete picture of “the first thousand years.”

However, Professor Wilken does not really deal with the fundamental question of whether and to what extent the Roman primacy was not merely claimed, but was accepted, in the course of the first millennium. And here I have mentioned only some of the instances that point to the conclusion that the pope’s authority as the successor of Peter was broadly and, indeed, almost universally, accepted in the period that Professor Wilken set out to describe. There are other instances. It was only in 1054, after all, at the beginning of the *second* millennium of Christianity, that the formal schism between East and West that has lasted up to our own day came about.

But this is evidently not how Professor Wilken sees things. He fairly consistently minimizes the role of the popes and the papacy in what nevertheless *was* the era of the “undivided Church.” In his lengthy list of Suggested Readings, for example—which generally illustrates how extensively he has ranged in consulting source materials—he includes only one history of the papacy, Eamon

Duffy’s (somewhat lightweight, I believe) 1997 *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*. And he includes only one biography of a pope from the entire first thousand years of Christianity, that of Pope St. Gregory the Great. Surely there were other popes during that long period who played important roles in the history of “Christianity”! Oddly too, while including several volumes by the non-Catholic J. N. D. Kelly in his list of Suggested Readings, he neglects to include the latter’s standard and solid *Oxford Dictionary of the Popes*.

So what do we have here? Is it legitimate to criticize a scholar for not according to the popes and the papacy the same importance usually given to them in histories of this era of Christianity? Is a historian necessarily obliged to accept and affirm that the successor of Peter was the head of Christ’s Church during the first thousand years—and hence was necessarily an exceedingly important if not indeed *the* principal leader of “Christianity” during the same period? This is distinctly *not* the impression conveyed in these pages; nor is it clear why the author has elected to minimize the importance of the popes and the papacy to the extent that he has.

However, it is *not* being suggested here that accepting the role of the popes and the papacy as the Catholic Church views this role is somehow required of the historian. What is required, rather, is that the scholar or historian recognize that if only in view of the very claims made by the Catholic Church with regard to the primacy of the pope, the evidence for and against this position must be presented and weighed and evaluated. This is even more essential, it would seem, if in fact the Roman claims are not accepted.

For whatever reason, however, Professor Wilken makes no attempt to do this. Too often he simply downplays the role of the popes and the papacy, minimizing or passing over lightly (or even entirely) some of the kinds of examples mentioned above. And more examples of the same kind could have been cited, some of them pointing to the *centrality* of the popes and the papacy in Professor Wilken’s chosen period of the first millennium of Christianity. Thus, in the opinion of this reviewer, and in spite of so much varied and even fascinating material in this book, Professor Wilken’s *First Thousand Years* nevertheless has to be judged in the end as *not* entirely satisfactory as history. ✠

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Elizabeth Johnson. *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 352 pp.

Reviewed by Anne Barbeau Gardiner,
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In her new book *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (2014), Elizabeth Johnson, says she wants to bring “the resources of theology to bear in interpreting the world of life which evolutionary science describes.” What she means by “evolutionary science” is Darwinism. In the first part she provides an extended, glowing commentary on *The Origin of the Species* (1859), and in the second part she interweaves Darwin’s materialistic philosophy with a theology drawn, she claims, “largely from the Catholic intellectual tradition.” In this essay I will start by examining first what she says about Darwin and second what she proposes as a “Catholic” evolutionary theology.

With regard to Darwin, Johnson makes three grave errors: she declares (1) that he believed in a divine Creator at the time he wrote the *Origin*; (2) that eugenics and the Nazi culture of death were a perversion of his teaching; and (3) that there are no respectable scientific objections to his idea of a very slow, gradual evolution over eons of time by “natural selection.” On the foundation of these three errors she builds her new theology.

(1) To start with, Johnson says that Darwin’s “religious stance” in 1859 “might plausibly be considered that of a deist.” As proof, she points out that he inserted the words “by the Creator” in the final sentence of the *Origin*’s second edition. Moreover, she defends his sincerity in religion by insisting that the “religious odyssey which led him away from Christianity has its own integrity and is to be respected” and that his way of “seeing the world with attentive and loving care is profoundly religious” (38-41).

The truth is that at the time he wrote the *Origin*, Darwin was a materialist. As the late Stanley L. Jaki, O.S.B, explains in *Savior of Science* and *The Purpose of It All*, Darwin deeply regretted having mentioned the Creator in the second edition of his book. In a letter sent to J. D. Hooker on 29 March 1863, he said he felt “ashamed for having ‘trucked to public opinion’ by speaking, in the conclusion of the *Origin*, of the evolutionary process as ultimately due to the Creator.” Far from being sincere, then, he courted public approval and disguised his atheism to ensure his work would be

accepted. As we see in his *Early Unpublished Notebooks*, composed in his late twenties (1837-39), he was already a “militant materialist” two decades before the *Origin* appeared. In those pages he exults that if his “conjecture” is allowed to “run wild,” then we—animals and humans—“may be all melted together.” He looks forward eagerly to an evolutionary conquest of the “mind,” which he calls the “citadel,” and attributes “the origin of our evil passions” to our simian origin. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), his materialism is just as “complete,” though not as “crude” as in the *Notebooks*. Jaki concludes that Darwin devoted his life to a goal that was “less scientific than anti-religious,” and his disciples “made no secret of the unbridgeable difference” between Darwinism and Christianity.

Johnson claims that Darwin approached nature with “religious” care, but Jaki observes that Darwin himself reminisced about “the delight he used to derive from shooting, just for the fun of it, hundreds of birds on a good sporting day.”

(2) Next, Johnson misrepresents the deleterious moral consequences of Darwinism when she alleges that eugenics, the Nazi culture of death, and “social Darwinism” were just a “perversion” of Darwin’s theory. In fact, they were the inevitable consequences of the new creed about the “survival of the fittest.” In *Darwin Day in America*, John G. West reports that the eugenics movement was started by Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton and promoted by four of his own sons. Among these, Leonard became president of the Eugenics Education Society, the main eugenics group in Britain. Darwin was so keen on eugenics that he nearly broke off communications with S. G. Mivart when the latter criticized his son’s essay in favor of eugenics. In the last conversation he had with Alfred Russel Wallace, Darwin lamented that “in our modern civilization natural selection had no play, and the fittest did not survive.” Worse still, he declared in the *Descent* that the break between apes and human beings fell between the gorilla and the Negro. His view of blacks as being at a “primitive stage of human evolution” gave a “scientific” rationale for racist laws like those against miscegenation.

In *The Political Gene: How Darwin’s Ideas Changed Politics*, Dennis Sewell notes that eugenics in Britain before World War I looked like “a Darwin family business” and that Darwin seemed to open the door to genocide by predicting (without condemnation) that soon “an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world.” Richard Weikart, in *From Darwin to*

Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics and Racism in Germany, observes that Darwin applauded “the crushing of ‘lower’ nations by ‘higher’ nations.” In his letters published in 1890, he said that “evolution justified the Russians promoting the higher race by smashing the Turkish armies.” In *The Absolute Beneath the Relative* (p 194), Jaki observes that Teilhard de Chardin, a great admirer of Darwin, wrote “glowing encomiums” of World War I in “The Promised Land,” part of *Writings in Time of War*, lauding it as “an unsurpassed means of promoting the heroic qualities of the race.” Weikart also speaks of the great shift in the ethics of German scientists and physicians between 1870 and 1930. Before they adopted Darwin’s principles, they were pro-life, but afterward they proclaimed that evolutionary science justified abortion, infanticide, involuntary euthanasia, and the killing of “useless” individuals. They thought Darwin had proven that the soul and free will were illusions.

In addition to all this, Darwin had a long-lasting effect on sexual morality. In *Ends and Means* (1937), Aldous Huxley reminisced that for his generation, Darwin’s theory had been “an instrument of liberation . . . from a certain political and economic system and from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.” Sexual liberation on the basis of our animal origins remains the zeitgeist to this day.

(3) Johnson’s third grave error is to treat all *scientific* objections to the theory of natural selection as beneath contempt. She insists that once Darwin had “brilliantly demonstrated” how “species evolve from one another by natural selection,” there could be no “reasonable scientific debate” about it. While she admits that there is an “absence or rarity of transitional organisms,” she says that this is merely due to “the imperfection of the geological record” (13–14, 102).

Jaki easily refutes this claim by pointing to “a persistent and scientifically most respectable minority of dissenters” who, since the time of Darwin, have accepted evolution but objected to the mechanism of natural selection. Among these he cites Niles Eldridge and David Raup. Eldridge blamed himself and his fellow paleontologists for not speaking out in the course of several decades: “We have preferred a collective tacit acceptance of the story of gradual adaptive change,” he lamented. “We paleontologists have said that the history of life supports this interpretation, all the while really knowing that it does not.” Jaki comments that in fact Darwin’s theory would require “the absence of

geological catastrophes over billions of years,” which is impossible. Due to the impact of huge asteroids, our planet has a “biological past riddled with extinctions of life-forms on a giant scale and at a periodic rate, roughly 26 million years.” Regarding the very slow mutation of species envisioned by Darwin, David Raup, an expert on geological catastrophes, wrote: “species appear in the sequence very suddenly, show little or no change during their existence in the record, then abruptly go out of the record.” Besides this, Stephen Jay Gould declared with regard to very gradual change: “the fossil record still proclaims it false, after more than a century of diligent search. . . . Paleontologists have documented virtually no cases of slow and steady transformation, foot by foot up the strata of a hillslope—not for horses, not for humans.” Besides all the missing transitions between species, Jaki adds, there are even larger missing links: the “fearfully mysterious transitions among orders, classes, and phyla.” In *God and Evolution*, Jay W. Richards reports that 800 scientists, some from M.I.T. and Princeton, have recently signed a statement expressing doubt that the Darwinian mechanism is capable of explaining the complexity of life. Yet Sister Elizabeth Johnson asserts that natural selection is as much a certainty as that the planets circle around the sun. Such is her faith in Darwin.

A Cosmos without a Purpose

In addition to these three grave errors, Johnson also builds her evolutionary theology on the foundation of Darwin’s view that evolution has no purpose and “no pre-programmed outcome” (84). Its history is the blind interplay of chance and necessity. As she puts it: “Taken together, scientific understandings of the indeterminism of physical systems at the quantum level, the unpredictability of chaotic systems at the macro level, and the long-term random emergence of new forms through the evolutionary process itself undermine the idea that there is a detailed, unfolding plan according to which the world was designed and now operates” (117).

To help us accept this horrifying vision, she (like Darwin) personifies natural selection and invites us to “realize that there is a power intently watching each slight alteration, and carefully selecting” (69).

Jaki comments acridly that “Darwin loved to return to the notion of chance, to the image of an unspecified primordial cosmic soup, out of which some strange accidents there arise, after a long chain of unpredictable turns.” A number of scientists have thought this scenario highly improbable, as for example the Nobel-laureate

biologist Sir Ernst Chain, who remarked in 1970 that “[t]o postulate that the development and survival of the fittest is entirely a consequence of chance mutations seems to me a hypothesis based on no evidence and irreconcilable with the facts. These classical evolutionary theories are a gross oversimplification.” Jaki points out the self-contradiction in all this: Darwin made “a very conscious and purposeful and therefore non-mechanical resolve, to value nothing but mechanism.”

Even worse, Darwin subjected “the mind too to his laws, blind and random, of biological evolution.” Of course he had fleeting glimpses of how he was undermining the reliability of human reasoning. In 1881 he wrote to W. Graham: “the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are not of any value or at all trustworthy.” Jaki comments: “if intelligent life is but an inevitable, however unforeseeable and precarious, result of the interplay of dark matter and blind forces, what ground remains for trusting the intellect itself?”

Darwin always insisted that species were in flux and that there were no essences, no natures, no ontological stability, and therefore no objectively and universally valid ethical norms that could be “grounded only in the metaphysical dimensions of things.” On this point Chesterton made the following prescient comment: “when once one begins to think of man as a shifting and alterable thing, it is always easy for the strong and crafty to twist him into new shapes for all kinds of unnatural purposes.” The twentieth century provides many examples of this.

Evolutionary Theology

In the second half of her book, Johnson adumbrates a theology that she believes will respect “the discoveries of evolutionary theory while showing that belief in the God who creates is still seriously imaginable.” Note here that it is God who is in the dock and has to be made “imaginable,” not natural selection. To clear the way for her evolutionary theology, she begins by accusing the Church of “dualism” for teaching that the soul is “meant to rule over the recalcitrant flesh” and that human beings endowed with rational souls are higher than other creatures. In a feminist aside she charges that the Church’s “hierarchical dualism of spirit over matter” led to “the social hierarchy of men over women” (125).

Next, she informs us that in the thirteenth century the Church invented a “natural-supernatural distinc-

tion” to separate “the realm of human nature, human beings taken as simply created, from that of grace, the gift of God leading to salvation.” She claims that this “natural-supernatural distinction suddenly “divorced” nature “from God’s graciousness” (126, 150). Far from being a thirteenth-century invention, the distinction between natural and supernatural goes back to the very start of Christianity. In her previous two books, Johnson also sneered at supernatural grace: in *Truly Our Sister*, she claimed that it could never be lost even by “the grossest sin,” and in *Quest for the Living God*, that it was found everywhere at all times with no need for religion.

Johnson then proposes a female Spirit to replace God the Father as Creator. This Spirit’s representation as a “dove,” she explains, alludes to the “broad tradition of divine female power” seen in Ishtar, Astarte, Anat, and Aphrodite. When the Jews adopted “Wisdom” (“Sophia,” in Greek) from the worshippers of these ancient goddesses, they “fearlessly incorporated [her] into the structure of monotheistic faith as an enriching way of speaking about the one God.” This borrowing allowed “Jewish belief to be expressed in a way that matched the religious depth and style of the goddess cult while counteracting its appeal.” (139–42). Here Johnson follows the modernist habit of treating the Bible as manmade, a construct rather than God’s word.

In her view, this female Spirit is a perfect fit for Darwin’s utterly random and purposeless evolution. Indeed, she says “we should not be surprised to find her hovering very close to turbulence,” something which “our older order-oriented theology” could not imagine (173). Of course it couldn’t! Our older theology had God the Father as maker and ruler of all, so we knew that what appeared random to us had been foreseen by his Providence. But Johnson’s Darwinist principles will not allow her to find such a God “imaginable.” She explains: “The absence of direct design, the presence of genuine chance, the enormity of suffering and extinction, and the ambling character of life’s emergence over billions of years are hard to reconcile with a simple monarchical idea of the Creator at work” (155). Thus, a purely random natural selection turns into a tool to deconstruct God the Father as Creator of heaven and earth.

Note well that Johnson’s female Spirit lacks omniscience as well as omnipotence. She has not the least idea of what is going to emerge when she “empowers and accompanies the evolving world” and gives it “the power to organize itself.” Indeed, she is madly in love with the world’s “autonomy” and “indeterminacy,” with all the “genuinely random” and “unscripted” happenings

around. The history of the cosmos, Johnson exults, is a “wild ride through time.” Only an ivory-tower academic could speak so rapturously about chaos (173-74).

What follows this is an attack on the Incarnation. Early Christians, Johnson contends, “forged” a link between “Jesus and Wisdom” when they “began to identify the crucified prophet from Nazareth, localized in time and place, with a divine figure associated in Jewish tradition with creating and governing the world and nurturing human beings on the path of truth and life.” The implication here is that the divinity of Christ was something made up by early Christians. In *Quest* she likewise subverted the Incarnation by declaring that the Jesus of the gospels spoke “Sophia’s words” and did “her deeds, and that St. John’s gospel was only “the story of Wisdom under the guise of the metaphor of the Word.” In *Ask the Beasts* she makes a similar point regarding Jesus when she says that “personified Wisdom is one way of figuring the creative revealing and saving presence of God in engagement with the world” (193). She even speaks of a “deep incarnation” in which the “material world” is assumed in Jesus, a “human being, a species in which matter has become conscious of itself and deliberately purposive.” Once appropriated, matter in Jesus is “not detachable,” so when he dies he is “born again as a child of the earth, but of the transfigured, liberated earth, the earth which in him is eternally confirmed and eternally redeemed from death and futility.” So much for the mystery of the ascension! The “significance of the incarnation,” she explains, must be reconfigured “in an ecological direction,” and the “good news” from now on is for all creatures, not just “one species or an elite group in that species but for all” (196-201, 227).

Like Thomas Berry in *Evening Thoughts*, Johnson blames the Church (especially St. Anselm) for an excessive emphasis on the redemption. She wants us to understand what is meant by “salvation for humans beyond the metaphors of atonement, satisfaction, and sacrifice” (223). We are to focus instead on the future resurrection of all flesh. Although this may sound like a science-fiction movie, it is a key point in her evolutionary theology that since God loves not just “the whole” of creation but “every part,” this means that “every single individual” in creation, from a specific ant to a specific buffalo, will be resurrected. In this section she stands as an example of Chesterton’s remark in *Orthodoxy*: “Darwinism can

be used to back up two mad moralities, but it cannot be used to back up a single sane one. . . . On the evolutionary basis you may be inhumane or you may be absurdly humane, but you cannot be human.”

After giving every last animal and insect its apotheosis, Johnson turns to human beings and knocks them down several pegs to the level of the rest of animal creation. She speaks a lot like a deep ecologist, only she wraps the bitter pill in biblical language. Whereas the Church teaches that our souls are created individually by God, she asserts that we are actually “germinated out of the depths of the evolutionary process” and are “primates whose brains are so richly textured that we experience self-reflective consciousness and freedom, or in classical terms, mind ad will.” She admits that the mind is not reducible “to the material function of the brain,” but argues that “as with all evolutionary changes, a new complex organization of matter allowed new capacities to emerge, capacities that require new levels of explanation” (235-39). Jaki observes that Darwinism in fact leads to this conclusion, that “no species is worthier than any other species.” Johnson’s evolutionary religion is an illustration of Darwin’s motto, “Never say ‘higher’ or ‘lower.’”

Johnson ends by moaning over the “mushrooming” population of *Homo sapiens*, calling it a “deep moral failure” that our species is “ruining the living places of multitudes of others.” She says that the “appropriate analogy is murder.” While she cites John Paul II on respect for life, she does so only in relation to ecology, never once mentioning the slaughter of the innocents in abortion. In conclusion, she calls us passionately five times to “a deep spiritual conversion to the Earth.” What she means by that is a conversion from anthropocentrism to “an experiential grasp of how deeply humanity is embedded in the evolutionary processes of life on Earth” (244-58). She laments that Christians are asleep while the Earth is “undergoing its agony in the garden, about to be crucified.” She disapproves of Psalm 8 because its “hierarchical framework” places “human beings, or at least an elite male cadre of them, in a position outside of and superior to other species, which are meant for their service.” Instead she exhorts us to think of “our identity primarily along the lines of kinship rather than rule” and to regard the “Earth” as “our only home in this vast universe.” The evolutionary religion she presents is far from being based, as she claims, on the “Catholic intellectual tradition.” ❖

Charles Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology: Five Strands*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013, 306 pp.

Reviewed by J. Brian Benestad,
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I picked up Charles Curran's latest book on moral theology to seek a deeper understanding of what Curran and others call revisionist moral theology. That theology, under the strong influence of historical consciousness or historicism, took shape when not a few Catholic theologians dissented from the reaffirmation of Catholic teaching on contraception by Pope Paul VI in his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae vitae*. Curran maintains that we can better understand Catholic revisionism, as well as the rest of contemporary Catholic moral theology, if we examine five strands present in the history of the Catholic Church: "(1) sin, reconciliation, and the manuals of moral theology; (2) Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic tradition; (3) natural law; (4) the papal teaching office; and (5) the Second Vatican Council" (ix). I will only focus on those aspects of the strands that help clarify the development or shape of Curran's revisionist moral theology.

The purpose of chapter one, on the first strand, is to explain the understanding of sin and forgiveness that developed over the centuries in the Church. Curran especially takes issue with the manuals of moral theology that were written after the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. "With their very limited scope, these manuals could correctly be described as minimalistic. Their only concern was what acts were sinful and the degree of sinfulness. There was no consideration of growth in the Christian life, the call to live out the baptismal commitment, or the virtues perfecting the human person and disposing the person to good actions in this life. Many people familiar with Catholic moral theologians were amazed that Vatican II could insist on the call of all Christians to perfection" (24). Curran sees his revisionist theology as a guide for Christians seeking to answer Vatican II's call to live a life of perfect holiness.

Chapter two, on "Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic Tradition," describes the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas, then the rise of "Second Thomism" in the sixteenth century, and the beginning of "Third Thomism" in the nineteenth century under the leadership of Pope Leo XIII. One conclusion Curran reaches in this chapter is that "the imposition of Thomistic philosophy

and theology had a significant influence in the life of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but never changed or even challenged the approach of the manuals of moral theology that by their very nature were not Thomistic" (64). Curran also believes that Pope Leo XIII and subsequent popes used Aquinas "to prevent any dialogue with contemporary thought in their struggle with modernity" (54). Finally, Curran says that in the twentieth century "a pluralism existed among Thomistic approaches" and that neo-Scholastic Thomism failed to give "enough importance to historicity and the subject." In other words, Curran is arguing that the prevailing Thomism of the twentieth century did not embrace historical consciousness, the new emphasis on the person, or enter into dialogue with contemporary thought, as he did in his revisionist theology.

Curran believes that revisionist moral theology is a form of natural law (strand three) that is rooted in the teaching of Vatican Council II (strand five) on "historical consciousness," the "*sensus fidelium*," and the human person. Curran believes that Pope Paul VI endorsed the stress on historical consciousness in his 1971 Apostolic Letter, *Octogesima adveniens (On the Occasion of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum)*, which was addressed to Cardinal Maurice Roy. Other revisionist theologians make the same claim. Curran further argues that revisionist theology requires dissent from and disagreement with papal teaching put forth through the ordinary papal magisterium (strand four).

Curran begins his explanation of what he means by historical consciousness in the chapter on natural law. He says that "revisionists agree that a historically conscious approach should replace the classicism of the accepted natural law theory" (99). By classicism Curran is referring to the view that human nature is a given that does not change over time. "The classicist methodology," he says, "tends to be abstract, a priori, and deductive. It begins with the abstract essence that is universal and immutable. Thus, in natural law theory the principle of morality is established and then other universal norms of conduct are deduced from it" (99-100). The advocates of historical consciousness, on the other hand, use an inductive, a posteriori, concrete methodology. They take notice of where people are and what they are doing, how "they are performing intentional acts that give meaning and significance to human living" (99). Later in his text Curran gives an example of what his historicist approach means in practice. Because a great number of Catholic married couples practice contraception, he says

that the “hierarchical teaching office” should no longer teach that “contraception is a grave moral evil” (132). Otherwise stated, the practice of Catholics should make bishops and pope realize that new truths have developed over time. Curran goes so far as to say, “The discrepancy between hierarchical teaching and the practice of married Catholics raises serious questions about the credibility of the hierarchical teaching office” (132).

The implication of Curran’s remarks regarding Church teaching on contraception is that truth emerges from the praxis of the Catholic people. He makes clear that he and fellow revisionist theologians believe that a change in Catholic teaching should take place not only in the area of contraception, but also “on such issues as masturbation, sterilization, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, homosexuality, divorce, premarital sexuality, and aspects of the abortion issue” (131). Curran’s understanding of historicism leads him to draw the conclusion that discrepancies between magisterial teaching and widespread practices among Catholics should necessarily be resolved in favor of the latter.

It is interesting to note that the magisterium said next to nothing about historicism until the appearance in 1998 of *Fides et ratio*, where Pope John Paul II addressed it in this way: “The fundamental claim of historicism . . . is that the truth of a philosophy is determined on the basis of its appropriateness to a certain period and a certain historical purpose. At least implicitly, therefore, the enduring validity of a truth is denied. What was true in one period, historicists claim, may not be true in another.”¹ So what the Bible said in the past may have been true for its time period, but not for all time. Not surprisingly, historicist theologians claim that the teaching authority of the Church can never definitively settle any specific moral issue—and some doctrinal matters, such as women’s ordination—with authoritative teaching. This is because reality supposedly doesn’t allow such a thing. For example, not a few theologians and public intellectuals now say that today’s historical circumstances call for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage. Some would go so far as to say that the Catholic Church should change its teaching on marriage and thus adapt to the concrete historical situation in which different groups are calling upon the Church to give moral approval to same-sex unions. The very fact that people in sufficient number or influence object to a particular Church teaching is, according to historicist theologians, a *locus theologicus* and should guide the magisterium in its teaching on moral matters.

Curran’s claim that Paul VI and Vatican Council II

support his acceptance of historicism is without merit. As proof that Paul VI “incorporates a historically conscious methodology” Curran quotes the following paragraph from *Octogesima adveniens* (no. 4):

In the face of such widely varying situations, it is difficult for us to have a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words, and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. . . . It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of good will, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political, and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed.

Rather than endorsing what Curran means by historical consciousness, Paul VI is describing how Catholics endowed with political prudence apply Catholic teaching to local issues. Take, for example, the introduction of the common core state standards (CCSS) into public and Catholic education. Catholics could not reasonably expect a pope to answer the question whether there is merit to adopting the new educational standards. Rather, it is up to them to study the issue and determine on the basis of perennial Catholic teaching whether CCSS would improve or hurt public or Catholic education from K through 12.

As for Vatican II, Curran claims that the Council moved from classicism to an embrace of a historically conscious worldview by the way it discussed *ressourcement* (a return to the sources of Christian teaching, especially biblical and patristic texts) and *aggiornamento* (bringing the Catholic Church up-to-date), and by changing the Church’s teaching on religious liberty. He does concede that *ressourcement* “does not necessarily involve a shift to historical consciousness” (236). He provides no evidence to show that Vatican II’s understanding of *aggiornamento* included his view of historical consciousness. Curran does make an unpersuasive argument to show that Vatican II’s teaching on religious liberty endorses a view of historical consciousness that would allow theologians to justify dissent from Church teaching when it is based on a classicist worldview.

Curran makes much of the fact that the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* begins with these words:

A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary persons. And the demand is increasingly made that human beings should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom.... This demand for freedom.... regards in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society.... This Vatican Synod takes careful note of these desires.... It proposes to declare them to be greatly in accord with truth and justice. (quoted from Curran, 248)

Curran's comment on this passage is as follows: "The Council fathers thus recognized that they learned the importance of religious freedom from the experience of people" (248). People's experience is of the utmost importance in Curran's approach because it is the experience of persons, which is a *locus theologicus* in his mind. So, if Catholic spouses experience contraception as a good for their marriage, then Church authorities should take notice of this experience and declare it to be "in accord with truth and justice."

Curran fails to realize that Vatican II does not base its argument for religious liberty on the simple desire of people to have religious liberty. Rather, the Council declares the desire for religious liberty to be "in accord with truth and justice." The implication is that every strong desire of persons and every praxis would have to be submitted to the same criteria.

The reason Curran puts so much stock in the practice of Catholics is not only his acceptance of historicism, but also his understanding of the people of God and the *sensus fidelium* or the *sensus fidei*. Curran directs attention to Vatican II's *Lumen gentium*, no. 12, where the Council Fathers say that "the totality of the faithful, who have the anointing of the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief." Because all the faithful participate in the prophetic office of Jesus, it is no longer correct to distinguish between the *ecclesia docens* (teaching church) from the *ecclesia discens* (learning Church). Curran further argues that one should no longer refer to the teaching authority of the pope and bishops as the magisterium but as the hierarchical magisterium. He is really saying that the people of God, with their *sensus fidei*, constitute a kind of magisterium because they are guided by the Holy Spirit. Curran then adds that according to Catholic theology, "authoritative Church teaching has to be received by the whole Church" (265). This means that the unwillingness of the laity to receive a particular Church teaching calls into question the validity of that

teaching. He mistakenly puts forth these points as the teaching of Vatican II.

Lumen gentium says more about the *sensus fidei* than Curran indicates. Right after its statement about the inability of the totality of the faithful to err in matters of belief, it adds, "[the faithful] manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural sense of faith [*sensus fidei*], when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" (no. 12). There's no question of pitting the teaching authority of the lay faithful against the magisterium of the Church; it is what the laity and the bishops believe together that is theologically significant. As Avery Dulles noted, "The sense of the faithful should be carefully distinguished from public opinion in the Church, which is not a theological source attributable to the Holy Spirit, but merely a sociological fact. Public opinion . . . often reflects the tendencies of our fallen nature, the trends of the times, and the pressures of the public media."² As for the reception of Church teaching, Dulles argues that it "is necessary for the efficacy of any teaching," but it may or may not be forthcoming. When it comes to contraception and other areas of sexual morality Curran displays no sense that a majority of Catholics could refuse to accept Catholic teaching for bad reasons. Dulles is again right on the mark when he says, "The mere absence of reception does not count as evidence against a teaching unless the opposition is animated by the spirit of Christ and the gospel. Otherwise, the dissent may prove only that the teaching is in conflict with the spirit of the times and what Paul would call the desires of the flesh."³ Catholic laity may or may not be in tune with the Holy Spirit. When Catholics are deceived by the spirit of the age, some authentic Church teaching will appear as a sign of contradiction.

Vatican II's teaching on the person, according to Curran, not only explains the significance of people's experience for the discernment of moral truth, but also requires a "personalistic approach to moral theology" (246). This entails a dismissal of the manuals of moral theology with their emphasis on individual moral actions and their degree of sinfulness. The emphasis must be "on the universal vocation of all Christians to perfection" and on the practice of the virtues as the way to show a grateful response to God's gift of salvation (246, 258). "The relationship to God is core" (258).

The personalist approach also leads Curran and other revisionist theologians to accuse the popes of embracing physicalism or biologism in their moral teaching.

This charge “criticizes the hierarchical approach for identifying the moral and human act with the physical or biological aspect of the act” (98). This is certainly a misplaced criticism of Paul VI and John Paul II. The latter, for example, shows how he approaches moral acts in his interpretation of the conjugal act. Through sexual intercourse spouses say to one another, “I want to be one with you and am willing to have a child with you.” This is hardly physicalism. Ironically, the revisionists are the real physicalists, since they downplay the object of an act in favor of the intention, so that human acts remain merely physical until you ascertain the intention of the acting agent. Following the revisionist understanding, for example, an umpire should not penalize a pitcher for throwing at a batter until he ascertains the pitcher’s intention. The mere throwing at a batter is the physical act; the intention of the pitcher reveals the real nature of the act, as if there is not an intention built into the act of throwing at the batter.

Curran’s emphasis on our relationship with God, seeking perfection and the practice of the virtues is, of course, right on target as a teaching of Vatican II. Curran, however, effectively undermines the Vatican II teaching by his interpretation of historical consciousness, which in many cases reduces the moral demands on the acting agent.

Curran’s revisionist theology also calls for overcoming what he calls the papalization of the Church, by which Curran means that popes have arrogated too much authority for themselves. Popes must admit, Curran argues, that their noninfallible, authoritative, and official teaching has been wrong in the past and can be wrong in the future. They must also be willing to recognize a greater teaching role for bishops, theologians, and the *sensus fidelium* which, Curran believes, existed in the past. One way to enhance the authority of the bishops would be to change the way the Synod of Bishops operates. Pope Paul VI established the Synod in 1965 to counsel the pope. “But if the synod were truly an exercise of collegiality in the Church,” argues Curran, “it should have the power to share in the governing of the Church and not just give advice to the pope” (271). The reason Curran calls for more sharing of authority is his interpretation of the operation of the Spirit in the Church. “As a consequence of recognizing the work of the Spirit in all the baptized, it follows that the teaching role in the Church is broader than just that of the hierarchical magisterium” (249). The total magisterium should not only include the *sensus fidelium* of the Catholic laity, but also

the magisterium of the theologians. “Recall,” Curran writes, “that in the Middle Ages everyone recognized that theologians had a magisterial role, but now that role is not authoritative” (193). Curran does not address the issue of coordinating the various organs of the all-encompassing magisterium in the Church, though he does say, as we previously mentioned, that the beliefs and praxis of the laity as well as the consensus of revisionist theologians can trump authoritative papal teaching.

When all is said and done, the key issue in the revisionist theology of Curran is his deference to a particular view of historical consciousness. Curran is the kind of historicist described in Pope John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio*, no. 87. Why should we all bow down before the historicist understanding of historical consciousness? Why should Catholic moral theology now take its bearings by historicism? Curran never answers these two questions.

Curran owes his readers answers because there is a lot at stake in the acceptance of historical consciousness by revisionist moral theology. Writing way back in 1940, a German political philosopher captured what’s at stake using almost the same words as John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio*: “The view that truth is eternal and that there are eternal standards, was contradicted by historical consciousness, i.e. by the opinion that all ‘truths’ and standards are relative to a given historical situation, and that, consequently a mature philosophy can raise no higher claim than to express the spirit of the period to which it belongs.” The political philosopher went on to say that historical consciousness came into being at a certain point and will again pass out of existence, to be replaced by something else, most likely a “new barbarism.”⁴ One could, at least, argue that the acceptance of historical consciousness by Catholic revisionists is self-complacent because it blithely accepts that truths are relative to a given historical period and gives up the quest to transcend the limitations of the culture in which one lives. In my mind, such self-complacency may pave the way to an even greater eclipse of Catholic moral teaching among large numbers of Catholics. ✕

ENDNOTES

- 1 Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 87.
- 2 Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Magisterium Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2007), 45.
- 3 Dulles, 107.
- 4 Leo Strauss, “Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy,” in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 132–33.

Flannery O'Connor. *A Prayer Journal*. Introduction by W.A. Sessions. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. 112 pp.

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

Flannery O'Connor was a writer of uncommon talent, and surely deserves to be counted among the major figures of twentieth century American literature. In some respects, she was very much the modern writer, in terms of, say, the pronouncedly realistic bent of her fiction, and yet there was an aspect of her identity, as a writer, that set her apart from other writers of her generation, American or otherwise, situating her decidedly outside the main stream of modern fiction. What made her a most unusual writer, indeed an altogether unique one, was the fact that she was an artist of the utmost seriousness, and, at one and the same time, a woman of faith of the utmost seriousness. A total commitment to her art was coupled with a total commitment to her faith, and the two commitments, working together harmoniously, shaped her singular identity as a writer. In this she was *sui generis*.

That art and faith were inseparably bound up with one another for Flannery O'Connor is something the proof of which is to be found in her fiction, although, it has to be admitted, not in a manifestly evident way. Readers who encounter her work for the first time often do not see it, even if, or especially if, interestingly enough, they happen to be Catholic readers. The fault here very definitely lies on the side of the reader. O'Connor once pointedly observed that "it takes readers as well as writers to make literature." By "readers" here she was referring to what is perhaps somewhat of a rare breed: people who have sufficient aesthetic sense to be capable of discerning what an artist is attempting to achieve through his art. If she was a special kind of writer, and she was

all of that, she required a special kind of reader to appreciate, and benefit by, what she was up to in her work. Her artistic perspective and intent, thoroughly informed by her faith, reveals itself by indirection. O'Connor does not shout at us; she speaks softly, but evenly, and quite distinctly. This approach was not without good effect, and her message (she would not particularly like that term) is all the more poignantly registered, in the end, on account of the oblique way by which it is communicated.

Should we be somewhat slow in seeing, in her fiction, what that fiction was designed to achieve, its very *raison d'être*, we can always advert to her non-fiction, where she helpfully spells things out for us in explicit terms. An excellent source in this respect is the sparkling *Mystery and Manners*, and there are her letters as well, collected by Sally Fitzgerald, and published under the title of *The Habit of Being*. But now, in addition to these sources, we have available to us the recently published *A Prayer Journal*, an altogether remarkable document. In this work we have the clearest kind of evidence that the very special vocation she had chosen for herself, to be an artist whose art was pregnant with her faith, had been settled upon at the very outset of her professional career as a writer.

When Flannery O'Connor was twenty years old, having just graduated from Georgia State College for Women in her home town of Milledgeville, she traveled north to enroll in the famed Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. During her stay there, where her role as a writer was to take definite shape and direction, she kept a journal over the two year period of 1946-1947. The copybook in which she kept the journal was recently found among her papers in Georgia, following which, thanks to the editorial work of W.A. Sessions, and to Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, this valuable addendum to American letters has been made available to the public. The published book,

considered simply as an artefact, is quite handsomely done. The first half contains the printed text of the journal entries; the photocopied pages of the original holograph document make up the book's second half. O'Connor's handwriting has a bold, straightforward quality to it, which seems, somehow, aptly to reflect the down-home, unpretentious directness of the author.

The Prayer Journal, in its general tone, is somewhat reminiscent of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, in that throughout the course of the work O'Connor is carrying on an intimate colloquy with God. The work is not long, taking up but forty-eight copybook pages, but what it lacks in length it more than makes up in the substance of its contents. Surely she never intended that the journal should see publication, given its highly private and personal nature, but just on that account it provides insights into her character not to be found in any of her other writings, not even the letters.

Prolonged serious prayer—and that is what this journal records—would seem necessarily to encompass a running exercise in self-scrutiny, but of a special kind, for the person at prayer endeavors to look into herself, not only with her own eyes, but, as it were, with the eyes of God as well. This is what O'Connor is doing, persistently, and she is not particularly impressed with the results of her investigations; she is, in fact, rather unsparing of herself, as she attempts to assess the state of her soul, at one point identifying herself as "a pretentious fool" (18). More than once she calls attention to what she regards as her mediocrity, and even wonders if in fact she might be even less than mediocre. She berates herself for the perfunctory quality of her prayers, for her distractedness at daily Mass, for not having the proper disposition for receiving Communion, for not making a proper thanksgiving after Mass. "I dread, Oh Lord, losing my faith," she writes. "My mind is not strong. It is prey to all sorts of intellectual quackery" (5). Will she persevere in

the faith? She is determined to remain in the Church, but only in the right way, only with the right attitude. “I don’t want to fear to be out; I want to love to be in” (6). She was apparently delving into some modern psychology at the time—Freud is mentioned more than once—and, while clearly rejecting the governing world view of the authors she is reading, apparently because of the “intellectual quackery” she found in them, she is clearly bothered by the naturalistic notions propounded by people who, following Feuerbach, argue that God and religion are simply the products of wishful thinking, no more than the projections of basic, entirely human needs.

All in all, though, there is nothing maudlin or self-pitying about O’Connor’s stern assessments of herself. It bespeaks the kind of healthy perspective that can only come from a deeply entrenched sense of humor. In going through this journal, we are peeking over the shoulder of a strikingly tough-minded young woman; she was—almost, it seems, from childhood—a clear-eyed, unsentimental realist, whether she was looking inward or looking outward. If she was not satisfied with the present state of her soul, neither had she any intention of making convenient accommodations with it. Her spiritual ambitions were large. At one point she requests, fairly demands, that God make her a mystic, “immediately.” On a later page she writes: “I would like to be intelligently holy” (21).

O’Connor’s preoccupations with grace is perhaps the single most striking feature of the journal. For the dedicated readers of her fiction, this would not come as a surprise. If there is a central theme that runs through her novels and all of her stories, and serves to give them, for all their diversity in other respects, an underlying unity, it is the operative presence of grace in the lives of her characters. In *Mystery and Manners* she wrote: “I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is

the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil.” “All boils down to grace, I suppose” (10), she writes in the journal, a supposition which was to become a mainstay of her thought throughout her life. The journal is laced with petitionary prayers of all sorts, but the most frequent and fervent of her requests have to do with grace. “Give me the grace, dear God, to adore You for even this I cannot do for myself. Give me the grace to adore You with the excitement of the old priests when they sacrificed a lamb to You. Give me the grace to adore You with the awe that fills Your priests when they sacrifice the Lamb on our altars. Give me the grace to be impatient for the time when I shall see You face to face and need no stimulus than that to adore You. Give me the grace, dear God, to see the barrenness and the misery of the places where You are not adored but desecrated” (8-9).

Running a close second to O’Connor’s preoccupation with grace which is to be found in the journal is her preoccupation with writing. This is easily explained by where she was at the time, and by the focus of so much of her thought and energy, but what is especially to be noticed is how these two preoccupations are inextricably bound up with one another. Her determination to become a writer, and not just a writer but “a *fine* writer” (23), stands out prominently in everything she has to say about the subject. She wants to be an artist, one who has mastered the craft; it is imperative that she rise above mediocrity, the danger of succumbing to which would seem to have haunted her. Much of her petitionary prayer has to do with her writing. “Please help me dear God to be a good writer and to get something else accepted” (10). [Apparently she had recently had one of her stories accepted for publication, possibly the first.] “Oh dear Lord I want to write a novel, a good novel” (18). “I must write down that I am to be an artist” (29).

But her understanding of “a *fine* writer” is what marks her uniqueness.

She wanted her writing to reflect her faith. “Help me to get more than what is natural into my work” (18). “God must be in all my work” (21). “I want to be the best artist it is possible for me to be, under God.” (29). “Please let Christian principles permeate my writing and please let there be enough of my writing (published) for Christian principles to permeate” (5). “Dear God please help me to be an artist, please let it lead to You” (29).

The resolve which Flannery O’Connor made at the beginning of her career, that her faith was to be an integral part of her writing, was not merely a youthful fancy, as is amply testified by the body of literature she has bequeathed to the world. She was a Catholic writer of a special kind, and quite unlike any other that this country has produced. This had everything to do with her singular earnestness of purpose. Her art was not for art’s sake, but for God’s sake. However, she knew, right from the outset of her writing career, and in this she displayed a maturity of judgment that was well in advance of her age, that the only art that was worthy of being dedicated to God had to be genuine art. “When people have told me,” she once wrote, “that because I am a Catholic, I cannot be an artist, I have had to reply, ruefully, that because I am a Catholic, I cannot afford to be less than an artist.” Substitutes for genuine art, however sincerely made and sincerely offered, will not do. Hence her insistently reminding herself, while at the Writers’ Workshop, that the artist she intended to become must be in possession of “aesthetic craftsmanship” (29).

Flannery O’Connor succeeded in her lofty aim. Christian principles do in fact permeate her writing, and are all the more poignantly present there for the artful way they are woven into the story. As is the case with the gospel parables, it is the story which first captures our attention. Then, once we are within the embrace of the narrative, we see that there is a story behind the story. To write stories which were

so many variations on the theme of the Christian story, so many accounts of the mysterious workings of divine grace in the lives of men, this was the aesthetic strategy that guided Flannery O'Connor in all her work, and with the happiest of consequences.

Natoli, Carlos. *Aristotle: His Life and School*. Trans. D. S. Hutchinson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. xix + 219 pp.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty,
The Catholic University of America

With this volume, Carlos Natoli enters a distinguished line of scholars who have produced biographies of Aristotle, from Eduard Zeller, (1897, 1921), Werner Jaeger (1923), and Ingemar Düring (1957). As Hutchinson observes in his preface, “Aristotle’s thought remains very much alive for us today, despite the great antiquity of his works, and his *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most studied book of moral philosophy at present on North American university campuses.” Yet for most students of his works his life remains obscure.

Natoli sets out to remedy this by assembling all available information about Aristotle’s life from ancient sources. “What I am interested in doing,” he says, “is to reconstruct as well as possible from reliable texts a complete and coherent biography.” To that end Natoli draws on Aristotle’s last will and testament, Aristotle’s poetry and letters, official documents from the period, ancient biographies, and other testimonials. Natoli subsequently reviews the panorama of biographic research published since Zeller’s account. He speaks of Aristotle as “This new intellectual figure so different from his predecessors whom we today call the Presocratics... With Aristotle a new cultural type was born, a model of the wise man different from the sages of times past.” And

again, Natoli writes, “With Aristotle a new style of philosophical reflection was worked out, the impact of which European culture in all the centuries that followed would be very difficult to overestimate”

Upon Natoli’s sifting out much misinformation, what we do know for certain is that Aristotle was born 384/383 B.C. in Stagira, a small Greek polis, of a well-connected family. He was orphaned at age 14 and was subsequently cared for by Proxenus of Atarneus, a friend of Plato. At age 17 he was sent to Athens to study at Plato’s Academy where he remained for twenty years. At some point Aristotle takes Pythia as a wife; a daughter is named for her mother. Plato dies in 347, Speusippus becomes his successor. An unfavorable political climate drives Aristotle in that same year to the court of Hermias, where he resides for three years before being called to the court of Philip of Macedonia to tutor Philip’s son Alexander. We know nothing for certain about what Aristotle taught Alexander. Plutarch believed that the young Alexander was exposed to the entire Aristotelian corpus. The most obscure period of Aristotle’s life is that which he spent at the court of Philip between 347 and 335. We know that upon the death of Pythia, Aristotle took a second wife, whom he described as “sensible and good.” His devotion to Pythia was such that in his will he directed that her remains be exhumed and reburied with his. It is not clear whether Nicomacheas was born to Pythia or Herpyllis, his second wife.

In 335 Aristotle returned to Athens, where he lectured at the Lyceum for twelve or thirteen years. In his lifetime Aristotle had many detractors. The alleged personal conflict with Plato is without foundation. It seems clear that Aristotle did not build the Lyceum in opposition to Plato while Plato was living. As to the alleged conflict between the two schools of thought, Natoli writes, “In all probability the relationship between masters and stu-

dents was based on free discussion and a fundamental agreement in choosing the problems to be discussed, rather than the solutions to be espoused.”

Natoli treats gingerly Ptolemy’s *Life of Aristotle* but seems to come down on the side of its authenticity. According to Ptolemy the Athenians by decree of the assembly, in recognition of the benefits that he brought to the city, authorized an inscription on a column that reads in part: “Aristotle of Stagira, son of Nicomacheas, had served the city well by doing good and by the great number of his own acts of assistance and beneficence and by all his services to the people of Athens, especially by intervening with King Philip for the purpose of promoting their interests and securing that they were well treated; that the people of Athens therefore wanted it to be quite clear that they appreciated the good that had come out of this, that they bestowed distinction and praise upon him and would keep him in faithful and honored remembrance.”

In 323 Alexander died, and when the anti-Macedonian faction gained strength in Athens, Aristotle found it expedient to leave and moved to Chalcis in Euboea where he died the following year.

Remi Brague, *On the God of the Christians (and One or Two Others)*, trans. Paul Seaton. South Bend, Ind.: Augustine’s Press, 2013. xvii + 160 pp.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty,
The Catholic University of America

The aim of this book, Rémi Brague declares at the outset, is to describe the image made of God by Christianity. In himself God is the same for all, but the images and concepts that have been made of God differ among men and among the associations that bring men together, whether they be philosophical or religious. “I want to show,” writes Brague,

“that a certain image of God, the one that Christians address, possesses traits that distinguish it from certain other images.”

Rémi Brague writes as a philosopher, but as one steeped in the history of Western thought from antiquity to the present. He is professor of philosophy at the University of Paris, I Pantheon-Sorbonne and the University of Munich. This book builds upon his previously published and much-admired work, *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism and Islam*.¹

This volume is an extended critique of the often misleading language by which Christians express their beliefs. To speak of three Abrahamic religions, for example, is not only false but dangerous. “To so speak,” writes Brague, “is to mask a serious error concerning the nature of the three religions.” By the phrase, “the three religions of Abraham,” people believe that they have established common ground by appealing to a common ancestor. It is true that all three, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have books in which the name Abraham appears, but, says Brague, “[t]he history of Abraham is not interpreted in the same way in Judaism and Christianity, let alone in Islam. The Quran makes use of the figure of Abraham to recount a history that neither Judaism nor Christianity know anything about. For Islam there is only one religion of Abraham, which is Islam itself.”

Well-meaning Christians who speak of the “religion of Abraham” include Judaism and Islam, and associate them with Christianity in a vague sort of way. But the Abraham that the three religions have in common is nothing more than a vague abstraction. “The smallest of common denominators coincide with none of the concrete figures revered by them in which they recognize themselves.” To accept such an Abraham, Christians would have to renounce a dimension of their faith. “So too with the expression, ‘three religions of the book.’” There are

three very different books, Old Testament, New Testament, and Quran. The concept of “revealed religion” is similarly deceptive. “What is revealed in Judaism is the history of the people of Israel. For Christianity, the revealed object is not the New Testament but the person of Christ himself; the book only recounts the history and reports the teaching of this person. In Islam, the revealed object is truly the book; the person of Mohammed, at least in primitive Islam, had little importance.”

To speak of “monotheism” is equally misleading, says Brague. The designation comes from without, not from within the religions themselves. The term “monotheism” can be traced to the pen of Henry More, one of the Christian Platonists who used it in 1660. Monotheism is not essentially religious. This can be seen in the deism of certain Enlightenment thinkers, but the best examples may be sought among the Greek philosophers who never heard of Judaism, not to mention Christianity, namely, Xenophanes of Colophon (sixth–fifth century B.C.), who spoke of “a sole god, the greatest among gods and men, who resembles mortals neither in appearance or in thought.” Aristotle himself called the unchanging first mover of his natural philosophy by the name of “god.” In an aside, Brague notes that Christianity recognizes the monotheism of Judaism, “although Judaism finds it harder to return the favor.” Maimonides, the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher, reproached Christians for making God “the third of three.”

Addressing the question of how we know God, Brague finds it necessary to reference the thought of Aristotle, C. S. Peirce, Pascal, Schleiermacher, and Locke, who each in his own day has reflected on the subject. Granted that God is one, how is unity to be conceived? Brague begins his discussion with a distinction between belief and faith. Belief, he holds, is imperfect knowledge of what can be known. We can believe in something, but we can also believe in someone. Belief in

something is susceptible of degrees; to believe in someone is not. “In the case of God, faith bears simultaneously upon a content and the one who reveals it. In Christianity the content of Revelation is nothing other than the one who reveals himself.”

In a chapter entitled “The One God,” Brague addresses the uniqueness and unity of God revealed as triune. “The mystery of the Trinity exists only in God and has no real analogy within the types of unity found within the created world.” Thus one must not conceive God on the model of the created world. “For the Christian the Trinity is the manner in which God is one; to say that ‘God is one’ is a way of saying that God is love.” And Brague adds, “The way in which God is one is not without implications for the way in which we have to conduct ourselves.” Brague finds it necessary in talking about the Trinity to distinguish between uniqueness and unity. “To be unique and to be one do not mean the same thing. To say that God is unique means there is but one God, and there is not a plurality of gods [as in pagan antiquity]. In contrast to say that God is one means to say that God is simple.” Brague continues this with an extended discussion of the Incarnate Word as found in John of the Cross.

There follows the question of the definitiveness or closure of revelation. Brague answers in the spirit of John of the Cross: “God has spoken in such a definitive and total way that if God, *per impossibiles*, spoke again, this would be to repeat himself, to harp. . . . Everything may be given, but everything is not manifested.” Then, too, if everything has been said, and in the words of Hegel, if “God no longer has any secrets,” a thousand things need to be done.

Reading Rémi Brague is to find insight after insight, one gem following another. He more-or-less ends this volume with a short discourse on the meaning of life. “A bit too often people speak of the meaning of life. Sometimes the phrase is used for apologetic

purposes and therefore means 'Faith gives meaning to life.' It would be impossible to live if life did not have meaning. Hence we need faith." There may be some truth to that, but, says Brague, "Christianity does not propose to give meaning to life, as if life did not have meaning and there was need to seek for some outside of it. Christianity rather proposes to unveil this meaning."

In a final passage "on the withdrawal of the sacred," Brague sadly observes, "The modern world can be characterized as the time of the silence of the gods or God. The long process of several centuries during which the world 'modernized' no longer leaves room for divine words." It doesn't take a philosopher to notice that withdrawal, but it may take a rejuvenated philosophy to reopen a place for the Divine Word within the academy. Clearly, Rémi Brague in this and in other works has shown the value of philosophy to theology and, indeed, theology's rightful place within centers of learning.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Remi Brague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism and Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

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Manent, Pierre. *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. 384 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty
The Catholic University of America

The ambition of this book," Manent declares at the outset, "is to propose an interpretation, or at least elements for an interpretation, of the political development of the West." He goes on to say, "We have been modern now for several centuries. We are modern, and we want to be modern." If that is so, when did modernity begin? What century: 16th, 17th, 18th century? Origins, Manent

reminds us, particularly in the realm of ideas, are bound to be obscure. "Whatever the case, modernity is a project, formulated and implemented first in Europe, but nevertheless intended from the beginning for all of humanity." In Manent's analysis it soon becomes clear that as a movement, modernity is destined never to arrive at a term.

Developing a theme from an earlier work, *The City of Man* (1995), Manent says, "If we want to understand the modern project, we must begin with the city, for it is in the city that people deliberate and form projects for action. It is in the city that people discover that they can govern themselves and learn to do so. They discover and learn politics. The city is the shaping of human life that makes the common thing and the execution of the common thing in a plurality of cities hostile to each other and divided within." The political form that succeeded the city was the empire. With the coming of Christianity, add to that a third form, one created by the Church that is at once a city and an empire. Europeans soon found themselves confronted by competing authorities. "They were assailed by prestigious and contradictory words—the words of the Bible, the words of the Greek philosophers, the words of the Roman orators and historians—and they did not know which to retain." With Luther's revolt, the authority of the Word of God itself became divided between that of the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church, although the Scriptures themselves were accessible only through the mediation of the Church, and in the first instance in the language of the Church, Latin.

Luther's Reformation created a spiritual upheaval, but it was also and inseparably a political revolution, a national insurrection. Different European nations selected the Christian confession under which they chose to live and imposed it. Thus the confessional nation became one of history's political forms.

"Europe produced modernity and

for a long period of time, Europe was its master and owner. . . . Today Bacon and Descartes reign in Shanghai and Bangalore at least as much as in Paris and London." Within Europe today, in spite of the multiple treaties that created the European Union, civic cooperation is feeble and the religious word almost inaudible. Manent continues, "Europe finds itself militarily, politically and spiritually disarmed in a world that it has armed with the instruments of modern civilization. It soon will be wholly incapable of defending itself. By renouncing the political form that was its own, Europe has deprived itself of the association in which European life had found its richest meaning."

Having sketched the subject of his inquiry, "The great question of the political development of the West," Manent finds it necessary to pause in order to take stock of tools of knowledge appropriate for the investigation. He finds that there are two versions of modern political science, one emphasizing science, the other experience. There is the political science of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke whom Manent calls "the architects of the modern state," and "the guiding spirits of modern politics." Arguing not from experience, modern political science takes its inspiration from Hobbes's fictional individual, postulated in a state of nature in which all war against all. From that postulate is derived the mythical social contract theory and all that it entails including the scope of human rights. Manent argues, "Modern political science in its founding moment, overcomes the grave deficiencies of modern political experience, the absence so to speak of an authentic political experience in the Christian world, by forging access to a pre-political human experience on the basis of which it will be possible to construct a new political order." Lost is the experience of those living in what was formerly called Christendom.

The most up-to-date version of Hobbes's starting point is that of John Rawls whose "original situation,"

Manent suggests, is “the postulation of a state of nature without nature.” As in the case of Hobbes, Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* trumps experience, and facts do not matter given his theoretical construct. Now contrast Hobbes and Rawls with Machiavelli who, Manent says, “wrote about how men actually lived, not the way they behaved in those imaginary republics and principalities.” Insightful reflections on the political theory of Cicero, Augustine, and Montesquieu follow.

Metamorphoses of the City seems to end in its penultimate chapter, with a kind of recapitulation in which Manent identifies “four great moments in the history of humanity”: Jewish law, Greek philosophy, Christianity, and democracy, “the religion of humanity.” The four great spiritual determinations, he suggests, not only form a chronological succession but also mark the major stages on the gradient of increasing universality. In the end Manent poses a question: Is it possible to imagine a new stage, the result of a mediation of Christianity and the modern conception of humanity?

In a final chapter, Manent brings together some converging thoughts. He finds a certain solidarity between Jewish law and Christianity, and between Christianity and the gods of the Greek philosophers insofar as those accounts provide a rational conception of divinity. The Religion of Humanity understood from the modern perspective has left behind Jewish, Christian, and Greek philosophical notions of the divine. As Manent expresses it, modernity by embracing Humanity has “expelled the highest idea to embrace simply the largest idea which is the idea of humanity itself.” Yet two great facts remain that, if recognized, would enable modernity to appropriate the Christian truth. Both the Hebrew scriptures and Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato and the Platonists, dispose one to Christianity.

The Reformation in rejecting the mediation of the Church as a separate and visible institution weakened

Christianity to the detriment of the social order. “The believer, instead of being saved by partaking in the sacraments of the Church, instead of being part of the Church, is instructed by Luther that he is saved by faith in the Word of God alone.” What happens when the Church is set aside? “The spiritual ministry is appropriated by every Christian in what is called the universal priesthood” Lost is the mediation of the Church between man and God.

Manent rhetorically asks, “If humans produce and receive human goods within the framework and by means of the city, why would they not receive the good that is God and even cooperate in God’s action, in a special and distinct city, the people of God, the city of God, or the Church.” Relieved of the burden of the ecclesiastical order, the Christian community inevitably falls under the state, as it soon did in Luther’s Germany. “However unsatisfactory or disappointing the mediating institution may be – Yahweh is forever reprimanding and even chastising his people – it is the bridge over the abyss” that separates the Immense and the lowly. What Christianity brings is mediation, not distance.

A brief review cannot do justice to this book, not simply because of its brevity. Given the breath of Manent’s intellectual probing, *Metamorphoses of the City* is a challenge even for the seasoned reader. The “elements for an interpretation of the political development of the West” promised in the beginning, are abundantly provided, but much is demanded of the reader.

Medieval Political Philosophy:

A Sourcebook, Second Edition, edited by Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland. Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2011.

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

Medieval Political Philosophy was first published in 1963 by the Free Press of Glencoe, and was edited by Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi; Cornell University Press issued a paperback edition of the work in 1972; in 1986 concerted work began on a revised edition, a project which was eventually taken over by Joshua Parens of the University of Dallas and Joseph C. Macfarland of St. John’s College, Annapolis, and which was brought to happy fruition in the book which has now been made available to us, under the imprint of Cornell University Press.

The book is divided into three parts, each composed of selected writings of thinkers representing respectively the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian communities. Part I, edited by Joshua Parens, contains selections from the writings of Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroës, the three major figures of medieval Islamic philosophy, and, indeed, of Islamic philosophy as a whole; also included in this part are selections from the writings of Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl. Part II, also edited by Joshua Parens, contains selections from the following Jewish thinkers: Moses Maimonides, Saadya Gaon, Judah Helevi, Isaac Polgar, and Abravanel. Part III, containing the writings of Christian thinkers on political philosophy, is edited by Joseph Macfarland; the figures represented in this part are Roger Bacon, St. Thomas Aquinas, Boethius, Stephen Tempier, Giles of Rome, Ptolemy of Lucca, Dante Alighieri, Marsilius of Padua, and William of Ockham.

The book begins with a General Introduction, in which the editors provide cultural and intellectual background against which the selections

that follow can be better understood. Discussing various themes and points of view, they show what is common to the thinkers in all three traditions, the differences among the traditions, as well as the differences that sometimes obtain among thinkers within a single tradition. In all, the General Introduction provides an informative and helpful overview of the book's contents. In addition to the General Introduction, each of the three parts of the book leads off with an introduction with a sharper focus, providing more detailed discussion of the writers whose work the part contains. In addition, the selections of each of the authors begins with an introduction, offering pertinent biographical and bibliographical information regarding the author. Following each of the book's three parts there is an ample bibliography. Finally, the book has a detailed index, which cannot help but add to its practical usefulness as a sourcebook.

As the editors point out, for all the differences of opinion and perspective that are apparent enough when we review the thought of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian medieval thinkers on the subject of political philosophy, perhaps what would first strike the reader, in comparing their thought to that of contemporary political philosophers, is what the medieval thinkers had in common, and that is the fact that they were religious believers, and, indeed, staunch, unambiguous monotheists for whom an afterlife was an integral part of their belief. This sets them dramatically apart from the general run of contemporary political philosophers, the tonality of whose thought is dominantly secularistic, and which tends to be dismissive of religion, if not positively antagonistic toward it. The religiously informed world view of the medieval thinkers clearly had a significant effect on how they thought and wrote about political philosophy. Their thinking was shaped by the awareness of there being two distinct powers operative within human society, secular and ecclesiastical, between

which conflicts could sometimes arise, in which case they were more inclined to given their allegiance to the ecclesiastical power rather than to the secular. Another relation that figures importantly in the ruminations of these thinkers over matters political, one that also involves conflict, is that between faith and reason. "We study these authors," the editors note, "with the intention of coming to understand the recovery and reemergence of political philosophy in these three monotheistic religious communities" (1).

A particularly interesting contrast between the Islamic and Jewish thinkers, on the one hand, and the Christian thinkers, on the other, is the differing ways they looked to and drew upon the ancient Greek philosophers. Stated broadly, the Muslims and the Jews favored Plato, giving special attention to the *Republic* and the *Laws*, whereas the Christians—and this was emphatically the case with Thomas Aquinas—were definitely Aristotelian in orientation. A particular example of this is found in how the Muslim philosophers, Alfarabi in particular, read the *Republic*, specifically in the manner in which the philosopher-king was interpreted. That singular political figure was seen as properly represented by the legislating prophet, though of course there was no agreement as to the precise identity of the prophet in question; for the Muslims it was Mohammed, for the Jews, Moses. Jurisprudence tended to be the governing subject in the thought of Muslims and Jews, whereas for the Christians it was theology that was given primacy of place. Muslim political philosophy, especially for Alfarabi, tended to be comprehensive, in the sense that it was seen as embracing dialectical theology, such as it was in Islam, and jurisprudence. This is the way, by and large, the Muslims tended to interpret the division of the sciences. Avicenna, for his part, perhaps because of his partiality for a strictly rational approach to things, blurred the lines between philosophy and theology. This was to draw criticism from Averroës,

who took the view that dialectical theology was subordinate to philosophy. The Christians, on the other hand, had a distinctly different way of looking upon the division of the sciences: again, theology was supreme, and philosophy, political philosophy in particular, was seen as subordinate to theology and subject to its guidance. There was more or less unanimity of agreement on this point among Christian thinkers, although Bishop Tempier's publication, in 1277, of 219 "Errors in Philosophy" (a particularly valuable addition to the anthology, by the way) indicates that there were some members of the arts faculty at the University of Paris who entertained dissenting views on the matter.

Both Alfarabi and Aquinas, each in his distinct way, can be cited as the forerunners in the medieval revivification of political philosophy. Maimonides was unquestionably the principal figure in the Judaic tradition. A particularly interesting aspect of his thought was the emphasis and interpretation he gave to natural law, which caused some controversy among Jewish thinkers. Like Alfarabi, Maimonides believed that thought or contemplation should take precedence over action, whereas the poet Judah Halevi, who, like Alghazali, was critical of the philosophic way of life, took just the opposite point of view.

The editors call attention to "the undeniably greater longevity of philosophy in the Christian West than in the Islamic world" (3). Alfarabi certainly got Islamic philosophy off to an impressive start, and he exercised considerable influence on Avicenna and Averroës, both of whom furthered the cause appreciably. But it would be no exaggeration to say that with the death of Averroës, in 1198, Islamic philosophy, as a distinct and independent science, ceased to be a factor in the Islamic world. For an explanation of this remarkable circumstance, we must cite the imposing figure of Alghazali, who might be better described as a theologian than as a philosopher.

Indeed, he had no sympathy for philosophy, which he saw as inimical to religion, and launched a spirited attack on it in his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. The influence of Alfarabi was pretty much limited to Avicenna and Averroës, but the influence of Alghazali extended to the entire Islamic world and had the effect of winning a decisive victory over philosophy. As a result we now have a situation today where, I think it can be argued, Islam's three greatest philosophers are better known in the West than in the Islamic world. The medieval Christian philosophers were very much aware of their Islamic counterparts, and studied their works carefully. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of the Christian philosophers, was thoroughly familiar with the works of Averroës, and gave him the high com-

pliment of referring to him simply as the Commentator, just as he referred to Aristotle as the Philosopher. According to Étienne Gilson, Aquinas was significantly influenced by the thought of Avicenna.

In the Introduction to *Medieval Political Philosophy* the editors, referring specifically to the contents of the Islamic section, claim that their book "has few, if any, competitors in English for coverage of this area of political philosophy." (11) That claim is surely justified, but I think it can be extended so as to apply to what their book does on behalf of the full sweep of medieval political philosophy, Jewish and Christian as well as Islamic. Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland have provided us with an excellent anthology. The authors they include in the book

have been judiciously chosen, as have the specific selections for each of those authors, with the result that we have at our disposal a complete and well-balanced picture of medieval political philosophy. The selected writings of course compose the heart of the book, but the commentary that accompanies those selections, for its scholarly heft and for the abundance of its well-directed and well-developed observations and insights, adds appreciably to the overall value of the work. It is easy to foresee that *Medieval Political Philosophy* will do good service for years to come, as a first-rate college textbook, but also as a reference work that every philosopher and historian would want to have as part of his private library.

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Rev. Joseph. W. Koterski, S.J.
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If you would like to receive one of these books to review for the Quarterly, please email Alice Osberger – Osberger.1@nd.edu

How Italy and Her People Shaped Cardinal Newman: Italian Influences on an English Mind, Jo Anne Cammarata Sylva, Pine Beach, NJ: The Newman House, paperback, 189 pps.

Newman and His Family, Edward Short, London: Bloomsbury, paperback, 425 pps.

Catholicism and Historical Narrative: A Catholic Engagement with Historical Scholarship, Kevin Schmiesing, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, hardcover, pps. 211.

Culture and Abortion. Edward Short. Leominster, Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, paperback, pps. 277.

Being at Work, Elaine Lloyd E. Sandelands. Lanham: MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, paperback, pps. 95.

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