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COLUMNS

William L. Saunders
FCS President's Letter. 3
Moral Guidance on Prioritizing Care During a Pandemic. 5

Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.
From the Editor's Desk: Painful Lessons 11

ARTICLES

Margaret I. Hughes
The Interior Cathedral and the Cathedral Interior. 21

Richard Gribble, C.S.C.
Religious Indifferentism and Secularism in America:
Why Catholicism Remains Relevant. 35

Grattan Brown
Flipping the Humanities. 47

D.Q. McInerny
The Metaphysics of R.G. Collingwood. 55

FROM THE 2019 CONVENTION

Marie Cabaud Meaney
The Cross as Fulfillment of the Human Vocation?
Simone Weil's Answers to Evil. 69

Michael G. Sirilla
The Bishop: Icon of the Beautiful Jesus. 81

BOOK REVIEWS

Piotr Jaroszynski and Lindael Rolstone. *Europe: Civilizations Clashing – From Athens to the European Union*
Curtis Hancock. 91

Bronwen McShea. *Apostles of Empire: The Jesuits and New France*
Thomas W. Jodziewicz. 94

Clemens Cavallin. *Art and Sacrificial Love: A Conversation with Michael D. O'Brien*
Jeff Koloze. 96

Luanne D. Zurlo. *Single for a Greater Purpose: A Hidden Joy in the Catholic Church*
Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.. 99

Bradley C.S. Watson. *Progressivism: The Strange History of a Radical Idea*
Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.. 100

Books Received. 105

Invitation to the Fellowship's 2020 Convention. 106

Information about the Fellowship and the *Quarterly*. 107

Letter from the President of the Fellowship

Dear Members of the Fellowship,

In the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, let us pray for one another, for our country, and for all those affected. Let us draw closer to the Lord in the certainty that He loves us.

It looks increasingly likely that we will be able to hold our annual convention at St. Louis University, September 25-27. You should have received an email by this time giving you more details. Our theme concerns the apostolate on campus, and we are happy to be working with Fr. David Meconi, S.J., and his team at the Catholic Studies Center to put on the convention. I hope you can join us. Solidarity in these times is more important than ever.

Until then, God bless you. Please pray for the Fellowship.

Cordially,

William Saunders, Esq.
President, FCS

Moral Guidance on Prioritizing Care During a Pandemic*

William L. Saunders, Esq. et al.

As our society struggles to come to terms with the Covid-19 pandemic, for which our resources to treat the ill may well prove inadequate, difficult and heart-wrenching decisions may have to be made by physicians and nurses. In a democratic republic like ours, "we the people" owe them as much guidance as possible, and we should want that guidance to be framed in ways that protect our society – and each of us individually – from temptations that will come all too readily to mind.

In cases where decisions must be made about who shall be saved when not all can be saved, we also decide what sort of society we want ours to be – we are constituting ourselves as a certain kind of people. When faced with scarcity, some will be tempted simply to pass by those who are older, the physically disabled or cognitively impaired, those who seem to have little to contribute to our common life. Indeed, some of the proposals for treatment allocation that have been made in different states may already reflect a yielding to that temptation.

We believe that such approaches are unacceptable, and recent statements by HHS on discrimination against the elderly or the disabled support this judgment. But there are additional ways in which even otherwise upright decisions could bring with them misinterpretations, seductions, and temptations that it would be wrong to accept.

Here, we identify three temptations in particular, along with principles to counter these, that we believe must be avoided when issuing, following, or contemplating guidelines for allocating resources in this time of scarcity. Various guidelines have been proposed, including, prominently, those by Ezekiel Emanuel and his distinguished coauthors that appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Helpful as these are in several respects, we believe it is also important to consider some social pathologies to which our current situation might contribute.

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Allowed Casualties Are Not Intentional Killings

A first temptation will be to see the deaths allowed in consequence of our decision to treat some and not others as intentional killings. Decisions to save some may be framed (though not, let us hasten to say, by the distinguished authors of the NEJM guidelines) as decisions to kill others. And this slippage is likely to be encouraged by critics as well as friends of our rationing decisions.

But the slippage must be resisted. Already, attacks on the distinction between killing and accepting death as a foreseen side effect of an otherwise morally legitimate act whose object is not death itself, are staples of the pro-euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide movement. If withdrawing a ventilator from one close to death is permitted, they ask, why not intentionally kill the same person in order to eliminate his suffering? After all, both, it is alleged, are "intentional" taking of life.

The answer is that intentional killing is not the same as allowing a person to die as a proportionate side effect of an otherwise sound moral choice. In intentional killing, someone's death is deliberately caused either as an end (out of hatred, for example) or as a means to something else (such as the relief of suffering). But when burdensome treatments are refused or withdrawn precisely to avoid the burdens they impose, the intention is to avoid those burdens, and death even if foreseen is not intended as a means or as an end, but is accepted only as a side effect.

Similarly, decisions to save some are not choices to kill others, as the NEJM authors acknowledge. This must be held steady in the mind's eye, lest our allocation choices be used as cover to advance the regime of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Accordingly we need to exercise tremendous caution in our language: "choosing who will live and who will die" is a dangerous way of expressing what we are about in trying to save whom we can, while mourning the loss of those we are unable to save.

Human Lives Are All of Equal Value

Allocation decisions that will be made in our crisis will, again, have lethal effects in certain cases. When not all can be saved, some will perish. The NEJM guidelines mentioned above make some important recommendations for who should be given priority of treatment. Surely it is right to say, as they do, that critical Covid-19 interventions – testing, PPE, ICU beds, ventilators, therapeutics, and vaccines – should go first to frontline health care workers and others who care for ill patients and who keep critical infrastructure operating, particularly workers who face a high risk of infection and whose training makes them difficult to replace.

But no such prioritization principles should be allowed to undermine a core conviction of our moral tradition, namely, that the lives of all human beings are of inherent, equal, and indeed incalculable value.

It is a constant temptation of humanity to elevate the lives of some over the lives of others, and this will surely be augmented by the practice of prioritization. But it should be clear that while there are valid reasons (in certain circumstances) to give priority to, for example, healthcare workers, this hardly means that their lives are more valuable or more important than the lives of their patients. We must be vigilant to ensure that the coronavirus crisis does not lead to any cheapening of the value and dignity of each individual human being's life.

This must especially be kept in mind in thinking about health care allocation for the elderly and disabled once this pandemic has passed. The elderly are not owed less because of their age; nor are the disabled to be given a lesser share of the healthcare resources to which all are entitled. We need to emerge from the pandemic with these principles intact.

Expressive Significance Matters

And this leads to our third point. Consider the language used by the authors of the NEJM piece: "Maximization of benefits can be understood as saving the most individual lives or as saving the most life-years by giving priority to patients likely to survive longest after treatment." Further on, the authors are more judicious, reserving a life-years approach, or other considerations, only for "comparing patients whose likelihood of survival is similar," which to some of us seems reasonable, though others of us disagree.

However, we all share a concern that a life-years approach, even if used only as a secondary consideration, could come to be understood in ways that would cut against the claims of the elderly, the disabled, and those who seem to have little to contribute.

Simply put, we fear the practical effects of emphasizing life-years, especially in a culture like ours. In practice such a policy could appear to systematically privilege the lives of the young over the old. Day after day, week after week, all across the country, and with the whole nation watching, the pattern would recur: a ventilator would be denied to an older patient and given to a younger one; denied to the 50-year-old in favor of the 30-year-old or the 15-year-old; taken from the middle-aged or retired, from parents and grandparents.

What lesson would people draw from this, and what attitudes might it entrench? That depends in part on what our culture has already primed us to think. And ours is a culture in which youth is worshiped and the natural effects of age are despised. Sometimes we fall into a pattern of thinking of the elderly as a "burden" – on themselves and on us. We already have political movements and,

in some places, laws and policies that would permit or encourage assisted suicide or euthanasia for those with lives judged no longer "worth living" or "burdensome" to society, including the frail elderly.

In this milieu, a policy of almost always prioritizing the young over the old could reflect and entrench a bigotry already widespread. It could lead to a further devaluation of the lives of the elderly, which could work severe and often lethal harms far beyond the triage scenarios imposed by public health emergencies. That is a possibility that gives us strong prudential reasons to oppose any principles that would advise doctors to maximize the number of life-years saved rather than looking to the number of lives saved – old or young.

Conclusion

Moving forward, we must not blur the distinction between "saving the most individual lives" and "saving the most life-years." A patient who—even if successfully treated – is likely to live only a few more years is, here and now, equal in dignity to one who may live for decades if successfully treated. So we agree with Dr. Daniel Sulmasy when he writes that we should focus on the benefits of treatment during this pandemic by prioritizing those with the most profound needs and those who are most likely to survive the treatment. Rather than claiming to maximize benefits by attempting to calculate the number of "life-years" we can maximize, we should focus, as Dr. Sulmasy puts it, on the "patient's objective clinical state, as best it can be assessed, for example by using a clinical scoring system to determine who has the best chance at survival." Doing so will almost surely still leave us uneasy and discontented, because we cannot do all the good we would like to accomplish. But we will not risk contributing to a cultural tendency to undermine our understanding of the equal worth of the elderly and disabled.

This is a reasonable way forward in our decision-making that affects all those – young and old, able-bodied and disabled – whom we are committed to regarding as our equals. None of this is to deny, however, that in a time of pandemic such as this there might be occasions when some patients should themselves consider – not out of legal or even strict moral duty, but rather as a supererogatory act of generosity – giving up access to something to which they are entitled so that someone else might have it. None of us should place greater value on one life than we place on another, but any of us may rightly decide for ourselves that we will live in such a way that we are prepared forgo care in order that someone else may live.

In the next few weeks, as the pandemic perhaps reaches its zenith, we will have the opportunity to decide once again what sort of society we intend to be. We

should eschew all invidious discrimination and recommit ourselves to treating all who are ill as bearers of profound, inherent, and equal worth and dignity.

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From the Editor’s Desk: *Painful Lessons*

Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.[*]

SUDDENLY having to do without something that is dear to us can prove a painful lesson. The swiftness of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything so quickly – not least, the access of many people to the Eucharist.

Within a very short time of the arrival of the virus among us, many bishops directed that Mass not be celebrated publicly. Our shepherds faced the need for extremely difficult decisions. Many Catholics found themselves desiring even more than usual to receive the Eucharist and to have the spiritual strength that Holy Communion brings. Being without the opportunity for getting to Mass and going to confession has been a terrible hardship and has provoked strong feelings. And yet there was also a pressing need to help slow the spread of infection.

Facing a danger the likes of which none of us has even seen, the bishops chose to cooperate with public authorities who urged that people not congregate. In some denominations individual pastors and churches decided to flout civil directives that they understandably interpreted as illegitimate restrictions on religious liberty. The longstanding respect of Catholicism to undertake certain sacrifices, where possible and necessary, for the common good gave Catholic bishops clarity about the policy that they needed to adopt for the Church.

To be sure, in questions requiring practical judgment, there can be more than one right answer. There is certainly a good case to be made for the decision to require masks and for what has come to be called “social distancing.”[1] On the other hand, the possibility of using modern technologies for live-streaming the liturgy has made it somewhat more bearable to have to live under the restrictions of social isolation and to offer our worship in an unusual form during a time when the public celebration of Mass has been suspended. In fact, it has been very inspiring to see an increase of devotion in many churches that have been able to keep their doors unlocked and to have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

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[1] How much better it would be to let our faith provide a name for this practice – perhaps something like “spatial reverencing”! My thanks to the Sisters of Life for this suggestion.

As the weeks passed during the crisis, there have been inspiring stories about priests who have stationed themselves under tents alongside church driveways so as to hear drive-by confessions. There have been wonderful accounts of the delight people have taken in finding online Masses from beautiful churches in distant parts. There have been stories about retreats being preached online that are specially geared for times of social isolation. There have even been intriguing rumors about "underground" Masses, and there certainly have been heart-wrenching conversations among priests who have felt the need to bring the sacraments to the sick and the dying even at risk to themselves.

What was specially impressive to me has been the number of people who said that this was their best Lent ever. Having to do without something that was very dear to them – receiving Jesus in the Eucharist – had made them appreciate how much we can take easy access to Holy Communion for granted. In the spirit of cultivating deeper gratitude for the Eucharist, let us consider some of the themes that are prominent in the liturgies of Holy Week

The Priesthood of Christ

Every time I offered the sacrifice of the Mass in the last few weeks, I found myself mindful of the great privilege that it is to do this. From my conversations with countless priests, it has become clear that this feeling is widespread. When we prepare the vessels, we are made mindful of how many people would love to be at Mass and cannot. We pray for them. When we approach the altar, we cannot help but think that every day – not just in time of emergency – we do it for the Lord and for our people. When we receive communion ourselves, we are mindful of those who must make a spiritual communion when they cannot themselves approach the altar.

As part of a religious community, I have the benefit of being with other priests during this crisis. Among the many fine homilies I have heard in these days, one of the most memorable was on Tuesday of Holy Week – traditionally the day of the Chrism Mass in most dioceses. It is a Mass that rather few people have ever witnessed. The priests and deacons of a diocese normally go to the cathedral for this Mass, to receive a new stock of the holy oils consecrated by the bishop for the coming year.

Our homilist that day pointed out that the Preface of the Chrism Mass directs our thanks and praise to God for three things: the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the royal priesthood of the Christian people, and the ministerial priesthood of those ordained as priests of Jesus Christ. The phrases of that Preface give much food for thought. First, the passage about the priesthood of Christ:

For by the anointing of the Holy Spirit you made your Only Begotten Son High Priest of the new and eternal covenant, and by your wondrous design were pleased to decree that his one Priesthood should continue in the Church.[1]

That Jesus was prophet, priest, and king is a theme of long standing in Christology, but that theme has not received nearly the attention in recent theology, preaching, or catechetical instruction that it has normally been given. It is, however, a central concern of Vatican II's relatively short document on the priesthood, *Presbyterum ordinis* (December 7, 1965).

Ludwig Ott's *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* provides a comprehensive review of the three offices of Christ within his carefully documented section on the doctrine of the redemption.[2] In stressing the point that the sanctifying activity of Christ's sacrifice removes the abyss between God and humanity that had been made by sin, Ott shows how the dogma of the priestly office of Christ corrects the errors of those who hold that Christ's activity had significance only by teaching and example.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* treats the priesthood of Christ directly in two paragraphs (1544–45). The emphasis there is on how the Levitical and Aaronide priesthoods of the Old Covenant and especially the unique priesthood of Melchizedek prefigured the priesthood of Christ. Respectful of the fact that Jesus did not belong by virtue of his human ancestry to either the Aaronide or the Levitical lines, the opening words of this first part of the Preface identifies the baptism of Christ in the river Jordan as the moment of Jesus's consecration as a priest. It also looks ahead to what is truly new about the New Covenant. His sacrifice on the Cross was an act in which he served as both priest and victim, for he made a liturgical offering of himself on Holy Thursday. On Good Friday he carried out the offering of himself in a sacrificial death that brought about the redemption for the whole human race – for those who came before him, for those of his own life, and for all those like us who have lived afterwards. It is Catholic doctrine that at the Last Supper he initiated the priesthood of the New Covenant

[1] This passage and the others below come from the Preface for the Chrism Mass, as found in *The Roman Missal* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2011), 290-96, here at 295.

[2] Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch, rev. Robert Fastiggi (Baronius Press, 2018), Part III: "The Doctrine of God the Redeemer," 137-233. See especially "The Realization of the Redemption through the Three Offices of Christ," 196-207.

by offering to the Father the sacrifice that he would carry out the next day on Calvary.[1]

As appropriate for a Preface, the final words from the passage quoted above voice our gratitude for his sacrifice, done once for all time. By God's wondrous design, his sacrifice on the Cross is made present in every celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church, for at every Mass we are blessed to be in union with Christ as he continues to exercise his priesthood in heaven. The *Catechism* brings to bear some of the important texts from Hebrews as it explains this part of Catholic doctrine:

> Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, "entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands...but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf [Heb 9:4] There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he "always lives to make intercession" for "those who draw near to God through him" [Heb 7:25] As "high priest of the good things to come" [Heb 9:11] he is the center and the principal actor of the liturgy that honors the Father in heaven [see Rev 4:6-11].[2]

Chapters 7 to 10 of Hebrews is a sustained reflection on the priesthood of Christ. After pointing out how the sacrifices of the Old Covenant were models of the death of Christ on the Cross, the text explains how the priesthood of Christ utterly surpasses what came before. It is a priesthood that never passes away (Heb 7:23). The passage then depicts the self-sacrifice of Christ as one who is holy, innocent, and immaculate. It washes away the sins of men of all times (7:27).

In similar fashion, St. Paul bears witness to the distinctive nature of Jesus's sacrificial death on the Cross. As Ephesians puts it, "Christ also loved us and delivered himself for us, an oblation [προσφορὰν] and a sacrifice [θυσίαν] to God as a sweet fragrance" (Eph 5:2). Invoking the Law's identification of atonement with sacrificial blood (Lev 17:11), Paul elsewhere writes: "God has proposed [Christ] to be a propitiation [ἱλαστήριον] through faith in his blood (Rom 3:25). To the Corinthians Paul explains: "For Christ our Pasch is sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7).

The Priesthood of the Faithful and the Ministerial Priesthood

The Preface of the Chrism Mass joins to its section on the priesthood of Christ several paragraphs on the priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. Thereby it directs our reflection to the blessing that the Church has

[1] The Gospel of John portrays the Last Supper in strongly liturgical language at 13:31–17:26. See also Mt 26:20–29, Mk 14: 17–26, and Lk 22:14–38. For a careful treatment of this theme, see Brant Pitre *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015).

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 662. This is a portion of the section on the line of the Creed that reads, "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father" (659–67).

received as the New Israel and to the role of those ordained as priests of Christ in its service. The Preface reads:

For Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people he has made his own, but with a brother's kindness he also chooses men to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands.

They are to renew in his name the sacrifice of human redemption, to set before your children the paschal banquet, to lead your holy people in charity, to nourish them with the Word, and strengthen them with the Sacraments.

As they give up their lives for you and for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, they strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself and offer you a constant witness of faith and love.

In its reference to the bestowal of a "royal priesthood" on "the people he has made his own," the Preface calls our attention to a second object of gratitude. The entire people of God participates in the three offices of Christ as priest, prophet, and king.

As the *Catechism* notes, we fulfill our *royal* dignity through a life in keeping with our vocation to serve with Christ, who as King and Lord of the universe "made himself the servant of all," for he came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[1] Quoting *Lumen gentium*, the Catechism understands the share of the people of God in the *prophetic* office of Christ as manifest when it "unfailing adheres" to the faith Christ gives to the Church and "deepens its understanding and becomes Christ's witness in the midst of this world."[2]

Just as Jesus became the high priest of the new and eternal covenant by the anointing he received from the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan, it is through our faith in him and our reception of the sacrament of baptism that we enter the People of God and "receive a share in this people's unique, *priestly* vocation."

This portion of the Preface gives each of us reason to remember the place and date of our own baptism and confirmation. Ny the spiritual regeneration that takes place in us through the anointing that we received from the Holy Spirit we were

[1] Mt 20:28, as used in *Catechism*, 786.

[2] *Catechism,* 785, quoting *Lumen gentium*,12.

"consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood."[1] At Mass – each Sunday and, if we wish, even each day – the priestly People of God is able to participate in the renewal of the New Covenant that Jesus established. It is precisely the disruption of our participation in the Eucharist that occasions these reflections. Often it is only when we are not able to do what we have so often done that we realize how much we may have taken for granted!

The third object of gratitude singled out by the Preface is the ministerial priesthood. In its delicate way of pointing out the great gift (*munus*) involved in ordination we are encouraged to thank God for providing a way for the priesthood of Christ to continue in the Church: "with a brother's kindness he also chooses men to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands." The ministerial priesthood, after all, is no one's right. Rather, it is the gift of an office with specific duties. Interestingly, all these aspects – and more – are expressed by the Latin term *munus*. Its range of meaning includes *gift*, *office, duty* and even *burden.* The Preface uses the aspect of *gift* by privileging the "kindness" of Christ in choosing certain men for the sacramental laying on of hands that bestows on them a share in the powers of Christ and imposes on them the *office* and *duties* of ministry and service.

In the words of the Preface that follow we read of the charge given to the ordained: "They are to renew in his name the sacrifice of human redemption, to set before your children the paschal banquet, to lead your holy people in charity, to nourish them with the word and strengthen them with the Sacraments." Here a crucial phrase is "to renew in his name the sacrifice of human redemption." It is the redemptive sacrifice of Christ that we are to renew at each Mass. After all, the sacrifice of the Mass is Christ's sacrifice, and what takes place at each Mass is the renewal of the opportunity for each worshiper to enter into the one sacrifice of Christ.

Especially in the current crisis, it has been extremely important to bear in mind that the celebration of the liturgy is not just a memorial but a renewal of the sacrifice of Jesus. When we are without a priest, we do well to have as reverent a memorial as we can manage, for we Christians have constant need to call to our minds Christ and his saving doctrines. But what we dearly miss when we have no access to the Eucharist is the opportunity to receive his glorified body and blood in Holy Communion. Being able to pray at Mass gives us the opportunity to participate in what he chose to make possible for us by the ministry of those consecrated by the laying on of hands. Jesus commissioned his Apostles, saying:

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[1] *Catechism,* 784, quoting *Lumen gentium*, 10, which cites Heb 5:1–5 and Rev 1:6. See also *Catechism,* 1546 as well as John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* (December 30, 1988), especially 14.

"Do this in memory of me,"[1] and ever since the Church has remained faithful to the practices he established at the Last Supper when he gave his disciples his body and his blood.[2]

The Preface of the Chrism Mass then takes up the service that the ministry of ordained priests is supposed to render: "to lead your holy people in charity, to nourish them with the Word, and strengthen them with the Sacraments." Given these tasks, it is not surprise that the collect of this Mass prays for the divine gift (*munus*) needed by anyone who is to assume the burden (*munus*) of this office (*munus*).[3] This prayer is echoed in the Preface: "As they give up their lives for you and for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, they strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself and offer you a constant witness of faith and love."

This prayer is thus a reminder to priests to avoid any hint of presumption and to resist relying on ourselves alone. We must strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself, and on our own this would be an unimaginably tall order and one impossible to fulfill. Only by the grace of Christ could one dare to hope to fulfill it.

At the center of the task that the Lord gives is the charge to lead the People of God on the road of charity. Charity, of course, is not merely being nice to those to whom it is nice to be nice. The *Catechism* gives the definition when it says: "Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God."[4]

To ponder the notion of charity so defined offers much fruit for how all of us need to approach the Eucharist. When in the name of Christ priests renew the sacrifice of redemption, it is to lead God's holy people in charity. When any of us participate in these sacred mysteries, it is a divinely provided opportunity for us to grow in love for God and for neighbor, all for his sake. This is the spirit in which to enter into the liturgy, beginning with the call at the introduction of the penitential rite to call to mind our sins, that the Lord may render us worthy to enter into these sacred mysteries.

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[1] Lk 22:19. See *Catechism*, 1341-44.

[2] Lk 22:7-20, Mt 26:17-29, Mk 14:12-25, and 1 Cor 11:23-26. See also *Catechism*, 337-40.

[3] The renewal of priestly promises that occurs after the homily in the Chrism Mass makes use of the term *officium* as well as the term *munus* to take account of the divine gift of the office of the priesthood and its duties. See the "Renewal of Priestly Promises," in *The Roman Missal*, 291, and the "Renovatio promissonum sacerdotalium," in *Missale Romanum*, iuxta typicam teriam emendatam (Midwest Theological Forum, 2015), 223-28, at 224.

[4] *Catechism*, 1822.

Longing for Jesus in the Eucharist

In part, the availability of the Mass through some form of live-streaming has allowed many people to have an access that would not have been possible in earlier ages. But to have such virtual acess is not yet being in the real presence of Christ at Mass. As Catholics, we long to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, and the enforced absence during this period of time can serve to increase our longing to have Jesus come within us in Holy Communion.

The Church's discipline for Holy Week includes the one day of the liturgical year on which the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass is not celebrated – Good Friday. Thankfully, we can still receive Holy Communion during this day's commemoration of the Passion, but the departure from the normal rhythm of the daily celebration of Mass can make us mindful of what the liturgy of Good Friday gives us: the opportunity to participate in his sacrifice on the Cross. We need God, desperately. As his creatures, we are pilgrims and wayfarers on the journey of life is a state of dependence on his mercy.

If there is one psalm used during Passiontide that especially conveys this state of complete dependence, it would seem to be Psalm 22. As part of the Tenebrae service on the morning of Good Friday, we read in full the psalm that Jesus recited from the Cross. In Matthew's account of the Passion, as in Mark, we hear Jesus cry aloud the opening line of this psalm: *Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani* (Mt 27:46. Mk 15:34): "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[1]

To judge from the speculation offered by some of the bystanders who thought that he was calling upon Elijah (Mt 27:47-49; Mk 15:36-37), they may simply have misunderstood what he said. But we can well imagine him, struggling even for breath, praying the whole of a psalm that he knew by heart from having prayed it throughout his life. Repeatedly the psalm gives voice both to physical pain and to the suffering that comes from rejection: "But I am a worm and no man, scorned by men, despised by the people. All who see me deride me. They curl their lips, they toss their heads. 'He trusted in the Lord, let him save him; let him release him if this is his friend'" (22:6-8).

Yet, interspersed with the expressions of his agony there is a prayer of adoration and trust. In the second stanza, for instance, the psalm reads: "Yet you, O God, are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you set them free. When they cried to you, they escaped. In you they trusted and never in vain" (22:3-5). Likewise, the fourth stanza echoes this theme: "Yes, it was you who took me from the womb, entrusted me to my mother's breast. To you I was committed from my birth, from my mother's womb

[1] The translation cited here is that of *The Grail Psalter* (1963) that appears in *The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite* (New York: Catholic Book Publ. Co., 1976), vol. 2, 468-70.

you have been my God. Do not leave me alone in my distress; come close, there is none else to help" (22:9-11).

In taking on our human nature, the Word of God assumed the entirety of our condition as creatures, that is, as utterly dependent on God. Even though he was the eternal Son of the Father, he did not exempt himself from any of the anguish that creatures can suffer. By divine providence, this psalm, written centuries before, describes the life of Christ, from the long months he spent in the womb of the Blessed Virgin through his death on the Cross. The plaintive words of this psalm use the first-person singular for voicing his anguish: "Like water I am poured out, disjointed are all my bones. My heart has become like wax, it is melted within my breast. Parched as burnt clay is my throat, my tongue cleaves to my jaws" (22:14-15).

That Jesus prayed this psalm of anguish and trust while hanging from the tree of the Cross can bring us to recall the tree of the knowledge of good and evil where the sin of Adam occurred. Like all subsequent sins, that first sin was a refusal of self-surrender to God's will in favor of self-idolatry. As Augustine explains,[1] it was not our bodily condition that was the cause of the Fall. It was, rather, a free choice of the will to reject our creaturely status of dependence on God and instead to grasp for divine status, believing the lie that the devil told our first parents: "God knows that as soon as you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods knowing both good and evil" (Gen 3:5).[2]

In Philippians St. Paul exhorts us to imitate Christ in his way of showing us what utter dependence on God really is: "Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!"[3]

To ponder such treasures as the Philippians hymn and the psalm that Jesus recited from the Cross is to acknowledge how the complete dependence of Jesus on his Father in life and in death rectifies the sin of Adam and the refusal of

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[1] Augustine, *De civitate dei* 14:3, trans. Henry Bettenson as *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (New York: Penguin, 2003 [1972]): "It is in fact not by the possession of flesh, which the Devil does not possess, that man has become like the Devil: it is by living the rule of self, that is, by the rule of man. For the Devil chose to live by the rule of self when he did not stand fast in truth, so that the lie that he told was his own lie, not God's. The Devil is not only a liar; he is 'the father of lies.' He was, as we know, the first to lie, and falsehood, like sin, had its start in him" (552). See also *City of God* 14:13.

[2] For an incisive meditation on this point, see C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), chap. 5, "The Fall of Man."

[3] Philippians 2:6-8 as found in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 2 (using the translation from *The New American Bible*), 2140-41.

creaturely dependence involved in every sin. We are, St. Paul explains, to take on attitude of Christ, but to do this we need him to dwell within us.

In this lengthy period of restricted access to the Eucharist, we can grow in our longing for his Eucharistic presence within us. To be without what is so dear to us for any length of time is a painful lesson, but we can pray in the words of the psalm he himself used: "O Lord, do not leave me alone, my strength, make haste to help me!" (22:19).

The Interior Cathedral and the Cathedral Interior

Margaret I. Hughes[*]

ABSTRACT: The fire in Notre Dame Cathedral and the subsequent debate about its reconstruction give rise to a consideration of what makes a cathedral, or any church, beautiful. This paper suggests that a church is beautiful primarily because within the church, man encounters God such that he may hope for his final and complete happiness. The paper first considers man's "interior" and the proper understanding of reason as receptive of reality that allows for man's interiority. That receptivity means that man's interior can be completed and satisfied only by God, who is the cause of all that is. The satisfaction of the intellect comes through knowing what is true and seeing it as good, which is also the perception of beauty. A church is beautiful, then, when it manifests both the delightful and terrible truth that man is destined for union with God, but that he depends entirely on God for that union and for his complete happiness.

IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING the dramatic fire in Notre Dame Cathedral, the debates about the reconstruction of the cathedral bring to mind a quote from the playwright-director Richard Foreman: "I come from a tradition of Western culture, in which the ideal...was the complex, dense, and 'cathedral-like' structure of the highly educated and articulate personality." But, he continues, we are becoming "pancake people – spread wide and thin."[1]

The suggestions for the reconstruction of Notre Dame Cathedral demonstrate sharply Foreman's assertion that we are becoming a "pancake people" and have lost any sense of the "cathedral-like" structure of the human person. This article, occasioned by the burning of Notre Dame, will suggest that in order to consider the architecture of any cathedral, indeed of any church, including that of Notre Dame, and what makes it beautiful, it is necessary first to understand the cathedral-like structure of the human person. Whereas Foreman explains the human person in terms of the cathedral, this only makes sense if we first understand the cathedral in terms of the human person. As some of the proposals

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[1] Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic* (July/August 2008), available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/.

for the rebuilding of Notre Dame make clear, we cannot presume agreement – as Foreman does – that a cathedral should be a dense and complex, that is, a beautiful, structure. But, I will suggest, if we see the complexity and beauty of the human interior, it will become clearer why a church is beautiful and why it should manifest that beauty visibly.

This approach has its justification, not just in Foreman's remark but, as he observes, in the Western tradition, and even in the Mass itself. The Mass for the dedication of a church is the *Missa Terribilis Est*, named after the introit of the Mass, which calls the church "terrible," or fearful, but also beloved or delightful. Both are terms that refer to our interior response to a church. If we understand the interior of the human being, we may then come to a deeper understanding of what makes a church beautiful.

I would like to suggest that a church is beautiful because of what it is built to house: our interior stretching out toward God, a stretching out so intense that it flows over to our bodily expression, and his coming to meet us on the altar, so that we may eventually be fully united with him. In a church, we come face to face with the reality that we are in this life only as wayfarers on the arduous way to our much longed-for true home. This is at once terrible and delightful; we can face that reality only with hope. A cathedral's visible beauty is an outward expression of our interior hope that our relentless longing for happiness may finally reach its fulfillment in union with God.

This article is not about how a church should be designed – that is a question for an architect, not a philosopher. Instead of considering architecture directly, this article will lay what seems to me the groundwork for talking about beautiful church architecture. First, I will consider what it means to talk about a human interior, which will lead to considering what beauty is. Only then will we be in a position to think about the beauty of a church, but, again, this section will be a consideration of what a church is and in what its beauty consists, and this, I will suggest, does not depend on its design. When finally we do arrive at considering the design of a church, I will suggest why it is deeply important for expressing the beauty of a church, but will not make any attempt to say how it should do this.

Interior Cathedrals

In Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited*, one of the characters observes that, without the Blessed Sacrament present, the chapel in the house is "just an oddly decorated room."[1] This is a striking claim because it seems true, not just of a house chapel but of any church. A church, no matter how big or small, simple or complex, is really just a room. And so, the first requirement for a church

[1] Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), 220.

to be a church is that it have walls that separate the space within the church from everything outside of it, and yet have doors so that what is outside may enter it in a way that is appropriate for a church.

A human being is like a church in this way – he too, is a "room," with an exterior and an interior. Christian spirituality is rife with instances of references to man's interior: Augustine describes turning into his "inner citadel."[1] Teresa of Avila calls this room an "interior castle."[2] Catherine of Siena recommends developing one's "inner cell."[3] Ignatius of Loyola advises making "room" for inspirations and opening the "gates of our minds and hearts."[4] Frances de Sales calls attention to "interior lights."[5] But these expressions, while they seem to point to something true about human beings, do not make clear what it means to refer to man's "interior" or to call that interior a "room." But, I think, unpacking the definition of man – that he is a rational animal – reveals that human beings, like churches, have an interior that is separated from what is outside of him, and yet lets what is outside of him in.

It is strange to call man's interior a "space" or a "room," because, of course, it is not a place in the way the space of a church is. It does not take up or set aside geographical space. Rather, it is a space in the sense that, as with a room, something can enter it, and enter it completely and as it really is, and yet both – the room and the thing in it – maintain their separate identities. Likewise, when a man knows, what he knows enters him truly and completely, yet it and he remain distinct. A brief examination of what it is that we know when we know shows this.

As an animal, man is a living body capable of sensation. Simply having a body establishes boundaries to the man, such that he has an exterior in the way that a church building has an exterior. The outermost bounds of his body are a boundary, a wall, where he ends, and everything else that is not him begins. But his interior, his inner room, is not simply his internal organs – his stomach, liver, lungs, and so on. When things enter him in a bodily way, they either lose their identity and become incorporated into his body – as does food – or they do violence to his body, as, say, a knife entering it. And so, the human body, considered just as a body, is not a room, since it does not have space to house

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[1] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 123.

[2] Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

[3] Catherine of Siena, "Letter to Raymond of Capua, 15 February 1380," in *Letters of Catherine of Siena*, vol. 4, ed. Suzanne Noffke (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS Press, 2008), 368.

[4] Ignatius of Loyola, "Letter 21," in *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, trans. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 205.

[5] Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 2003), 45.

what is not it. It cannot admit things into it without either it or the thing entering it losing its identity.

Nor does sensation on its own constitute man's inwardness. When any other animal senses, what is sensed does not become a part of the animal. The animal has a response only on the level of a feeling. The thing has not entered him – it has only stirred a sense response.

But man is not just an animal, he is a *rational* animal. Man's interiority is rooted in his rationality. Reason, as Josef Pieper says in his usual understated yet profound way, "is nothing but the 'passage' to reality."[1] Man's rational capacity is both his door to the world outside of him, and the space within him into which that world can enter.

When we know a thing, we know its form. The form of a thing is the cause of its being the kind of thing that it is. The form causes the structure of that thing and so gives it its identity as that kind of thing. The reason a chair is a chair, not a table or a bookcase or a pile of wood, is that it has the form of a chair. A cat is a cat, not a dog or a mouse, because it has the form of a cat.

The form of a thing, in causing it to be that kind of thing, also causes it to be intelligible. We can know what it is because it *is* something. To know a thing is to know its form. Of course, we first encounter formed things as particular, material things through our senses. But immediately the intellect abstracts the form from our sense experience, such that we know what it is. Through abstracting from sensation, we receive the form of the thing into the intellect. While the form exists in a different mode in the intellect than it does in the matter, it is the identical form in each. The form of the chair – what it is – is really in the chair and really in the one knowing the chair. Man, when he knows, receives beings into himself in such a way that they take up no literal space, but also in a way that is total, such that what the thing is is really in him. It makes sense, then, to refer to man's "interior." He has the capacity, as does a room, for receiving things into him that are not him, and yet they and he maintain their separate identities. When he knows, he receives what is real into him and knows what is true.

In order for a room to receive things into it, it must have doors. When the doors to the room are open, they indicate a welcome to those who pass through them. Someone has opened them, which conveys that someone, whether that person is known or not, wants other people there. And, ultimately, we want what is good. Open doors convey to the person who walks through them that someone sees their presence in that room as wanted, and so as good.

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[1] Josef Pieper, "Reality and the Good," in *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things and the Reality of the Good*, trans. Lothar Krauth and Stella Lang (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 113.

Just as the entry of someone into a room requires the invitation of an open door, so too does the entry of reality into the interior man. This invitation comes from the will. That is, while the intellect is oriented toward receiving reality, and so to knowing what is true, this happens fully only when man allows himself to be open to reality by willing that openness. That is, man must assent to the natural orientation of his interior life toward receiving reality as it really is: he must will himself to see things as they are, rather than as he wishes them to be.

Since the orientation of his inner life is to know reality, and he desires that knowledge, his desire will be fully satisfied only when he knows all of reality. His inner room can be fulfilled only by knowing all that is. But, to know something fully, we must know its causes. This means that his interior will be fulfilled and completed only when he sees the Cause whose knowledge is the cause of all things. That is, man will know fully only when he knows the one whose knowledge is not receptive of reality but rather causative of reality. His interior room will be filled and completed only when he sees God.

At least in this life, our inner room is like a room with a ceiling that is beyond our view. In this life, man's interior room is never yet full; his desire to know is never fully satisfied. As Thomas asserts, "the exertions of all the philosophers combined have not yet been sufficient to track down the essence of even a single mosquito."[1] Beings, even mosquitos, are mysteries to us because we do not see their cause, God, completely and fully. In this life, we are always faced with the mystery of reality, because no matter how much we know, we also see that there is more to know. And this is what a mystery is. Something is mysterious not because it is unknowable, but because it *is* knowable but we do not yet know it. Since, in this life, we do not yet know fully the cause of all that is, we do not yet know fully all of reality. In this life, there is always more for man to welcome into his interior room.

Modern and Post-Modern "Rooms"

In stark contrast to the Thomistic conception of man's interior as one that is always yet open to reality is the modern conception of man's interior. Descartes, in some ways the first "modern" philosopher, turns inward, just as Augustine, and Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Avila, and many others, do. Descartes's inward turn, however, does not move upward. He turns to examine his ideas, which he claims are there in him already, irrespective of any contact with reality. He has ideas – not things themselves – in his inner room. His reason is not a passageway to reality but rather a container and organizer of his ideas.

[1] Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, trans. John Murray, S.J. and Daniel O'Conner (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 64; quoting Thomas Aquinas, *Symb. Apost*. prologue.

For the modern philosopher, reason is capable of coming to knowledge simply through its own efforts and through looking at itself. This makes for two important differences from the inner room that we have just laid out: man turns inward toward himself, not upward toward God, and his room is already full; he does not live his life in pursuit of his fullness. That is, because he knows only his ideas, he is not receiving anything into himself when he knows. And, because his knowledge is only of his ideas, he can reach its limit. His room has a ceiling well within his view. He does not need to stretch out beyond himself.

Postmodernism, perhaps especially deconstructionism, reacts violently to this obviously false conception of reason. Reason fails too regularly and spectacularly for the modern overconfidence in it to be justified. Postmodernism sees and rejects modernity's presumption. Its response, however, is one of despair. Instead of being overconfident in reason's ability to fulfill itself, it rejects any confidence in reason. Ultimately, a deconstructionist, in deconstructing meaning, deconstructs his own inner room. If there is no meaning, there is nothing that he can know, nothing within him to which he may turn, and nothing to which he may stretch beyond himself.

Modernity and postmodernity, both of which have had impacts on church architecture, as evidenced by many of the proposals for the reconstruction of Notre Dame, reject mystery; the former, because of an overconfidence in reason, such that it presumes that reason can, through its own efforts, know fully; and the latter because of a lack of confidence in reason, such that even the possibility of there being a knowable reality is rejected. The rejection of mystery, which is the result of flattened notions of reason, leads also to the flattening of man's inner room, such that he becomes like Richard Foreman's "pancake people."

Beauty in the Room

This flattening out of our understanding of reason has had profound influences on many things, not least of which is our conception of what beauty is. I will consider these very briefly, and then turn to Thomas's well-known account of beautiful things as "that which pleases when seen," to examine how the deeper understanding of man's interior that we have laid out helps us to understand this claim about beauty.

For the deconstructionist, there is no beauty. To be able to say that something is beautiful, the word "beauty" must have a meaning. But, in deconstructing words, each word means both what it is and what it is not. "Beauty," then, has no meaning. There isn't beauty.

In modern philosophy, on the other hand, there is at least a limited view of beauty, the limitation of which follows from the limitation of man's inner room and the segmentation of his inner life from the rest of reality. For the modern

philosopher, the beauty of a thing is not judged by a direct encounter with the thing – that is impossible – but rather by looking at our ideas, which include our sensations, of the thing. Since ideas are the only means by which we know anything, when we consider something's beauty, it can be only by our ideas that we perceive it as beautiful. We do not receive what is beautiful into us, since we do not receive reality into us, but rather judge our ideas as beautiful or not.

It may seem that this modern way of considering beauty is also Thomas's, given his well-known assertion that "beautiful things are those which please when seen."[1] Because we are children of modernity and deeply imbued in the modern conception of man, it is very easy to misread Thomas's statement. Certainly, it sounds as though he is limiting beauty to objects of sense perception – what is seen – and judging them as beautiful based on the perceiver's "idea" – that is, his pleasure.

But, if we make that mistake, it is because we are placing his assertion in the inner room of the modern philosopher, and not in that of the medieval thinker, who understands knowing not as knowing ideas but as seeing through ideas to what is real. Just as the eyes really see what is visible and not just an image of the visible, so too the intellect really knows what is intelligible and not just an idea of the thing. Sight is, in part, an intellectual activity, while the activity of the intellect is a kind of spiritual "sight."

Beauty is seeing – not only what is sensible but also and primarily what is intelligible – what pleases. Pleasure is our response to receiving what we desire. We desire what is good. When we receive what is good, and recognize it as good, we respond with pleasure. The most complete way in which we receive something, because we receive it completely into ourselves, is in knowing it. Thus, when we see the good, and know that it is good, we receive it completely. And this is what beautiful things are: things that are good and are seen *as* good, simply. We respond with pleasure because we possess what we desire, which is the good of knowing reality.

And so, when Thomas says that beautiful things are those that please when seen, he is talking about not just what is happening in man's interior, divorced from reality, but the way in which the reality of the beautiful thing enters into man. What is beautiful enters into man through his intellect – he grasps what is true – under the aspect of the good, and this possession of the true recognized as good elicits a response of pleasure or delight.

But, strangely, while beauty delights, it also pains. The beauty perceived in created things is always incomplete because created things are incomplete goods. As good as they are, as much joy as they cause, they always fall short. There is

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[1] *Summa Theologica* I, q. 5, a. 4.

always more beauty to see, more for which to yearn. In the perception of beauty, as Cardinal Ratzinger writes, "the wound of the arrow strikes the heart and in this way opens our eyes."[1] Our momentary resting in beautiful things makes us aware of our longing for complete rest in the completely beautiful. The experience of beautiful things, of coming face to face with them and seeing them as good and so rejoicing in them, is a shadow of the experience of a full and completed inner room, in which man comes face to face with God. Beauty in this life, as Goethe writes, "is not so much a fulfillment as rather a promise."[2]

Beauty of a Church

The function of any church is to express and affirm this promise of happiness. This purpose is what makes the church beautiful. It may seem as though what causes a church to be beautiful is first its design, its architecture. But it does not seem that this can be the case. What makes a church a church, and what makes it beautiful, is its consecration as a church. When a church is consecrated, no matter its design, the space that its walls carve out is reserved for one activity, and one activity only, which is the worship of God. A cathedral, or indeed any church, although it is simply a room, is a very special kind of room because it has been dedicated to a very specific purpose. That purpose is identical to the purpose of the interior room of the human being. It is the place into which God is received, and where he is worshipped. The church provides the space in which man, in his interior life, stretches out to God to such a degree that it overflows into bodily expression with others.

The introit to the Mass of Dedication for a church illuminates the fundamental beauty of the place where God is worshiped. It prays:

Terribilis est locus iste: hic domus Dei est et porta caeli: et vocabitur aula Dei. Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum! Concupiscit, et deficit anima mea in atria Domini. Gloria Patri... Terribilis est locus iste...

Terrible is this place: it is the House of God, and the gate of Heaven; and it shall be called the Court of God. How lovely are Thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the Courts of the Lord. Glory be to the Father... Terrible is this place...[3]

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[1] Joseph Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," Message to Communion and Liberation, August 2002, available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020824_ratzinger-cl-rimini_en.html.

[2] Josef Pieper, "Love," in *Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Richard Winston, Clara Winston, and Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 251, quoting Goethe, *Campagna in Frankreich* (Münster, December 1792).

[3] "Mass: Terribilis Est... : For the Dedication of a Church." *The Daily Missal and Liturgical Manual* (London: Baronius Press, 2011), 1073-74.

The contrast between the terribleness and loveliness of a church illustrates the complexity and depth of the human interior, which, in its capacity to fear and to delight at the same time, also has the capacity to hope. In what follows, I will consider how it is that a church is both lovely and terrible, and suggest that the beauty of the church lies not in its design but in the hope for eternal life of which it is a sign.

Quam Dilecta Est Tabernacula Tua

Worship, for which the space of the church is set aside, is adoration and honor given to God. In worship, we adore God, which, as the *Catechism* states, is to acknowledge "God as God, Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists."[1] Worship is, at heart, an acknowledgment – it has to do with our knowing, not in the sense of our discovering something new, but in the sense of resting in what we know. It is being aware of and resting in the knowledge that God is God.

An intrinsic part of our acknowledgment of God as God is that God is good. When we turn our attention to God, we affirm that God is good, precisely because we have willed ourselves to focus on him. We make him, and his goodness, the object of our will. Worship engages our whole selves, intellect and will, in the activity of reaching out and resting in, insofar as that is possible, the true and the good, which have their source and fulfillment in God.

But, because we are not pure intellects, as the angels, but rational animals with bodies informed by a rational soul, our worship of God, while stemming out of and ordered to our interior lives, cannot engage only our interior. It must involve, as well, our bodies. Only then are we giving our whole selves over to the adoration of God. The engagement of our bodies in worship occurs through various appropriate positions, but also through the engagement of our senses.

We set aside space and consecrate it as a church so that we may set aside our everyday concerns and distractions, so that we may allow our minds and wills to be totally turned to God, who comes to meet us there. And, as the introit says, that makes this place lovely, delightful.

Terribilis Est Locus Iste

But, in the introit of the Mass of Dedication, the declaration "Quam dilecta est tabernacula tua" is sandwiched by a much more ominous proclamation: "Terribilis Est Locus Iste" – terrible is this place. That a cathedral is beautiful because it is delightful, the meeting place of God and man, seems to be

[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2096.

contradicted by the announcement that it is terrible. What is terrible, it seems, it is not delightful and so not beautiful.

It is clear, I think, that terrible is not meant in the colloquial sense with which we would use it when describing a terrible movie or a terrible restaurant, or even a terrible tragedy. Instead, the root of "terribilis," "terreo," meaning "to fear," points us to something both perplexing and true about a church and the goodness of God. Affirming the goodness of God, as we do when we construct a church and when we worship there, should stir not just delight but fear.

Fear is our response, in the words of St. Thomas, to "the arduous evil, considered as an evil, and has the aspect of something to be shunned."[1] The response of fear – a response to an arduous evil – seems so contrary to what we have seen about the delight that a church elicits.

A church is delightful because delight is our response to a present good, and God, who is completely and totally good, is present there. What, then, is the arduous evil of the church that causes us to proclaim "terribilis est locus iste"? And does it somehow mar the beauty of a church?

The solution to this conundrum lies in our earlier discussion of the inner room of man. We saw there that man, in this life, is incomplete. His inner room, which is filled through knowing what he loves, will be completely full only when he knows and loves all that is, which is possible only in seeing God face to face. His intellect, in this life, remains incomplete, and so his will, which yearns for the completion and fulfillment of his intellect – the complete good that is his happiness – stretches ever outward and upward toward reality and the source of reality.

There is something terrifying in that longing for completion. It is a longing for a good not yet fully present. In this life, man is always not yet complete. He is always on his way to happiness. He is a pilgrim.

The pilgrim on his way, although he has the good of his destination in view and is moving toward it, cannot ignore the ever-present risk of not reaching that for which he longs. He may become injured or ill, there may be a natural disaster, he may simply give up. It is this last risk that is most terrifying, because it recalls the most arduousness aspect of his trek: his interior struggle. The pilgrim must, most of all, face himself and his own shortcomings, which are the reason for the journey but also the greatest risk to the success and completion of that journey.

And the pilgrim, as he progresses on his way, becomes more and more aware of his own powerlessness. He can do only so much to prevent injury, or hunger, or cold. No matter how much he struggles and strains against his lacks, no matter how much he exerts himself on his pilgrimage, it will never be enough. He cannot

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[1] *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 23, a. 2.

accomplish the pilgrimage on his own. He must rely on others for help – for directions, for shelter, for food, for encouragement.

So, too, for man on his way to complete happiness. He cannot accomplish his pilgrimage toward his complete fulfillment on his own. Worship brings this reality into view, because he sees himself before God. When he worships, he acknowledges that God is the Creator, which means that man is a creature. To be a creature is to be totally dependent. That we are and what we are are given to us; we simply find ourselves as we are, with a nature that is determined not by ourselves but by him who causes us to be and to be human beings. Even our desire for happiness with God is given to us by God.

This means that we are totally dependent on God even to be able to worship him. How fearful it is that, for us to achieve what we desire most deeply, God had to become man and offer himself as the perfect sacrifice, so that we might be able to participate in that perfect worship. This is not a servile fear, a fear simply of punishment. Rather, it is, as Thomas calls it, "filial fear."[1] This is a fear of offending God, as we might fear offending a father, through some fault. Truly, our lack and our falling short of that which we desire most deeply by nature is terrifying!

This complex experience – of terror and delight in response to the same object but from different aspects – is possible only because of man's capacity for interiority that allows him to see reality, including himself, as he really is, including in his shortcomings, but also the good that, while beyond him, he might yet attain. That is, man's interiority allows him to hope.

Hope permits man to dare to think that his future good is attainable, but also sharpens his longing for that good, since it focuses that longing on its true object, which, in this life, is never yet attained. Hope, Thomas explains, "inasmuch as it implies a present appraising of a future good causes pleasure; whereas, inasmuch as it implies absence of that good, it causes affliction."[2] In hope, man stretches out towards the good that he desires but does not yet possess, and will not possess easily. That man does not yet possess that longed for good, and that he will not possess it easily is a cause of affliction, but the prospect of that good and that it is possible to attain is a cause of great delight.

And so it is that a church is both terrible and delightful: because it is a sign of hope for final union with God. It is the place where we have a glimpse of a shadow of our full delight in being immersed in the sight of God without end. But, in having that glimpse, our longing for it deepens, and we see how difficult our journey to that goal is and how totally incapable we are of accomplishing it on our

[1] *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 19, a. 2.
[2] *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 32, a. 3, ad 2.

own. But, in the church, God comes to dwell with us so that we may dwell on him. And so, we may hope, despite our fear, and indeed, because of it, that we may come to dwell with him in Beatitude. It is this hope in which a church's beauty lies.

Physical Beauty of the Cathedral

That a church's beauty lies not in its design but in the consecration of that space for worship, however, does not mean that the design of the church is unimportant or that it can simply be whatever we want it to be. On the contrary, precisely because the church's beauty originates not from the architect and his designs but, rather, from God who comes to meet us there, the church architect has a fearful task. His task is to design a building that is a fitting meeting place for man and God.

The church is beautiful because of its consecration; the design of a church is beautiful – that is, the appearance of the church is beautiful – insofar as it expresses the invisible beauty of hope for eternal life with God in visible terms. What makes the design of a church beautiful is its appropriateness for the purpose of the church. Thomas points out that while glass is a beautiful material, a saw should not be made out of glass, because that would inhibit the saw's purpose.[1] Likewise, the design of a church is appropriate and fitting if it aids, and does not distract, from man's interior focus on God in worship. If the architecture of the church, and not the worship of God, becomes its focus, it is like a glass saw.

This means that the design of a church should be such that it engages the interior man, so that he is moved to delight in God and to terror at his incompleteness and longing for God. All a church need do to elicit this response is to bring man's attention to what the church is and to what is happening there.

This is no small task, however. Human beings are extremely distractible. We are drawn by nature toward goods, of which there are many. At every moment, all around us, there are many goods that can draw us in many different directions. Ordinary, everyday life is filled with being pulled toward many goods – there are all the goods of creation that we must pursue simply to survive, and all the goods of creation that we are pulled toward to enjoy. This is part of what is wonderful about being a human being – we can use and enjoy the goods of creation more fully than any other animal. But this means that it is also very easy for those created goods to take up all of our attention and so distract us from the Uncreated Good.

This is why the walls of a church are so important. They mark a separation from the space in which we work and eat and sleep, in which we study and

[1] *Summa Theologica* I, q. 91, a. 3.

entertain ourselves. They mark the distinction between the space in which all other activities occur, the space in which we enjoy the goodness of Creation, and the space in which we turn our attention directly to the goodness of the Creator. The walls of a church allow us to be separated from the space in which we are taken up with the very important, but very distracting, cares of everyday life so that we may turn our full attention to the goodness of God.

Those walls, their design and their decoration, are essential for our focusing on what is happening within those walls because that focusing of attention in the interior life of man happens first through the senses. While reason is nothing but the passage to reality, the senses, in a way, are the first window of reason. The senses, like the intellect, are actively receptive. Each has an activity proper to it, and that activity is one of receiving its proper object. And, just as delight is stirred by the intellect receiving what is good, so too for the senses.

The senses come to rest, in the sense of being actively focused on and receptive to what is sensible, when they encounter their proper objects. That is, the senses are delighted by sensing objects that are good for them, that allow for their activation most fully. So a church must appeal to the senses in such a way that they can focus on the appearance of the church and never be done with it. They are open and receptive to what is before them.

And the senses in their resting openness continue to stretch out toward the building. That is, in the delight of the senses, there is also longing. The senses, in encountering what is good for them, long for more of the same, to perceive ever more deeply that which is good for them. They continue to focus on and receive what is before them.

When the senses are focused and resting in their good, man as a whole may turn his whole attention in worship to the here and now of the goodness of God. Sensible goods, instead of distracting him, help him focus on the as yet invisible good that he longs to see. In that longing looking outward toward God from his interior, he catches a glimpse of the eternity with God for which he hopes.

Conclusion

It is impossible for a philosopher to offer specific instructions on how to design a church such that it draws the senses in so that the whole man can focus on what is beyond the senses. Philosophers deal in universals, but the design of each church is particular. But, to judge from a description in Allan Temko's book, *Notre-Dame of Paris: The Biography of a Cathedral*, it seems that Notre Dame, at least up to now, is a particular instance of a church that, through its design, makes visible the beauty of the church that is rooted in hope. Temko writes:

> The Cathedral moves, breathes, aspires to Heaven with a human impulse. And so young in line and feeling that the prepossessing skyscrapers back home seem antiquated and even shabby in comparison. Young! ... The Cathedral is younger than today's newspaper and stands a better chance than the newspaper of being considered interesting tomorrow.[1]

It seems odd to call an 800-year-old building "young," and there are many who don't. Certainly, to some, the building seems positively outdated. For example, the French prime minister, in announcing the competition for the redesign of the spire, called for "a new spire that is adapted to the techniques and the challenges of our era."[2] But concern for always having what is new, for keeping up with the times, is a sure sign of being a pancake people. It looks for fulfillment in temporary goods, and looks forward only to the next temporal good, rather than daringly stretching out to the eternal good. On the other hand, it is that hopeful longing that allows men to realize their cathedral-like structure. We become pancake people, and so design unfitting churches, when, through either the presumption that reason does already know all that there is, or the despair in thinking that reason cannot know anything, we cease to hope for our complete happiness in God. As Pieper observes, the man who presumes he will easily attain that good is immature and babyish. The man who despairs, who sees the longed-for good and gives up on its pursuit, is already old. But the man who hopes remains youthful. The young look forward to the future good, recognize that it is far off and difficult to attain, and yet remain confident that it is possible. And so it makes sense to describe a beautifully designed church, such as Notre Dame, as "young," for it is a visible manifestation of man's hope for full and final happiness with God.

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[1] Allan Temko, *Notre-Dame of Paris: The Biography of a Cathedral* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 4.

[2] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47959313.

Religious Indifferentism and Secularism in America: Why Catholicism Remains Relevant

Richard Gribble, C.S.C.[*]

ABSTRACT: The current situation of Catholicism in the United States is well known. Small gray- and white-haired congregations populate our parishes, religious illiteracy is highly problematic, the numbers of priests and religious continue to decline, and a sense of indifference to organized religion in general is pervasive. Secularism and the perception that "cafeteria Catholicism" should dictate the future direction of the Church, prompt some to question the contemporary relevance of Catholicism. This situation requires a response. Faithful Catholics must set a good example and witness to the Church's contemporary relevance. Educational opportunities for youth and adults must be enhanced. Lastly, it is essential that Catholics stand firm and "hold the line" against contemporary thought that contradicts the basic teachings of Christ and the Church. Proclaiming the relevance of the Church and its message grows more important each day.

THE PASTOR of a small rural parish had a problem. One of his parishioners was running around town telling everyone that there was no need to go to Mass on Sunday. The man suggested that God could be found in any and all places; therefore, there was no need, if one did not desire, to be with others to attend the local parish. This situation came to a point of confrontation as the recalcitrant parishioner continued his harangue against the Church. Thus, the pastor decided to invite the parishioner to his home so they might talk about this situation. The parishioner accepted the pastor's invitation; the two men met in the rectory on a cold winter night. When the parishioner arrived he was welcomed by the pastor, and the two men sat in the parlor, enjoying some hot chocolate, cookies, and light conversation. They carefully navigated around the subject of church attendance.

When there was a brief pause in the conversation, the pastor stood up from his chair and went over to the fireplace, which kept the house warm by its roaring fire. With some metal tongs he reached into the fire and pulled out one single briquette, which glowed red as he placed it on the brick hearth in front of the fireplace. He sat back down, and the two men watched as the single briquette, now

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alone and without the support of the other briquettes, slowly but surely lost its heat, became an ashen gray, and finally its fire went out. A moment after the briquette "died," the parishioner said to his pastor: "Father, you will see me in church on Sunday."

No words were exchanged, but the message was indeed clear: the individual person, like the individual briquette, cannot survive without the support of others. We need the community of faith that meets each Sunday at our local parish. This scenario repeats itself, unfortunately, far too much in the Church today, but for those who feel they can "go it alone" and believe there is no need for the community of faith, that the Church is no longer relevant in our twenty-first-century society, a renewed message of the absolute need and relevance of the Church in our contemporary society is warranted.

The Present Situation and How it Developed

While there are signs of a more positive trend, the present situation of the Church in the United States is far from ideal. The late Fr. Richard Neuhaus described the situation this way:

> [T]he Church in America [is] a context marked by confusion, controversy, and the splendor of truth. It is also a context in which Catholic is more and more viewed as a choice, perhaps a personal preference, and not as something that really matters and maybe matters ultimately.[1]

This situation includes poor church attendance, continuing declines in the numbers of priests and religious, dwindling students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools, as well as a significant division in how members of the faith view the Church, especially when observing the apparent conflict between Catholicism and contemporary culture.

The present situation in which Catholic Americans[2] find themselves has developed over time. Sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow, in his monograph

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[1] Richard John Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth* (New York: Perseus Books, 2006), 3.

[2] Those who study Roman Catholicism in the United States use the general term "American Catholics." However, Richard Neuhaus presents an interesting perspective, intentionally juxtaposing these two words and preferring the term Catholic American. He explains: "The great thing to discover is not what it means to be an American Catholic, but what it means to be a Catholic American. One might think the noun is more important than the adjective, but this is not necessarily so. The adjective qualifies and, in qualifying, controls. To say I want to be an American Catholic assumes I know what it means to be an American but am uncertain about the Catholic part of 'American Catholic.' The goal, rather, is to be a Catholic American; to be a person who knows what it means to be Catholic and is working on what it means to be a Catholic in America." See ibid., 166.

After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s, posits a plausible explanation by looking at religious activity in the United States more generally. He suggests that in the postwar 1950s religious practice was marked by "indwelling." By this term he means that those who practiced their faith did so by physically going to a dwelling, namely, the church or synagogue (in the 1950s practice of Islam would have been rare and, therefore, few mosques were present). Practitioners of religious faith went to these physical dwellings both to pray and to be educated. Wuthnow then shows how through the tumult of the 1960s the practice of "indwelling" was transformed into a mission of "seeking," that is, searching for religious meaning beyond the confines of a physical location. Such a religious mentality obviates any need for one's physical presence at a particular place and time to worship with the community of faith. Thus, from this analysis, the palpable drop-off of people practicing formal religion in what one might call more traditional ways of liturgy can be explained, even if it cannot be properly understood.[1]

The transition that Wuthnow describes was generated in large part by what happened during the decade of the 1960s. Certainly the era was marked by the spirit of rebellion, freedom, and a distinct distrust for authority on all levels – political, social, and religious. All things were challenged; nothing was considered sacred. Politically the nation suffered through the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. The 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago was marked by riots in the streets. Socially, the civil rights movement had competing methods. The nonviolent civil disobedience advocated by Dr. King was challenged by the black power movement of leaders such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. Additionally, social norms of proper behavior were tossed out the window when the "hippie movement," characterized by living in communes, rejection of all sexual mores, and the liberal use of hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, sent many on temporary psychological "trips" but created permanent changes in social behavior for many. It was a time when the spirit of change suggested that we need to "throw the baby out with the bathwater." "Out with the old and in with the new" was certainly the catchphrase for many.

As the chaos of the Western world in the 1960s was becoming more intense, the Roman Catholic Church worldwide examined itself and concluded, in the minds of many, that it needed an update, an *aggiornamento*, as the initiator of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII described it, when he shocked the Catholic world by calling the Council on January 25, 1959. In his speech, Pope John professed that

[1] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Roman Catholicism needed to open itself to the "new winds" of modernity, since for all practical purposes it was operating as it had for over 400 years since the Council of Trent (1545-1563). While the world had moved forward through advanced transportation, communication, technology, and education, not to mention the effects of the discovery of the New World and the ravages of the French Revolution and the two World Wars of the twentieth century, the Church had not met in an official capacity, save for Vatican I (1869-1870), which was called specifically by Pope Pius IX but was adjourned with much of its business incomplete. Pope John firmly believed that the Church needed to update, to view the world as a positive influence, not something that should be kept at arm's length.[1]

During its four sessions, with the bishops meeting during the fall months each year between 1962 and 1965, the Council fathers issued sixteen documents, divided into three groups: four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations. Unquestionably the Council was highly significant and produced many changes in the Church, including revised rites for celebration of the sacraments, including use of the vernacular, a different understanding of the relationship between Catholics and non-Catholics as well as non-Christians, and a modification of the Church's self-understanding by describing itself as the "People of God." During the ensuing half-century since the close of the Council, two understandings of the changes brought by this historic event have arisen. One idea, held by more progressive and liberal Catholic thinkers, suggests that Vatican II was a revolution, moving the Church in a completely different direction. Additionally, this perspective generated what many today refer to as "the spirit of Vatican II," by suggesting that the bishops in generating the documents advocated a spirit of change that intended to go beyond the letter of the documents. Another view, held by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as examples of a more traditional Catholic perspective, sees the Council as showing "continuity with change." In

[1] Most Catholic observers were confused and even shocked that Pope John called for an Ecumenical Council. In each case of the previous twenty councils, beginning in 325 at Nicaea, and running to 1869 at Vatican I, councils have been called for one of two basic reasons: either an external problem impinging on and ill-affecting the Church needed to be discussed, or an internal problem, generally some heresy such as Arianism or Nestorianism, needed to be reviewed and generally speaking condemned. In the late 1950s, from the perspective of empirical numbers, including such things as numbers of priests and religious, children in Catholic schools, and a general agreement among most Catholics that the magisterium was generally right in its teachings, the Church was viewed to be on a high note. Thus, many suggested there was no reason to call a Council. However, Pope John thought otherwise, stressing the need to update the Church to modernity.

this view, the documents must be read on face value; they should not be interpreted "beyond what was specifically stated."[1]

Regardless of the position one takes on the interpretation of the Council, it cannot be denied that the Council changed many outward practices of the Church at the same time that the world, as described above, was being turned upside down during the social upheavals of the 1960s. Hindsight being 20/20, it seems that the changes brought by the Council, regardless of one's interpretation, were too much for the structures of the Church in place at the time. Priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley explained this phenomenon through use of a biblical text. He referenced Luke 5:37-38, which reads, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins." For Greeley, the new wine of a renewed understanding of Catholicism that was poured into the old wineskins of the Church's Tridentine structures was too much.[2] The old skins, the structure dating from the sixteenth century, broke down under the weight of the changes.

The manifestations of this breakdown were many and obvious. The significant downturn in many of the statistical markers of Catholic participation, church attendance, numbers of clergy and religious, and the closing of Catholic schools were obvious to all observers. A general disregard for many traditional Catholic practices, especially the rosary, Eucharistic adoration, and many previously popular devotions such as the Stations of the Cross, first Fridays and Saturdays, and novenas, became for many of the faithful antiques of an earlier form of Catholic practice. The measurable drop-off of regularly practicing members of the faith meant a general religious illiteracy of many, a situation that today is in its second, transitioning to its third, generation.

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[1] The two basic perspectives are represented by the opposing opinions of James Hitchcock and John O'Malley, S.J. See James Hitchcock, "Interpreting Vatican II: Version One—A Continuum in the Great Tradition," *America* 128, no. 5 (March 9, 2001): 16, 18-19, and John O'Malley, S.J., "Interpreting Vatican II: Version Two—A Break from the Past," *America* 128, no. 5 (March 9, 2001): 17, 20-22. In order to illustrate the concept of the "Spirit of Vatican II" vs. the documents themselves, one can review "The Constitution on the Liturgy," section 36 (1) and (2): "The use of the Latin language, with due respect to particular law, is to be preserved in the Latin rites. But since the use of the vernacular, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or in other parts of the liturgy, may frequently be of advantage to the people, a wider use may be made of it, especially in readings, directives and in some prayers and chants." Clearly, the Constitution says that use of the vernacular may be used, but Latin "is to be preserved." Many people today would say the Council intended to rid the liturgy of Latin.

[2] Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004), esp. 7-70.

The most significant manifestation of this transition was in the rise of religious indifferentism. Catholics who had become "seekers" began to suggest that one religion was as good as another. Why did Catholicism have some special corner on the market? In turn, many Catholics lost a sense of the sacred. Since, in the minds of many, Mass attendance was optional, it was easy to lose sight of the significance of the Eucharist and the sacraments in general. A spirit of relativism invaded the Church and began to grow like a cancer. Concerning this situation, Pope Benedict XVI commented, "Relativism, which considers all opinions true even if they are contradictory, is the greatest problem of our time."[1] Neuhaus agrees with the Pope emeritus's ideas: "Catholics...are infected by the religious relativism of the surrounding culture in which it is assumed that religion is not a matter of what is true or false but of what works for you."[2]

The relativism foisted upon the Church is closely aligned with the general cultural ideas of secularism rampant throughout society. In a graduation speech at Liberty University in 2014, former governor of Louisiana Bobby Jindall stated, "Today's world is increasingly hostile to matters of faith. American culture has, in many ways, become a secular culture."[3] Similarly, popular Catholic writer Matthew Kelly has commented, "We have become too comfortably a part of the modern secular culture, and discomfort has resulted in a dangerous complacency toward the life-giving words of the Gospel."[4]

Progressive "Cafeteria" Catholicism

The situation created by the fallout of the 1960s, a misinterpretation of Vatican II, and the consequential rise of relativism and secularism in society has raised in the minds of many questions that challenge the relevance of Catholicism in the twenty-first century. One major manifestation of this situation is the reality of a fracture in Catholic thought. While U.S. Catholics in the post-World War II era were basically all on the same page and did not question Church teaching, the reality is quite different today. Two major groups are now present. Richard Neuhaus explains the divide:

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[1] Quoted in Matthew Kelly, *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic: How Engaging 1% of Catholics Could Change the World* (Hebron, KY: Beacon Publishing, 2012), 82.

[2] Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters*, 25-26. In another context, Neuhaus writes, "In our culture, it is polite to say that all religions are more or less equal. What matters is that your religion 'works for you.'" See Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters*, 15.

[3] Bobby Jindall, "Speech at Liberty University," in *Remembering Who We Are: A Treasure of Conservative Commencement Addresses*, ed. Zev Chafets (New York: Sentinel, 2015), 118.

[4] Matthew Kelly, *Rediscovering Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose* (Cincinnati, OH: Beacon Press, 2010), 20.

> The insistence upon moral truth and that conscience is a faculty for discerning truth puts the Catholic way of thinking at odds with the dominant mindset of American culture; this results, perhaps inevitably, in a deep disagreement also among Catholics, some urging a greater accommodation to the surrounding culture and others insisting that the way of fidelity is the way of unapologetic confrontation.[1]

In an effort to promote ecumenism, one of the great strengths and messages of Vatican II, there has been a tendency to downplay the differences between Catholicism and other Christian traditions. Again, Neuhaus has commented: "There is also no doubt that the mis-understanding of ecumenism led many Catholics to believe that differences were to be downplayed, that what were once deep differences now made no difference, that Catholicism was one denominational option among others."[2] For many Catholics, a sense of religious indifferentism or a willingness to compromise on teachings of "lesser significance" has become rather common.

This progressive side of this division has been labeled by some as "cafeteria Catholicism." The term seeks to compare those who pick and choose what they wish to eat from the many food items available in a cafeteria to those Catholics who pick and choose which teachings of the magisterium they will follow. While many contemporary Catholics in the United States, knowingly or unknowingly, fall into the cafeteria Catholicism mentality, the results of this religious perspective have been highly detrimental to the Church worldwide. The popular writer and biographer of Pope John Paul II, George Weigel, has commented:

> Progressive Catholicism accepts this relativization of religious truth and sees Catholicism as one possible story – one possible truth – in a pluralistic world of truths and narratives, none of which can claim the mantle of certainty.... At the same time, the infertility of progressive Catholicism – in its inability to transmit the faith to successor generations, which has a lot to do with its watering down of Catholic truth claims or doctrines – has now been amply demonstrated throughout the religious wasteland of Western Europe.... History, not argument, has shown the implausibility of progressive Catholicism as a strategy to empower the Church for [its] mission in the third millennium.[3]

Progressive or cafeteria Catholicism is most strongly evident in its general rejection of traditional Catholic teaching concerning sexual morality. Religious historian Mary Eberstadt has described this situation: "The churches that did most to loosen up the traditional moral code of Christianity are the same churches that have ended up suffering most for that effort – demographically, financially, moral-

[1] Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters*, 149.

[2] Ibid., 122.

[3] George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 17.

wise, and otherwise."[1] Similarly, Richard Neuhaus has demonstrated that historically such divisions have created permanent fractures in Christianity: "The Protestant principle, as we know from sad experience, is so protean and subject to variation that it results either in gutting the tradition or in creating new traditions around which schisms are formed."[2] Thus, it is incumbent upon the Church to stand as a bulwark against this tidal wave of secularism and contemporary relativism, including the trend of cafeteria Catholicism, which seeks to dethrone values and truths that have been accepted by people of faith since the dawn of Christianity.

Why the Church Is Relevant

It is historically verifiable that Catholicism was the first manifestation of Christianity. While numerous heresies have arisen over two millennia, Catholicism continues to proclaim, as it always has, that it possesses the fullness of the truth. Two Vatican II documents, *Lumen gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Unitatis redintegratio* (The Decree on Ecumenism), specifically state that the fullness of the truth "subsists in" the Catholic Church.[3] In his encyclical on evangelization *Redemptoris missio*, Pope John Paul II, while respecting the views of others, spoke of the validity of this claim: "The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honors the sanctuary of conscience."[4] John Henry Newman, while still an Anglican, drew the same conclusion concerning the validity of Catholicism: "The Church of Rome preoccupies the ground."[5] Richard Neuhaus put it this way: "There is only one Christ and therefore there can be only one body of Christ. There are many churches, but there is only one (upper case) Church."[6]

The claim made by the Church to hold the fullness of the truth and thus to have abiding relevance is supported by other important ideas and practices. Theologically the truth of its teachings comes from its basis in revelation. Vatican II instructs us that Catholic fidelity to revelation involves respect for scripture, sacred tradition, and the magisterium.[7] Second, the Catholic Church continues to offer the seven sacraments as well as clear teaching based on scripture and sacred

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[1] Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2013), 153.

[2] Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters*, 58.

[3] *Lumen gentium*, 8; *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4.

[4] *Redemptoris missio*, 39.

[5] Quoted in Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters*, 65.

[6] Ibid., 16.

[7] *Dei verbum*, 9. Vatican II corrected a misunderstanding from the Council of Trent that spoke of two sources, scripture and sacred tradition, in an attempt to counter Luther's rejection of sacred tradition.

tradition. These special signs of God's grace can be traced back to the nascent Church that Jesus inaugurated and left to his followers to develop. Most importantly, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, taught by the Church from its beginning, speaks to Catholicism's relevance throughout history. Additionally, while it might not be a popular statement to make in some circles, the Church has always maintained that moral truth exists, as articulated through the magisterium in many documents over the centuries. Administratively and structurally, the Church can verifiably claim its roots in the office of pope from St. Peter, who was first proclaimed by Jesus as "the rock upon which I will build my church" (Mt 16:18).

The Challenge for the Contemporary Church

The contemporary situation faced by the Roman Catholic Church in the United States presents a significant challenge, but it is not one from which we should run. Rather, it is a situation that we must fully engage in every aspect of the faith. In order to do so, however, we must first recognize and acknowledge the situation. The late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago commented on this challenge:

> [W]e have to recognize what we are up against. The world is both friendly and unfriendly, both holy and demonic. The world will welcome some of our criticisms and will do everything it can to contest others. When we hear the demands of the world, which we have to hear, lest we fail to attend to the signs of the times, the great missionary challenge then is to discern what the Church must adapt to and what is incompatible with the faith.[1]

Acknowledging the reality of the contemporary situation and realizing that inaction is an unacceptable approach, the faithful today must actively do what we can to reevangelize our brothers and sisters who have lapsed in their practice by setting the proper example. In short, while it might seem a monumental task, we are called to transform the world. Matthew Kelly offers this challenge: "Our mission as Catholics is not merely to move through the world, leaving it unchanged. Changing the world is part of our mission."[2] We do well to recall how Jesus sent out seventy-two of his followers to minister in his name. He told them, "Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs, among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way" (Lk 10:3-4). After the resurrection and immediately before his ascension to the Father, Jesus commissioned the eleven: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

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[1] Cardinal Francis George, O.M.I., *The Difference God Makes: Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion and Culture* (New York: Crossroads, 2009), 181.

[2] Kelly, *Four Signs*, 146.

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20). These first followers of Jesus did their best to transform their world. We must continue that same effort and tradition today.

The life of discipleship that all are called to live is centered around the basic yet difficult task to be a good example. Again, Vatican II helps us to understand this responsibility. In *Ad gentes divinitus* (The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity) we read: "By a truly Christian life, families become seedbeds of the lay apostolate and of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life."[1] The power of example, yet its simplicity, was articulated beautifully and succinctly by St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel and when necessary use words."

Catholicism's challenge is to demonstrate its relevance today in a world that exalts values that are often contradictory to Christian thought. Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., of Philadelphia articulated the challenge:

> We Christians are in the world but not of the world. We belong to God, and our home is heaven. But we're here for a reason: to change the world, for the sake of the world, in the name of Jesus Christ. The work belongs to us. Nobody will do it for us. And the idea that we can accomplish it without engaging in a hands-on way the laws, the structures, public policies, the habits of mind, and the root causes that sustain injustice in our country is a delusion.[2]

In our ministry to engage and transform the world, we cannot remain static but must come to greater maturity and development in our faith, possibly in ways we never dreamed of. Openness to the possibilities God sends our way is essential. Again, Archbishop Chaput has commented:

> The one thing we can't do with a living faith is remain the same. We must either kill it or become new people because of it. Anything less is fraud. And in like manner, the Church must be a mustard seed in society, transforming – not by coercion but by active witness – every fiber of the nation's political, economic, and social life.[3]

Our challenge to set a good example need not be manifested in great and glorious events, things that people remember or will make the headlines of our daily newspapers. On the contrary, is often the routine, mundane, very ordinary activities that can have the most profound effect when they are done well. In essence, we are called to witness to others by the way we live our lives. Archbishop Chaput has put it this way:

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[1] *Ad gentes divinitus*, 19.

[2] Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., *Render unto Caesar: Serving a Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 46.

[3] Ibid., 53-54.

Yet most of our days are spent in more indirect witness: how we speak, how we live, the example we set, the people we encounter. We set an example in everything we do, though we may never know the results, this side of heaven. For every conversion, for every life that turns to Christ, a silent evangelizer known only to God and the convert, has done his or her quiet work.[1]

Too often we may feel that our efforts may be insignificant or ineffective in demonstrating the relevance of the Church. We must realize, however, that it is not our job necessarily to bring forth the fruit of a renewed understanding of the faith and others. Even St. Paul, the first and greatest Christian evangelist, realized his ministry was simply to plant the seed. He wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3:6). Such is the case with all of us. We have no idea how our actions and words, planted in simple and generally ordinary ways, can, with the help of others and the grace of God, eventually bear great fruit. Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington expressed these same sentiments by writing,

We are – all of us – called to water, nurture, and cultivate those seeds already sown, or to plant new seeds where we recognize the opportunity. The ground may be rocky, filled with thorns or heavily trafficked by many feet, but every Catholic can make a difference. This is the new evangelization.[2]

Besides the important ministry of example and witness, the challenge to promote the relevance of Catholicism today requires us to enhance our Catholic education. While we who are priests and religious might have one leg up in this important element of Catholic renewal, we must remember that the vast majority of the people to whom we minister continue to operate, at least religiously, with the knowledge that they gained as children, whether that was through Catholic schools or various religious education programs. The reality of the dearth of basic catechesis among the faithful has been acknowledged by Archbishop Chaput: "Many of the same American Catholics who are successful, assertive, and professionally well-educated in their secular lives really know very little about the Church, their faith and what being 'Catholic' requires."[3] Thus parishes, dioceses, and other Church institutions need to provide refresher courses. While we need to educate children, it is obvious that we need to reeducate their parents.

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[1] Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., *Living the Catholic Faith: Rediscovering the Basics* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2001), 119.

[2] Cardinal Donald Wuerl, *Seek First the Kingdom: Challenging the Culture by Living Our Faith* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

[3] Chaput, *Render unto Caesar*, 227.

A third, and probably most challenging element of proclaiming the relevance of Catholicism today is to have the courage to stand against the tide of contemporary thought and culture that holds such fascination with values basically antithetical to Christian orthodoxy. Archbishop Chaput addresses this issue in detail, with respect to the political environment, in his monograph *Render unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life*. He says that it is time, as we periodically hear today, to "take the gloves off" and stand firm in our convictions. He writes: "[The] time for easy Christianity is over. In fact, it never really existed. We're blessed to be rid of the illusion. We need to be more zealous in our faith, not more discreet; clear in our convictions, not muddier, and more Catholic, not less."[1]

He further suggests that the Church has every right to challenge secular authority and those who have power in it: "The church claims no right to dominate the secular realm. But she has every right – in fact an obligation – to engage secular authority to challenge those wielding it to live the demands of justice."[2] Catholics must not be afraid to speak what they know is the truth and to promote the relevance of the Church in the face of opposition. Again, Archbishop Chaput has commented: "If we say we're Catholic, we need to prove it. America's public life needs people willing to stand alone, without apologies, for the truth of the Catholic faith and the common human values it defends."[3]

Conclusion

While we live in a contemporary world that contradicts Christian values in many ways, and while there exists a tidal wave of secularism and religious indifferentism, all is not lost. Quite to the contrary, Catholicism with its fullness of the truth, the sacraments, and the faithful witness of its members, the Body of Christ, has great worth and relevance in our contemporary world. The Church stands as a countercultural voice, with a set of teachings that it has held consistently for some 2,000 years, to affirm that there are eternal truths. Even though society has largely chosen a different path, the Catholic Church should not necessarily follow. On the contrary, the Church must stand as a witness to the truth taught by Jesus Christ. Let us personally assist those we serve to avoid the trap of the parishioner who drifted away from his parish and in so doing drifted away from God. It is our responsibility as members of this great body to do our share to promote the faith. There is no back up plan; the Lord is counting on us. May we never disappoint him!

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[1] Ibid., 53.
[2] Ibid., 217.
[3] Ibid., 197.

Flipping the Humanities

Grattan Brown[*]

ABSTRACT: By studying the humanities in greater depth later in their college careers, students would learn more from the humanities, and enjoy them more. Colleges should move the bulk of required humanities courses to undergraduates' junior and senior years and replace humanities survey and general education courses with an integrated set of higher-level courses. First year students should solidify thinking and communication skills and begin study in a major, taking more time to explore and change majors and to develop professional skills. In that way, students bring stronger intellectual skills and more life experiences to humanities study and more easily see the relevance of the humanities to their future life and work.

FOR MORE THAN TWO decades, professors have been "flipping" classrooms to introduce course material online and free classroom time for more student-centered activity and higher-order thinking. This move strikes me as a good analogy for flipping some required humanities courses from the first half to the latter half of a college student's education. Replace lower-level survey courses and humanities distribution requirements with an integrated series of upper-level courses that help students to think deeply about humanity and society. Require first-year students to declare a major and begin its initial courses earlier. This flip shares similar goals with the classroom version: increase student engagement and higher-order thinking in order to maximize the impact of a subject – the humanities – on the educational experience. It also gives students more time to explore and change majors.

Some may not like this proposal because humanities courses will become more prominent when many students and employers have written them off as irrelevant and when administrators have eliminated them from curricula and given the credits to other programs. Depending upon the institution, administrators may or may not need to increase the number of required humanities courses. Humanities faculty may lose contact hours with students, and thus recruitment opportunities, during a time when students are choosing majors. Nonhumanities faculty may not like their junior and senior majors spending time in humanities courses when they are performing their best in their specialized field. But by studying the humanities in greater depth later in their college careers, students would learn more from the humanities, and enjoy them more.

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Why should we care? The humanities study the human being, thus the human context for every business deal and cultural activity, all scientific research, and every use of technology in communication, medicine, manufacturing, and so on. When we ponder new technologies, for example, biotechnologies like organ transplants in the 1950s and gene-splicing today, we look back to insights developed from the ancient world to the present. Those insights sound not because they are old but because it didn't take humanity very long to figure out certain characteristics of human success and failure and to explore fundamental human experiences. Great minds have found myriad ways to express those insights so that future peoples, including us, may use their works to sort out, for example, our aspirations, actions, injustices, and loves, to prepare for tragedy, and to enjoy the best of human experience and work.

By humanities, I mean literature, history, art, music, theology, philosophy and its branches in the social sciences, such as psychology and economics. I also include the arts of thinking and communicating – humanities disciplines in their own right. The great minds are great because they have excelled at the arts of thinking and of communicating their insights with great depth and refinement. Among the greats we find powerful truths and blind spots, the development of ideas and disagreements and overlapping consensus. Studying their examples develops our own minds so that we may direct our activities by the best possible thinking we can achieve.

The best possible thinking unites the humanities and the sciences. What we call the humanities today were joined to math and science in the liberal arts tradition. In the ancient world, the study of the arts of thinking and communicating – grammar, logic, and rhetoric – led to the study of math and its applications for calculating space via geometry, the heavenly movements via astronomy, and sound via music. Today we apply math to understand the movement of matter in physics, of chemical reactions in chemistry, and of living bodies in biology. Then as now, the liberal arts enable great minds to uncover and articulate deep insights about humanity and the natural world. They enable every person to participate at some level in the greatest conversations of the age and to apply what they learn to their lives and to their work.

Personally and professionally, I have searched for these insights in the Western and Roman Catholic traditions, which have been influenced by cultures across the globe, but especially by the ancient Middle Eastern and European cultures. Because of this search, I can recognize many similar insights in the humanistic works of other traditions and a complex tapestry of shared wisdom and cultural diversity among them.

The humanities help students evaluate the ideas and arguments they encounter, to accept some truly good ideas for credible reasons, and to reject

others as legitimate but not relevant to them or not preferred, or as distorted ideologies that no one should accept. The possibilities of great insight and great deception require humanities faculty to teach students a range of humble intellectual skills. Students need to learn to interpret texts and works composed in cultures unfamiliar to them, understand each author's or artist's meaning, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of that person's thought, and relate what has been learned to life and work in the present so as to prepare for the future. There are many pitfalls, notably, importing irrelevant assumptions about what an author or artist may have meant, evaluating past authors based only on today's accepted standards, and overlooking the complexities of human experience.

If the humanities have been well situated within the liberal arts tradition, why are they so marginalized today in undergraduate curricula? First, the humanities are intellectually demanding and thus more difficult for students in their initial college years, when students encounter them among general education requirements. Second, studying the humanities with greater life experience yields deeper insight, but juniors and seniors are often immersed in professional majors. Finally, humanities study is perceived today as impractical when people can study math and science, immediately deploy productive technical skills, and feel more confident about future employment. By moving the humanities to an integrated set of courses in the latter half of the curriculum, colleges could provide longer professional preparation and more impactful learning from the humanities.

The First Year

How can a humanities curriculum better serve students? First, teach grammar, logic, and rhetoric but not philosophy, literature, or other humanities courses to first-year students. First-year students are generally the least equipped people on campus to undertake the complexity and depth of thinking in the humanities. Many of them are smart, ambitious, and well motivated, but they are still as a group the least equipped. First-year students often do not have the intellectual capacities or the life experiences that junior and senior students can bring to humanities study. Some students enter college without the writing and logical skills needed for college-level work, and all students are there to develop them further.

Even if students read the classical authors of their own tradition in high school, such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky in the Western tradition, or Confucius, Mencius, and the authors of *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the Eastern, students cannot read them at the same depth and with the same relevance to future professional, civic, and familial life as a student with more academic and life experiences. Some high school students never encounter the classics in any tradition. They arrive on

campus without ever having struggled with difficult yet rewarding texts, narratives, arguments, and artistic works.

The first-year students who enter college immediately after high school tend to expend a lot of intellectual and emotional energy trying to figure out how to live more independently. Whether they try partying, working, studying, just "doing whatever they want," stressing about their future, creating the next billion-dollar startup, or some combination of the above, they are making important life transitions. The students who enter college several years after graduating from high school are reviving, or just now learning, productive study habits, often while handling greater work and family responsibilities. Neither first-year nor returning students are in a position to study humanistic works profitably, never mind to enjoy the experience.

It is no wonder that the less experienced students on college campuses end up disliking the humanities. They encounter them in survey courses that attempt to cover the great literature of an entire millennium. Some colleges present a menu of core humanities options and require students to choose a certain number of them. But these humanities curricula are regularly superficial or disintegrated and not suitable for providing less prepared, less experienced students an intellectually satisfying engagement with humanity's most talented minds.

Instead of taking these kinds of humanities courses, first-year students should study writing, math, and logic so as to develop solid intellectual skills, and they should begin studying in their major. If they are undecided about their major, they should choose introductory courses in the one or two majors that are most attractive to them. They can then take advantage of more time to investigate and change majors if they need to. Students are often worried about money and wondering what career they'll find rewarding. In any case, they are in college to develop the skills to succeed. Colleges will have a greater positive impact on their incoming classes if they help their students work on those problems before offering them the best of human thought.

First-year students educated in this way should still encounter some of what the humanities have to offer. For example, writing and logic courses should incorporate examples of great thinking and writing drawn from humanities texts. Professional programs may use history to introduce their fields and would use philosophy and logic to explain their methods. Many colleges already teach life skills and personal finance, in which students explore their values and consider a way of life. Those courses provide a fertile field for students to encounter excerpted literary and philosophical texts in an accessible, personally relevant way. Weaving the humanities into skills development and professional learning prepares students for a more mature, complex, and satisfying experience of the humanities later in their college careers.

After the First Year

Colleges should teach a few humanities courses to sophomores and expand humanities offerings for juniors and seniors. By their sophomore year, students have pretty well figured out how to "do college." Students who attempt college-level work and decide not to continue will have left campus. If those students return later on, they will not have bad memories of humanities courses, will likely bring more work and life experiences to their study of the humanities, and will have the entire humanities curriculum in front of them.

Academically, sophomores have improved their thinking and communications skills and have begun their majors and professional preparation. If they love their major and career direction, they are thinking more and more about its value for their society and their future. If not, they are changing their major. Either way, the second year is a good time to use works from the humanities to raise such topics as what it means to be human and live in society, what lifelong aspirations have proven most compelling, and what great minds have thought about love, suffering, death, friendship, character, sexuality, marriage, and work.

Students receive a much richer college experience if, in the junior and senior years, the bulk of humanities study accompanies the highest level of specialized, professional study. This arrangement enables students of diverse disciplines, professions, and industries to gather to discuss the humanity that we all share, even though people interpret it differently and contradict each other about the most important matters. In this way, the curriculum fosters the kind of conversations that adults have in families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and social media platforms. Juniors and seniors are privileged to engage with some of the greatest minds in history as they examine the trends, possibilities, distortions, and great ideas in the culture they are inheriting. Colleges graduate future employees, leaders, philanthropists, citizens, spouses, parents, and neighbors of greater human depth and ability for lifelong learning.

The strongest core humanities curriculum would thus be an integrated one rather than a menu of courses. In an integrated curriculum, students follow a prearranged series of courses that build upon and "speak" to each other. For example, what people think about being human influences their view of ethics, and both influence their view of how society should be organized. Thus, a college may offer a series of courses presenting various views of being human, followed by ethics, political philosophy, economics, and culture. "Great Books" programs offer another integrated solution. Over at least four courses, students would trace the development of salient ideas via some of the most prominent thinkers in a tradition.

In an integrated curriculum, students typically have fewer course options but choose how to interpret, evaluate, and respond to the material in the courses,

which is the more valuable sort of freedom. Whatever integrated program a college offers, it will likely provide a deeper, more relevant, and more enduring learning experience than the lower-level survey courses and distribution requirements so widespread today.

Conclusion

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, colleges tried to preserve liberal arts education by shrinking the liberal arts curriculum from four years to two. They identified core liberal arts subjects and taught them before students moved on to specialized majors. Students became skilled in language, math, and logic and applied those skills to science and "humane letters" (classics in Greek and Latin and great works across ancient, medieval, and modern eras). Then students proceeded to professional degrees in medicine, law, or theology or to specialized majors in scientific disciplines, social scientific fields, and technological production.

This order teaches the arts of thinking and communicating early in the undergraduate curriculum but has left the greatest insights found in the humanities inaccessible to many students today. In the past, fewer students attended college, and those who did came with better understanding of the humanities. Today, undergraduates need to solidify thinking and communication skills, expand their social relationships, and begin addressing professional concerns before they think more deeply about fundamental human questions and encounter high-quality thinking, writing, and art.

If colleges flipped the humanities, students and their families would be happier because students would immediately begin a professional major that prepares for employment. If a student ends up changing career plans and thus changing the major, better to figure it out earlier. Less experienced students would no longer sit in humanities courses wondering when they'll get to the "real stuff" that will help them get a job. More experienced students would get more out of humanities courses and relate what they learn to their lives and careers.

Humanities faculty would be happier teaching more in-depth courses to more experienced students than survey courses to less experienced students. Those courses may be more standardized, but more students would take them. Fewer students may choose a humanities major since all students will receive better humanities instruction later in their college career. Moreover, humanities faculty would lose some early required humanities courses that they count on to recruit majors. But if declining numbers of humanities majors are any indication, that recruitment strategy is not working anyway.

Humanities faculties may respond by pursuing quality over quantity in first- and second-year courses and in humanities talent. Humanities faculty would still

teach writing, rhetoric, and logic, highlighting great humanities texts and artistic works. Humanities faculty would also need to work with admissions departments and honors program directors to identify talented humanities students. They would develop their students' talents in higher quality courses that complement the humanities curriculum that all students receive. In the end, humanities faculties would offer stronger required and major courses.

Non-humanities faculty would find less experienced students in more of their program's early courses. But those students would have the motivation of having chosen the subject they study. As non-humanities majors enter their junior and senior years, they will have to spend more time in humanities courses. But non-humanities faculty could take the opportunity to help students explore the human dimension and the ethos of their disciplines, especially if students are also applying what they learn in internships. Imagine engineering or biology courses speculating about the next decade's technological innovations by integrating knowledge from both science and the humanities. Such courses would succeed much more easily if non-humanities majors were to take humanities courses in the same or nearby semesters rather than having to remember the little they retain from humanities-lite courses taken two or three years in the past.

College students grow immensely from first through senior years. During three to six years, students have not only studied more broadly and learned a major subject in depth but also further developed or changed a worldview, possibly gained a sense of mission, held part- and full-time employment, studied abroad, entered and exited romantic relationships, governed organizations large and small, volunteered, and learned to manage time and resources.

The humanities can have a powerfully beneficial impact on this growth and plant the seeds of lifelong learning, but colleges should deliver their humanities courses later in the curriculum to achieve these goals.

The Metaphysics of R. G. Collingwood

D. Q. McInerny[*]

ABSTRACT: The Oxford philosopher R. G. Collingwood, under the influence of Hegel, and swayed by his own radical misreading of Aristotle, convinced himself that traditional metaphysics was essentially a pseudo-science, having no proper subject matter. To remedy this state of affairs and to preserve metaphysics as a science, he redefined it: metaphysics is history. While Aristotle, Collingwood acknowledges, was the inventory of metaphysics, he failed to see it for what it really was, history, and made the critical mistake of supposing its subject matter to be "pure being." Collingwood spends the greater part of *An Essay on Metaphysics* developing his thesis that metaphysics and history are one and the same, in the course of which giving primacy of place to the highly problematic notion of "absolute presuppositions." In attempting to show that the way he views metaphysics is not novel but has an ancient lineage, he launches into the field of Christian theology, with unfortunate results, making any number of claims that are completely unfounded.

THE MOST STRIKING FEATURE of R.G. Collingwood's *An Essay on Metaphysics* is that, its title notwithstanding, it is not about metaphysics at all, not at any rate, as that science has been traditionally understood and practiced since the time of Aristotle. To engage with "the metaphysics of R. G. Collingwood," then, is not, as one might expect, to find oneself dealing with an individual philosopher's studied responses and perhaps contributions to a firmly established discipline that has behind it a long and rich history, but rather it is to encounter his boldly eccentric, indeed idiosyncratic,[1] understanding of what he chooses to call metaphysics. Very much like Kant before him, by whom he was clearly much influenced, Collingwood looks upon traditional metaphysics as a highly questionable enterprise, but which, for all that, he feels can be remedied by proper reform. However, reform is not what he embarks upon; to reform something assumes that the something in question will, after the reformation, retain more or less its basic character. Collingwood does not reform traditional metaphysics, he replaces it. Reformation effectively becomes abolition. Kant, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, provides a copious though sometimes convoluted

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[1] The term "idiosyncratic" can be applied quite precisely to Collingwood's understanding of the nature and purpose of metaphysics, for it seems unique to him. To the best of my knowledge, no other philosopher has adopted his sweeping redefinition of the science.

account of what he took to be the fatal shortcomings of traditional metaphysics, and then spells out how metaphysics might better be done. Collingwood's treatment of traditional metaphysics, by way of contrast, is considerably more concise than Kant's, and expressed in language that is admirable for its clarity. It takes him only the first twenty pages of *An Essay on Metaphysics*, a book that runs to a total of some 340 pages, to lay out his summary of Aristotelian metaphysics, and then to dismiss it out of hand—not without justification, it can be said, for his summary misconstrues the substantive center of Aristotle's thought.

Graciously enough, Collingwood acknowledges that Aristotle is the originator of metaphysics, and while allowing that the Stagirite was commendably correct in several respects, he was fundamentally wrong on account of a critical mistake he had made regarding ontology. Collingwood explains: "Ontology will be my name for a mistake which people have made, Aristotle first and foremost, about metaphysics."[1] Aristotle's mistake, he argues, was to regard ontology as a legitimate science; the cogency of his argument rests squarely on his translation of Aristotle's τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὂν (*ens qua ens*) as "pure being." He cites this as what Aristotle regarded as the proper subject matter for metaphysics, and that was his grand mistake. It was a mistake for the simple reason that there is no science of pure being, "because a science of pure being is a contradiction in terms."[2] That conclusion is acceptable only because it depends on his highly questionable translation of τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὂν as "pure being," which governs his reasoning in the first three chapters of the book, wherein he contends, not unreasonably, that "pure being" is equivalent to "nothing," and that explains why a science of pure being is a contradiction in terms: a science must have a subject matter, but "pure being," which is simply nothing, obviously does not provide one. In arriving at this determination about traditional metaphysics, and ontology in particular, he is explicit about the fact that he is following in the footsteps of Kant, for whom being is not a predicate; and he has Hegel as an ally as well, noting that "he expanded that phrase of Kant's ['being is not a predicate'] into the more explicit statement that pure being is the same as nothing."[3]

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[1] R. G. Collingwood. *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Mansfield Center, CT: Marino Publishing, 2014), 17. First published, Oxford, 1940.

[2] Ibid*.,* 11. One can readily consent to Collingwood's claim that there is no science of pure being, if pure being is taken to mean mere abstraction, which he seems to be doing. But his purpose is simply to deny the legitimacy of the science of ontology, for which he of course has no grounds whatever.

[3] Ibid*.,* 15. In Part I, Logic, of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel writes: "But this mere being, as it is mere abstraction, is therefore the absolutely negative: which, in a similarly immediate aspect, is just *Nothing*" (emphasis in text). In *The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Monroe C. Beardsley (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 615.

Obviously, the mistake being made here is not Aristotle's but Collingwood's, and it is not a small one. It is radically to misconstrue ontology to maintain that it lacks a proper subject matter, and to contend that it is about "pure being," or "mere abstraction," or simply "nothing." In fact, ontology's subject matter is of the most fundamental and comprehensive kind, for in engaging scientifically with *ens qua ens* it is in effect concerning itself with everything, with the *that* of every actual existent, as well as with the *hows* of its existence. Collingwood's dismissive attitude toward ontology, the real science and not what he superficially conceives it to be, goes far toward explaining the difficulties he has in dealing adequately with the objective order of things, which is in turn explained by his idealism.

In Collingwood's rejection of traditional metaphysics in general, he believed that he was setting aside what he took to be an erroneous idea regarding the very nature of metaphysics. He was not doing away with metaphysics as such, but only as it had been improperly understood and practiced since the time of Aristotle. His purpose in writing *An Essay on Metaphysics* was to inform his readers as to the true nature of metaphysics. It is not at all what traditional metaphysics has erroneously taken it to be, the study of being as being. What then is metaphysics, properly understood? It is all quite simple: metaphysics is history; it is one and the same with the science of history. A corollary is that the metaphysician and the historian are one and the same. Metaphysics can thus be said to be reduced to, or rather absorbed by, history. No matter how revolutionary his thesis might seem to be – and it would surely come as a large surprise to many philosophers, and doubtless to not a few historians as well – Collingwood insists that he is not, by identifying metaphysics with history, coming up with a novel idea, for metaphysics, as rightly understood, has always been one and the same with history. He is not denigrating metaphysics as such; he sees it as a supremely important science, and his sole purpose is to "reform" it by reestablishing its proper identity. He wants it to be recognized as the science that effectively governs all other sciences, and therefore he vigorously opposes the logical positivists of his day for their peremptory rejection of metaphysics. Philosophers like A. J. Ayer, who characterize metaphysics as nonsense, are entirely right in doing so if they have traditional metaphysics in mind; but they are altogether wrong by rejecting metaphysics as properly understood, as being one and the same with history. Ayer's problem is that he is ignorant of the true nature of metaphysics.

The heart of Collingwood's metaphysics is best understood by recognizing the key role in his thought that is played by what he designates as absolute presuppositions. An absolute presupposition is a dominant idea or set of ideas, an overriding and commanding point of view, that may be expressed, provisionally, in propositional form, and that governs, guides, informs, and explains the thought of any particularly science, or, more broadly, may exercise the same set of

functions for a particular historical period, such as a generation, a century, an era. So, for example, the science of physics is governed by a set of presuppositions which are peculiar to that science, and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was governed by a set of presuppositions that gave it the peculiar character it had. "Everything has a cause" may be taken as a presupposition of physics, and "Reason will eventually solve all human problems" a presupposition of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

One might think that an absolute presupposition, especially one governing a particular science, is much like what we would regard as a first principle, but this, according to Collingwood, would be to make a grave mistake. First principles are stated in propositional form and are taken to be true. An absolute presupposition might provisionally be stated in propositional form, simply to identify the idea or ideas it involves, but an absolute presupposition is not a proposition, nor can it ever be, and that is because it is not taken, as are propositions, to be either true or false. Its truth value is simply set aside.

Collingwood explains that "the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply to absolute presuppositions at all, that distinction being peculiar to propositions."[1] Absolute presuppositions are not the conclusions to arguments; they are what make argument possible. They are not confirmed by proof, for proof depends on them. Our attitude toward them should be one of "unquestioning acceptance"; they must be accepted as the foundation of "all our thinking without asking why they should be thus accepted."[2]

Absolute presuppositions would seem to be something very much like articles of religious faith, except for the large difference that articles of religious faith do not violate human reason, which cannot be said of Collingwood's absolute presuppositions. These are so rooted in the minds of those who subscribe to them that they are virtuously impervious to any kind of rational examination. What is more, and here we have another revelation of Collingwood's essential idealism, "absolute presuppositions cannot be undermined by the verdict of 'experience'."[3] The presuppositions take precedence over experience because experience is dependent upon them, and it is by sheer act of will that a scientist, say, chooses to "retain the presuppositions by whose aid he reduces such experience as he enjoys to such science as he can compass."[4] In other words, experience does not validate presuppositions; presuppositions validate experience.

Absolute presuppositions are foundational to Collingwood's bold initiative in redefining metaphysics. They serve as the basis for science, and indeed for

[1] *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 32.
[2] Ibid., 173.
[3] Ibid., 193.
[4] Ibid., 198.

civilization itself. They are for the individual, by his submission to them and allowing his entire life to be informed and guided by them, supposedly the identifying mark of his status as a rational creature.

Remarkably, these supremely important governing ideas do not exercise their pervasive and powerful influence in the lives of those who are governed by them in a particular society, or within a particular science, because they are regarded as true. The question of their truth or falsity is set aside as being of no practical consequence. Collingwood is advocating a state of affairs, apparently to be regarded as altogether normal, in which supposedly rational creatures systematically refrain from asking, of the principles that form the basis for their thought and action, the most important and pressing question they should be asking of them: Are they true?

In light of this problem we might suppose that Collingwood takes a skeptical attitude toward the notion of truth itself, but this is not the case. A particularly forceful chapter in his book bears the title "The Propaganda of Irrationalism," in which he describes "something more like an epidemic disease" that is sweeping over the whole of Western culture, a disease characterized by a "withering of belief in the importance of truth and in the obligation to think and act in a systematic and methodical way."[1] Much of what he has to say about Western culture and its relation to truth in this chapter continues to be applicable today, but one might wonder, given how truth figures in Collingwood's own thought, if he is not a contributor to the very malaise that he so tellingly describes.

Collingwood's metaphysician/historian looks upon a practicing scientist to be one who does not concern himself with truth at the foundational level, that is, with regard to the specific ideas that constitute the presuppositions of his science. He supposedly simply takes them for granted as reliable, apparently doing this in his normal work as a scientist because he finds them operationally dependable; they "work." If not, he would surely abandon them. But can we reasonably suppose that his typical modus operandi is such that the rudimentary considerations of truth or falsity play no part in it? It seems more reasonable to suppose that a physicist adopts certain ideas, is continuously committed to their rightness, because he finds them to be consistently confirmable by experimentation.

Whether or not he explicitly makes use of the term in describing those ideas, he takes them to be true because, on the most basic level, they square with what sense experience tells him to be objectively the case. An idea in his mind is regarded as true because it conforms to extramental phenomena to the factualness of which he can confidently attest. Collingwood imagines a situation – in fact he takes this to be the standard situation – in which a scientist, or any human being

[1] Ibid., 135.

of sound mind, can routinely "bracket" the question of truth or falsity regarding matters of the most serious import in their lives. But this is to imagine a highly improbable, if not simply impossible, situation. There are, after all, certain philosophical and psychological constants that cannot be overcome. The proper end of the human intellect is truth; we cannot reason coherently about anything at all if we suppose that, in doing so, we can somehow step outside the jurisdiction constituted by the insistent imperatives of truth.

The principal task of Collingwood's metaphysician is to identify absolute presuppositions wherever he may find them throughout the course of human history, and then subject them to close analytic study. That, in sum, is what metaphysics, as conceived by Collingwood, is essentially all about. The work of a metaphysician is that which has traditionally been assigned to the historian, but now with a very specific and remarkably narrow focus. "Let it be understood that the business of the metaphysician is to find out what absolute presuppositions have actually been made by various persons at various times in doing various pieces of scientific thinking."[1]

Metaphysics, as a science, must itself be guided by presuppositions that are proper to it, and these are easily enough identified: because metaphysics is history, its absolute presuppositions are those of history. What history presupposes is that all the sciences are governed by absolute presuppositions; these are the "facts" that the historian ascertains, and as such they and they alone can be unqualifiedly designated as "true." The part played by the distinction between truth and falsity in Collingwood's system is limited to determining simply whether or not a specific absolute presupposition was actually held by certain people in a certain place at a certain time. An example of such a fact would be something like: "In the nineteenth century the science of W was framed and guided by the absolute presuppositions X, Y, and Z." The question is not whether X, Y, and Z are true (that is irrelevant), but whether it is true that they are absolute presuppositions of W.

Because the metaphysician/historian does not raise the question of the truth of the key absolute presupposition by which his science is guided, which in this case has to do with the very existence of absolute presuppositions, it looks as if the metaphysician/historian has very slim grounds, if any, for being certain, in taking what he identifies as absolute presuppositions, to be what he believes them to be. He identifies X to be an absolute presupposition of science Y in century Z, but he cannot question the "fact" of absolute presuppositions themselves, for taking them to be real is an absolute presupposition of his science. He simply has to rely on his natural faith in the existence of absolute presuppositions, and how they direct him in the presumably proper construal of history. Given this uncertain

[1] Ibid., 60.

state of affairs, with what kind of confidence could the metaphysician/historian claim that his science has definitely to do with truth in any way whatever?

Without genuine first principles, foundational ideas accepted as true, the whole edifice of a would-be science collapses. By making absolute presuppositions the key concept around which his unique understanding of metaphysics turns, Collingwood is effectively undermining the possibility of any real scientific knowledge of any kind, as well as destroying the possibility of an authentic science of history.

"Metaphysics has always been an historical science," Collingwood writes, "but metaphysicians have not always been fully aware of the fact."[1] As a major part of his project to "reform" metaphysics, the Oxford professor endeavors to show that, from the beginning, metaphysics was simply history; in this effort his line of reasoning becomes strained to the breaking point. In order to provide evidence for his claim he makes extraordinarily bold excursions into Christian theology in general and Patristics in particular, with unfortunate results in both cases. He informs us that the principal absolute presupposition of the Christian religion is the proposition "God exists."

As an absolute presupposition, this is not to be understood as having any existential implications as far as God himself is concerned. In other words, we are not to ask if it is true that there is a God, that his actual existence is a fact. Strictly speaking, he explains, "God exists " is not a proposition and therefore it is "neither true nor false. It can be neither proved nor disproved."[2] However, "God exists," as an absolute presupposition, is true in the sense that it is an actual fact of history that Christian people have believed and do now believe that God exists. What underlies and supports this and all other absolute presuppositions, very much including those that govern science, is belief, belief understood as the unquestioning acceptance of what does not admit of proof.[3] In sum, what is true is not that God exists, but that people believe that God exists.

Collingwood unabashedly claims that this is how Christians themselves have always looked upon the matter, the Fathers of the Church in particular. "According to these writers (I am speaking of the so-called Patristic literature) the existence of God is a presupposition, and an absolute one, of all the thinking done by Christians." Furthermore, the Church Fathers happened to be of one mind with Collingwood: "For the Patristic writers the proposition 'God exists' is a metaphysical proposition [that is, an absolute presupposition] in the sense I have

[1] Ibid. 58.

[2] Ibid., 188.

[3] "If 'God exists' means 'somebody believes that God exists' (which it must mean if it is a metaphysical proposition) it is capable of proof" (ibid., 188). However, whether it is a fact that God exists is not, accordingly to Collingwood, capable of proof.

defined the phrase."[1] With breezy self-assurance, Collingwood instructs his readers that "the Christian Church has always taught that metaphysics is an historical science."[2]

Collingwood finds in St. Anselm's famous "ontological argument" the thought of someone whose mode of reasoning was entirely consonant with his own, in that the saint understood metaphysics to be simply history.[3] According to Collingwood's peculiarly tailored interpretation of the argument, it would seem that St. Anselm is berating the fool who says there is no God because he, the fool, fails to realize that "God exists" is an absolute presupposition, something that is clearly understood by St. Anselm himself.

As an absolute presupposition, that means, of course, it cannot be either proved or disproved. But if Collingwood is right in how he chooses to interpret the argument, St. Anselm was flagrantly contradicting himself in proposing it. If he regarded the existence of God as something that cannot be proved, then his argument, which was clearly intended by him as a proof for the existence of God, was a futile exercise.

Collinwood enters the field of Patristics to show that the thought of the Fathers of the Church was consonant with his own with regard to the true nature of metaphysics. From the earliest years of the Christian era, he reports, there was common consensus that metaphysics and history are the same science. The Fathers were essentially of one mind with his own, for "they had worked out the notions I have been describing."[4]

What this meant, specifically, was that the religious beliefs espoused by the Fathers, such as that there is one God and that God created the world, were taken by them to be absolute presuppositions, with all that implies. When he goes on coolly to explain to his readers the doctrine of the Trinity as understood by the Fathers, he moves from the mere preposterous to what is objectively tantamount to blasphemy, whatever might have been his subjective intentions.

By believing in the Father, they meant (always with reference to the procedure of natural science) absolutely presupposing that there is a world of nature which is always and indivisibly one world. By believing in the Son they meant absolutely presupposing that the

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[1] Ibid., 186.

[2] Ibid., 188.

[3] Collingwood writes: "It is because Anselm's proof so explicitly takes its stand on history that it provides so valuable a test for a metaphysical turn of mind." And then, a bit further on: "Anselm's proof is the work of a man who is on the right lines; for a man with a bent for metaphysics does not need to be told that metaphysics is an historical science, and at his first meeting with Anselm's proof he will realize it is historical in character" (ibid., 190). In sum, St. Anselm was a "metaphysician" à la R. G. Collingwood.

[4] Ibid., 222.

one natural world is nonetheless a multiplicity of natural realms. By believing in the Holy Ghost they meant absolutely presupposing that the world of nature, throughout its entire fabric, is a world not merely of things but of events or movements.[1]

He thus utterly transforms one of the central and most sacred doctrines of the Christian faith, inviting us to believe that the Fathers of the Church fostered what is in effect a purely naturalistic understanding of the three hypostases of the Blessed Trinity. What is more, we are to understand that because they regarded their belief in the Trinity as an absolute presupposition, they refrained from thinking of it in terms of being either true or false.

Collingwood saw the thought of the Fathers as everywhere informed by absolute presuppositions, and that being the case, he regarded Patristics as providing a rich field of study for the metaphysician/historian. We should feel especially indebted to the Fathers, Collingwood maintains, for they laid the conceptual foundation for modern empirical science, particularly though their Trinitarian doctrine. In passing, he informs us that the Fathers taught that the absolute presuppositions to which they adhered "must be believed...by anyone who wished to be 'saved'."[2] In all, the Christian way of life that the Fathers "proposed for adoption" was one that was "based upon the absolute presuppositions I have tried, in a partial and one-sided manner, to describe."[3]

The quality of what Collingwood has to say about Christian theology in general and Patristic thought in particular, in his attempt to make the case for absolute presuppositions, resoundingly speaks for itself. The wildly extravagant character of so many of his claims is manifest. His clear, unambiguous style, commendable in itself, has the salutary effect of putting what turns out to be sheer nonsense on full display. Especially noteworthy, regarding this part of the book, is the quality of the historiography reflected in its pages.

Collingwood was a professional philosopher, but also a distinguished historian, who made exceptional contributions to the history of Roman Britain. And yet the character of the historiographical scholarship in these lengthy passages of the book is not conspicuous for its professionalism. For example, Collingwood with calm assurance repeatedly informs us what the Fathers "said" and "meant," but not a single Father is identified by name; he refers vaguely to the "Patristic literature," but there is not a single quotation from that literature in his text. This lack of scholarly apparatus, though at first puzzling given what we know of the author, has a ready explanation: Collingwood would not have been able to

[1] Ibid., 225-26.
[2] Ibid., 226.
[3] Ibid., 226-27.

find citations anywhere in early Christian literature that would substantiate any of the claims he made, least of all the more outlandish of them.

I alluded above to the fact that Collingwood viewed Patristic thought, as he chose to interpret it, as effectively laying the foundation for modern empirical science, particularly with regard to its pervasive reliance on absolute presuppositions. Absolute presuppositions and the important role they played were not limited to the realms of theology or religion. The absolute presupposition is to be regarded as a principal regulating factor applicable to the whole of human thought. It governed all the sciences, very much including the empirical sciences.

Indeed, we learn that the operative presence of absolute presuppositions is so universal that it covers what would normally be taken as the most elementary commonsense attitudes regarding the physical world. Thus, while religion begins with the most basic of its presuppositions, that "there is a God," empirical science, for its part, begins with an absolute presupposition which is peculiar to its field, that "there is a nature." In other words, the empirical sciences presuppose that there is an objective order of things, that there is a real physical world out there all of whose activities take place according to established laws and operating quite independently of human influence. The physical world with all its operations is not something that can be demonstrated to exist by argument. It is simply accepted, without question, as the postulate upon which the whole of empirical science rests; "it is the fundamental presupposition on which depends the very possibility of natural science."[1] Religion and science are on exactly the same level in that neither can prove their most fundamental absolute presuppositions.

One would suppose, however, that a major difference between religion and empirical science must be recognized, for while religion has no direct access to the reality of God through sense experience, it is the very nature of empirical science to be able to establish the reality of nature simply by relying on the knowledge it gains through sense experience. But Collingwood will make no allowances for this. "An absolute presupposition cannot be undermined by the verdict of 'experience,' because it is the yard-stick by which 'experience' is judged."[2] Once again, it is not sense experience that founds the reliability of an absolute presupposition; rather, just the opposite is the case: it is the absolute presupposition that permits the scientist to trust the reliability of sense experience.

Within the all-embracing compass of the fundamental presupposition of science, that there is a nature, there are any number of subordinate presuppositions that pertain to the realm of the natural world, such as the objective reality of motion, and the reality of causality. "If the world of nature is by definition a world

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[1] Ibid., 192.

[2] Ibid., 193-94.

of movements," Collingwood writes, "and if the existence of that world is an absolute presupposition of natural science, the movement which is its essence must be an absolute presupposition too."[1] Causality, for Collingwood, is at bottom a subjective reality, the basic mechanisms of which we apply interpretively to the objective order; here the influence of Kant is not to be mistaken.

Collingwood will grant that human beings themselves are real causal agents, and in this case we can accept experience as offering reliable verification of that fact. But as for purely objective cause–effect relations, those that occur in nature and are beyond human influence, they are to be regarded as "descriptions of relations between natural events in anthropomorphic terms."[2] What Collingwood seems to be saying here is that we interpret certain events in nature as having causes by applying to them our subjective experiences as causal agents.

So much of what Collingwood has to say about the natural world and the human mind's knowledge of that world represents such a radical departure from common sense, not to say the reasoning of sound philosophy, that we stand amazed. Our amazement is considerably modified, however, when we realize that the man whose words we are reading was at bottom a thoroughgoing philosophical idealist, a student of Kant and Hegel.

I mentioned earlier that his rejection of ontology reflected the view of the world he was to adopt. To assume the position, as he does, that the principal task of metaphysics does not involve the full commitment of the intellect to the in-depth contemplative encounter with being, real being, is, inevitably it seems, eventually to succumb to an arid, self-enclosing idealism. When Collingwood rejected Aristotelian metaphysics he was in doing so turning his back on philosophical realism, and he was quite aware of that. "Aristotle thought," he writes, "and he was not the only Greek philosopher to think it, that by merely using our senses we learn that a natural world exists. He did not realize that the use of our senses can never inform us that what we perceive by using them is a world of things that happen of themselves and are not subject to control by our own art or anyone else's.

I have pointed out that the existence of such a world is a presupposition." Aristotle, when he described the world as something that was discovered by our senses, "was falling into metaphysical error."[3] The system according to which we see order in the world, its regularity, and such phenomena as cause–effect relations "is a system not 'discovered' but 'devised' by thought."[4] He gives his unique stamp to what is essentially a Kantian view of the world by the advocacy

[1] Ibid., 221.
[2] Ibid., 322.
[3] Ibid., 215.
[4] Ibid., 196.

of his absolute presuppositions and the key role he has them playing in providing a framework for a projected reality.

In his assertion that absolute presuppositions "are not 'derived from experience,' but are catalytic agents which the mind must bring out of its own resources to the manipulation of what is called 'experience' and the conversion of it into science and civilization"[1] we have as clear an expression as one would want of the "program" of philosophical idealism. He is quite blunt in expressing his opinion of realism. After describing how a person "unscientifically" takes the deliverances of his senses to be reliably apprising him of how things in the external world are actually as he perceives them to be, he offers the following comment. "This theory of knowledge is called 'realism'; and 'realism' is based upon the grandest foundation a philosophy can have, namely human stupidity."[2]

An Essay on Metaphysics was published in 1940, at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, one of the most distinguished publishing houses in the English-speaking world. Given the book's severe limitations, its abundance of statements that are either plainly false or highly questionable, one wonders how it managed to get past the editors. The explanation for this must surely have had much to do with the fact that at the time of the book's publication Collingwood was the Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford University.

Presumably the editors decided that whatever the man occupying so august a position had to say on the subject of metaphysics was to be accepted without demur. There is another factor to be considered. British analytic philosophy was then at its height, and that philosophy had little sympathy with traditional metaphysics. A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* had been published in 1936, and in it the author grandly pronounced metaphysics to be nonsense. The intellectual atmosphere in Britain at the time was such that a book that relegated traditional metaphysics to the exterior darkness, while proposing a new "metaphysics" that had nothing to do with metaphysics, was welcome, and did not appear as bizarre then as it does to us today.

Even so, we must not think that, even in Britain, there were not philosophers who were actively and very impressively involved in traditional metaphysics. The Neoscholastic movement, inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, was also at its height in the mid-twentieth century, and it certainly gave due emphasis to metaphysics, but its influence, though not insignificant, was not sufficient to counter the dominating influence of modern philosophy, born in the seventeenth century, bearing the deep imprint of idealism, and which was generally indifferent, if not forthrightly antagonistic, toward metaphysics.

[1] Ibid., 197.
[2] Ibid., 34.

The form taken by R. G. Collingwood's antagonism toward metaphysics was of a remarkably novel kind, but his attempt to eradicate the science by renaming it was to no avail. Even Kant, no friend to the ancient and venerable science, had to admit that there was something about the metaphysical mode of thinking, the penchant for persistently going beyond the phenomena, which was an ineradicable trait of the human mind. Any effort to rid ourselves of metaphysics, to marginalize it, convincing ourselves that it is of no real import, is effort, if successful, whose inevitable result is our intellectual and spiritual impoverishment.

The truth-oriented human intellect can find adequate satisfaction only in the engagement with, the sustained contemplation of, that which is absolutely basic, the emphatically and definitively real: being, in all its manifestations. When St. Thomas says that being is the proper object of the human intellect he is, albeit by indirection, calling attention to the inchoate awareness we have of the source of our own being. One of the names that Aristotle gave to the science which has come to be known as metaphysic was theology. Metaphysics, if done well, should lead us ultimately to God, not to the God of the philosophers, but to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Cross as Fulfillment of the Human Vocation? Simone Weil's Answers to Evil

Marie Cabaud Meaney[*]

ABSTRACT: Moral evil inflicted upon others can lead to suffering that crushes them, leading them in their anguish to commit evil themselves in a vicious cycle that seems never-ending. And yet evil is overcome at the very moment when God himself seems vanquished on the Cross. How suffering and evil intertwine, how human beings paradoxically find their fulfillment in the Cross (without becoming morbid) is something that Simone Weil in her usual idiosyncratic way traces, thereby shedding new light on perennial truths. Other valid approaches to the problem of suffering, as well as false ones, are discussed in this essay.

HORRIFIC SUFFERING AND EVIL may crush us, sometimes putting even the meaning of life into question. Yet even small burdens and sins have a way of eating away at our energy and well-being, making us long for the sort of happiness experienced by Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. If only we could shake off this suffering, be delivered from evil, find a solution to the pain that is gnawing at our hearts and bodies, then we too could return to this state – so it seems to us. We try various self-help methods, which need not be wrong in themselves, but from which we, deep down, still have the false expectation that they will bring us perfect bliss and redemption. Suffering, evil, and death appear terribly off-tune; rightly we sense that they were not meant to be. Turning to them seems morbid and masochistic. At the very least one would like to feel zen and find the sense of inner harmony that numbs one to the upheavals of life; but this would deaden one from the inside, making one less alive to the demands of love,

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with all the potential pain they entail. How to deal with suffering and evil is one of the biggest challenges human beings must face, and their approaches are, alas, all too often insufficient or downright wrong.

Christianity has been accused by Nietzsche and his followers of being the religion of the resentfully weak who try to muzzle the strong by holding up suffering and feebleness as values while instating a life-negating morality. Though this is a keen insight into a certain kind of pathology, it does not reflect the true meaning of suffering in light of Christ's cross. This doesn't mean, however, that the latter is easy to understand or accept. As St. Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, Christ's cross seems foolish to the world but, in reality, manifests the power of God, who is humble, meek, and gives himself to the point of a complete *kenosis* (1 Cor 1:18).

Yet it might feel like a huge leap when the philosopher (previously agnostic and then mystic) Simone Weil speaks of the cross as the fulfillment of the human vocation. She writes in her notebooks around the end of 1941 or beginning of 1942: "The crucifixion is the conclusion, the accomplishment of a human destiny. How could a being whose essence it is to love God and who finds himself in space and time have any other vocation than the cross?"[1]

Suffering inflicted upon us through the evil actions or omissions of others is particularly galling. For at the center of evil directed against another lies a rejection that often leaves a festering wound. Though a natural evil such as an earthquake can be crushing and ruin all chance of natural happiness, it entails no intentional desire to hurt that goes against a person's existential need to be loved and inherent dignity.

In this article, I investigate Simone Weil's approach to the question of how to respond to the challenge of moral evil when it is inflicted upon us and to the suffering that ensues from it. I do so without addressing the question of natural evil or theodicy. I focus first on two of the reasons Weil gives for committing evil. Both have their roots in the attempt to avoid suffering. Then I turn to a sound way of addressing this challenge before concluding with an analysis of false approaches to the problem of evil. Evil and suffering are often intertwined, for each has a tendency to lead to the other.

Fear of God, Fear of Suffering

When we shudder at suffering, it is not just because our flesh fears pain. A more deep-seated reason, according to Weil, is the fear of God – not the kind of fear that is the beginning of all wisdom, an awe that might turn into love, but a dread that makes us turn away from God like the servant in the parable who buries

[1] Simone Weil, Œuvres complètes, hereafter *OC* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 6.2:375.

his talent since he finds God exacting. "One knows that one cannot see Him face to face without dying, and one does not want to die," Weil writes in her Cahiers in 1942.[1] Nobody can see the living God without dying – to himself, to his sins, vanity, false sense of superiority, and desire for autonomy. In Weil's view, pleasure and pain – attractive and repulsive as they are – are merely excuses to turn away from God. They are the pretext for turning toward evil, and they hide from us the fact that we are doing so. "The flesh is not what distances us from God; it is the veil we put in front of us as a screen between God and ourselves."[2]

The alternative to this mindless escape is seeing oneself in the light of God, that is, seeing one's mediocrity and sinfulness in the light of absolute perfection. This is the *via purgativa* of the mystical life through which one must pass in order to perceive God; if not undergone in this life, according to Catholic doctrine, it will be in the next. From what the mystics say, it is terribly painful, and therefore it is no wonder that the soul prefers almost any excuse for avoiding it.

Thus turning toward evil is a way of avoiding suffering, and in more ways than one. "For man has (perhaps?) the capacity to transform all his pain into sin and thus not to feel the suffering," Weil writes in her notebooks in 1942.[3]

In his article "Evil in Person" Jean Luc Marion analyzes evil along similar lines. Evil follows the logic of suffering. I am hurting and want to expunge that pain by burdening someone else with it, whether that person is responsible for my suffering or not. For the pain I am experiencing from having been sinned against "plunges me into a subjectivity 'without doors or windows' in which the only things that count are my suffering and whatever that suffering inspires in me."[4] The sufferer feels innocent while blaming someone else and transferring that evil unto him without realizing that he is thereby becoming evil himself. Similarly, Weil notes how the evildoer does not feel the evil he is committing: the more he is steeped in it, the less it is perceptible to him.[5]

The only way to counter this is to let the evil in oneself – whether it is evil in the sense of having been sinned against or evil one would like to inflict – become suffering. "Every crime is a transfer of evil in the one who acts unto the one who is subjected to it.... One has to transfer the evil of the impure part into the

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[1] *OC* 6.3:351.

[2] Ibid. 352. This is reminiscent of Pascal's *Pensées*, where human beings chase after a hare, ambitions, money, women, putting up a panel in front of them that hides the fact that they are running toward a precipice, namely, death. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées, Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), nn. 205 [210] and 226 [27].

[3] *OC* 6.3:207. Also: "The evil act is a transfer on another of the degradation contained in oneself. That is why one is inclined towards it as a liberation" (ibid. 349).

[4] Jean-Luc Marion, "Evil in Person," in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 1-30, at 2-3.

[5] Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu* (Paris: Fayard, 1966), 103; *OC* 6.3:349 ff.

pure part of oneself...thus transmuting it into pure suffering."[1] But how is one to do this and accept the burden of the unbearable? I return to this issue later.

Counteracting Daydreaming:
Transforming Evil into Suffering through Acceptance of the Cross

Another reason for committing evil that Simone Weil considers is, believe it or not, daydreaming. On first thought, daydreaming doesn't seem to be problematic. But it is corrupting insofar as the daydreamer loses his sense of reality; action becomes perceived as arbitrary, unimportant, unreal. He no longer experiences the momentous challenge of the moral ought but instead is left floating, like an astronaut in space. Perhaps its dangers are more obvious when we think of the daydreaming that social media and movies can give rise to. When Weil speaks of daydreaming, she means not the kind of absentmindedness that everybody is prone to at times, but escapist distractions or Pascalian *divertissements*.

It is quite difficult to renounce daydreaming, Weil claims, for it acts like an opiate, making one immune to the demands and difficulties of life. To renounce daydreaming therefore implies "a mad excess of love" for Christ, as Weil writes in a letter to the paralyzed poet Joë Bousquet;[2] it is like selling everything – including the familiar reality that surrounds us – in order to buy the pearl of great price.[3] "Love is real," and so to encounter it, one must leave behind all falsehood, however vital a crutch it may seem.[4]

Choosing the good over and against evil is no abstract decision. As Weil writes in that same letter, "[t]o renounce...[daydreaming] for the love of truth is really to abandon all one's possessions in a mad excess of love and to follow him who is the personification of Truth."[5] Hence the last judgment as described in the gospels is about the implicit response to him who is Truth himself. You clothed me, gave me to drink, to eat, visited me in prison – or failed to do so. It is this failure that is damning, and shockingly the people on Christ's left don't understand why they are condemned, for they do not know they were rejecting Christ by neglecting their suffering brothers and sisters. One might object that neither do those who are saved understand why. But theirs is the unconsciousness of love

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[1] *OC* 6.3:353.

[2] Simone Weil, *Seventy Letters*, ed. and trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 139.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. At the root is a fundamental choice, a way we approach reality, as taking or giving, which Weil refers to as "eating" and "looking." See my articles mentioned in the first note above.

where the right hand does not know what the left does, while the other kind is that of a heart so hardened that it does not realize its sins of omission.

To renounce daydreaming ultimately means bearing the cross, "because time is the cross" that is avoided in the realm of fantasy.[1] Instead, human beings prefer to fool themselves by thinking that if only they attained their all-too human goals, they would be happy. In reality, however, any worldly success gives way to another objective and another false promise of happiness, as Pascal already noted. Stopping that mad race means accepting the emptiness left by the dethroned idols and facing oneself in all one's misery. Hence the cross is inscribed into the very fabric of moral life. It is paradoxically essential to an authentic and fulfilled human life, whether one is a Christian or not. This truth is especially clear when we reflect on the fact that the human person is made for communion, that is, for love, and that love by its very nature on earth demands death to self and sacrifice for the sake of the other.

One Needs God to Counteract Evil and Transform Suffering

In contrast, Weil notes, attempts to counteract evil directly by the efforts of one's will are unproductive. Though evil is finite, so is the human will. The individual tends to react to evil by doing evil, to being hurt by passing on the hurt, for this way one avoids suffering.[2] Only the pure being, the *être pur*, as Weil calls it, transforms evil into suffering. However, no human being can do so consistently through his own effort. No finite being possesses the purity needed to become the perfect scapegoat, for "only that which is absolutely pure can receive our evil without being sullied by it, and therefore without ever sending it back to us."[3] Thus, "the perfectly just can only be God incarnate,"[4] Weil claims, for all finite human beings necessarily reach the end of their rope at some point. With respect to the suffering that is owing to natural causes, the temptation is similar – to find relief by transmitting it to others.

Other false options include stoicism and its attendant danger of pride in one's own achievements, which deadens the heart as one seeks numbness to pain. Another alternative is resentful rebellion, which enters into the same *perpetuum mobile* of sin. Though Weil could empathize, for example, with Ivan Karamazov's rebellion at the sight of innocent children suffering, she points out his hypocrisy:

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[1] *Seventy Letters*, 139.

[2] "The person who receives and transmits malediction does not let it penetrate to his core. He does not feel it. But it penetrates to the core of the one upon whom it settles, the one who stops it. He becomes a curse. To become malediction, it is necessary to be pure" (*OC* 6.3:382).

[3] Ibid. 200.

[4] Ibid. 356.

if he were really upset about their suffering, then would he not try to help the innocents? However, in failing to give aid he adopts the same attitude of which he accuses God.[1]

And so, Weil argues, human beings need God in order to deal with moral and natural evil.[2] One cannot stop the *perpetuum mobile* of moral evil on one's own, especially if multiplied by billions of people who all commit evil in their lives. Furthermore, only God's absolute purity can burn away human vice. Who else but a being of absolute goodness and love has the capacity to absorb it without becoming evil himself?

The Cross

Ultimately the cross is the only adequate response to evil. If one does not bear the unavoidable evil inflicted on oneself by another or by necessity (the latter a Weilian concept designating the crushing rule of nature and force), one will pass it on, thereby committing evil.[3] While the one who commits evil transfers it from within himself to another, the victim has the choice either to respond in kind or to "transmut[e] it into pure suffering."[4] Again, this happens not through sheer will power, but requires contact with "an unalterable purity placed outside, out of any reach."[5] One cannot fully accomplish this transmutation on one's own, it seems. Therefore, as Weil clarifies, patience is of the essence: "Patience consists of not transforming suffering into crime."[6] For patience, one might add, comes from *pati* and means to bear, to suffer. Bearing suffering rather than transmuting it into evil is key to the moral life.

The cross reveals this ongoing dynamic of evil, of removing one's own pain by projecting it onto somebody else, but also shows how to halt it. René Girard, who was influenced by Simone Weil, further developed this idea by showing how the frustration of one's unfulfilled desires, kindled through mimetic desire, is overcome by scapegoating another.[7] The presence of the crucified Christ in his

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[1] *OC* 6.2:398; 6.3:119.

[2] Weil proposes various approaches to dealing with temptation and evil inclinations: obedience to the moral law, which means accepting the pain of unfulfilled desires; attention and prayer; patient waiting/*attente* for God's painful, purifying grace instead of trying to weed out evil oneself; resisting the temptation to satisfy one's inner longing for God with idols and bearing the pain this entails. All of these imply embracing the cross. See my articles mentioned above for a more detailed investigation.

[3] Thus, regarding evil one commits, "one should ask for a situation such that all the evil one does falls only and directly unto oneself. That is the Cross" (*OC* 6.3:104).

[4] Ibid. 353.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] See my article "Simone Weil and René Girard: Violence and the Sacred," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2010): 565–87.

Passion is therefore the key for understanding the divine response to evil and suffering, and of seeing through the false lures of power.[1] God who is almighty, yet the essence of love, hides his power on earth most of the time. In his *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger writes of this tension:

> what 'almightiness' and 'lordship of all' mean only becomes clear from a Christian point of view in the crib and the Cross.... The highest power is demonstrated as the calm willingness completely to renounce all power, and we are shown that it is powerful, not through force, but only through the freedom of love, which, even when it is rejected, is stronger than the exultant power of earthly violence.[2]

Paradoxically, meekness gets the better of evil. It allows for a conversion of heart by giving human beings the space to perceive God's love, which, though hidden, is capable of manifesting itself in ways that would be covered up by the use of power. But even if conversion does not happen, if the decision for evil becomes final, as in the case of fallen angels and the damned, this love is still stronger than other kinds of power. For it is, as Ratzinger points out, a self-limiting power, one that freely strips itself of its use, that is not subjected to itself, and that can therefore accept the limitations set up by another freedom rejecting it.[3]

The cross as the transforming power of turning evil into suffering is therefore essential to human life after the Fall. But Weil goes further by saying that without suffering, human beings could not answer God's love to the same extent. "It is not astonishing," she writes in *Intuitions Pré-chrétiennes*, "that this world is par

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[1] In "Quelques réflexions sur les origines de l'hitlérisme," Weil bemoans the fact that "the idea of the despised and humiliated hero which is so common among the Greeks and which forms the subject matter of the Gospels is almost foreign to our tradition" (*OC* 2.3:213).

[2] Josef Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 149-50.

[3] God does not need to prove himself or make others feel that he is more powerful than they are. The power of Lucifer, apart from being limited by his being a finite being, cannot be compared to God's since it is essentially different. It is a power that is enslaved by the desire to subject others, to make them feel his dominion, and to give them no room except to follow his commands. It is a power that, in a way, hardly deserves the name since it is completely self-enclosed and determined. Dante's depiction of Lucifer as impacted in ice, obsessively chewing the greatest sinners, is therefore very astute and metaphysically accurate. At the heart of hell is the most unfree person of all, determined by his rebellion against God, and by his eternally thwarted desire to get the better of God. Since this is impossible, he can try only to get back at him indirectly by snatching from God or at least hurting those he loves. In contrast, God has made himself vulnerable by creating finite persons who can reject or love him, and whose sufferings he shares (as would a mother whose child is in pain). The cross is the loving answer of freedom par excellence. Hence Christ insists repeatedly that he takes his cross on himself freely and that we should do so as well. His answer to evil is given of his own accord and follows the logic of love.

excellence the place of affliction, for without affliction perpetually suspended, no folly on the part of man could echo that of God."[1] United with God through his Son's crucifixion, we are able to transform the apparent senselessness of suffering into a means of responding to his radical love while being stripped of every emotional crutch. Once we embrace it, we are centered in a new way. Weil compares the human soul to scales that are out of balance. Only when God fully takes possession of the soul do they indicate the correct weight. She writes, "The scales are agitated in all directions. A nail fixes the center. Henceforth they show correctly. The nail does not show any number, but because of the nail the pointer shows correctly."[2] This nail is the cross through which human beings participate in the suffering of Christ. And the cross allows us to be in tune with the cosmos, for, according to Weil, it goes through the very heart of the universe: "the entire universe, in the totality of space and time, has been created like the Cross of Christ."[3]

Yet man's nature revolts against suffering. However, as Weil writes in "L'Amour de Dieu," "one thing alone allows one to consent to true affliction, that is the contemplation of the Cross of Christ. There is nothing else. That is enough."[4] In the cross we discover the presence of God, a means of union otherwise impossible, a tearing up of the bandages we have used to dress our wounds, but that is necessary to make us to live in the truth. This is true even during the extreme affliction of the dark night of the soul, when God seems absent. The transformation and union may happen unbeknownst to the soul, but they are no less real. "One does not have the courage to look at the face of affliction," Weil writes. "[O]therwise, after some time, one would see that it is the face of love."[5] Ultimately the soul will come to hear: "Silence itself as something infinitely more filled with significance than any answer, as the word itself of God. [The soul] knows then that the absence of God here below is the same as the secret presence here below of that God that is in heaven."[6]

But without God, suffering becomes hell: "Affliction without the Cross, that is hell, and God has not put hell on earth."[7] But with God, it becomes the moment of truth, growth, wisdom, and supreme union with God: "He whose soul remains oriented towards God while it is pierced by a nail finds himself nailed to the very

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[1] *OC* 4.2:276-77.
[2] *OC* 6.4:195.
[3] *OC* 4.2:290.
[4] *OC* 4.1:370.
[5] Ibid. 369.
[6] *OC* 4.2:291.
[7] *OC* 4.1:370.

centre of the universe. That is the true centre, which is not in the middle, which is outside of space and time, *which is God*."[1]

False Responses to Evil

In the meantime, human beings come up with their own responses to evil and suffering, which turn out to be inadequate. For example, the rationalist idea that knowing about evil is enough to prevent it from happening is naïve, in Weil's analysis. Education and the analytical skills of intellectuals, though helpful, are insufficient to counter evil, though this was Weil's earlier view in her 1937 article "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie."[2] Highly educated people are just as prone to evil as educated ones, as the Third Reich and Soviet Russia have shown. To believe that culture is the response to evil fails to take it seriously.

Without a supernatural response, evil cannot be vanquished. Just as human intelligence is challenged by mystery, Weil writes, human love is challenged by evil.[3] The only adequate answer to mystery is supernatural, namely, faith; similarly, the response to evil will also require something supernatural, namely, *caritas*. Natural love, warm feelings, altruism, and humanitarian concerns all reach their limits sooner or later and fail to vanquish evil if they are not fed by a source other than good human intentions.

Another false response to evil would be to fail to take it seriously. To pooh-pooh it might seem less of a temptation after the Holocaust and the many wars and genocides of the twentieth century. Yet to believe in progress and in the betterment of human nature against all evidence to the contrary seems a fundamental human temptation. The idea that everything will be all right, even in this life, seems connatural, especially among younger people, for the alternative is too horrible to face. Weil felt strongly the horrors of evil and suffering, to the point of weeping tears of blood, as she wrote in her essay "L'amour de Dieu et le malheur."[4] In her *Cahiers* she stated, "One cannot contemplate without terror the

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[1] Ibid. 359.

[2] If people thought through those "empty," capital-letter words like "Communism," "the Nation," and so on, they would realize that they have no content and are therefore not worth spilling blood for, as she writes in that article (*OC* 2.3:51-52, 65-66). However, in her later "Cette Guerre est une Guerre Religions," she sees the root of the problem as idolatry, and therefore its solution lies somewhere else, namely, in a fundamental moral choice of eternal consequences (Simone Weil, *Écrits de Londres et dernières lettres* [Paris: Gallimard, 1957], 99-100).

[3] "Evil is to love what mystery is to the intelligence. Just as mystery compels the virtue of faith to be supernatural, similarly evil constrains the virtue of charity" (*OC* 6.2:465).

[4] *OC* 4.1:373. See also her letter to Maurice Schumann from 1942 (*Écrits de Londres et dernières lettres*, 199).

extent of evil that man can do and bear."[1] On this side of the grave there is no answer, no ultimate consolation, for "[h]ow could one believe that it is possible to find a compensation, a consolation to this evil since, because of it, God was crucified?"[2] If absolute innocence and goodness must suffer because of evil, then it is a very serious thing indeed.

But isn't evil the ultimate defeat of the good? After all, it amounts to a rejection of God, of love, and of all authentic values. Yet God can still be present in evil, as Weil explains: "Just like God is present in the sensible perception of a piece of bread through the Eucharistic consecration, he is present in extreme evil through redemptive suffering, through the cross."[3] Thus evil is defeated if it is transformed through suffering; the hate experienced by a victim can be transformed into love by embracing the pain and forgiving the oppressor; the oppressor may or may not change, but he is more likely to do so if his hatred is met with something from a different dimension, namely, love. But whether or not he does, the victim has brought the *perpetuum mobile* of sin to a halt, making a new beginning that may inspire others.

Therefore, to oppose evil and seek to eliminate suffering through human efforts, by trying to set things right through revolution, for example, and believing that oppression can thereby be eradicated, means being blind to the fact that one form of oppression will be replaced by another, one kind of injustice by another:

> The illusion of the Revolution consists in thinking of the victims of force being innocent of the violence which occurs, that if one were to put force into their hands, they would handle it justly.... The evil which is at the handle of the sword is transmitted at the point. Hence the victims, once in power and intoxicated by the change, do as much evil or more, and then soon fall again.[4]

Attempts to address evil through human justice necessarily amount to replacing one evil with another. This is the sad tale of human history, verified for the first time on a grand scale during the French Revolution. For the evil the oppressed experienced was passed on to their oppressors – now themselves the oppressed – and could have been avoided only if the cause of their suffering had been removed or if their suffering had been transformed in light of the cross.[5]

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[1] *OC* 6.3:279.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *OC* 6.2:468.

[4] *OC* 6.3:266.

[5] Hence the choice for dealing with evil is between the cross and the sword. For "[w]hoever draws the sword will die by the sword. And whoever does not draw the sword (or lets it go) will die on the cross" (*OC* 6.2:327). This is not a defense of pacifism, a position Weil and with many other intellectuals held in the 1920s and 1930s, but which she later discarded, even calling it "criminal." The choice to become an *être pur* can be only

Good and Evil

Authentically supernatural good and evil are essentially different things.[1] They are not on the same level; nor are they contraries. Only natural and human good and evil are comparable on the same plane. "Good as the opposite of evil," writes Weil, "is in a sense equivalent to it."[2] She adds: "That which is the direct opposite of evil (perhaps) never belongs to the order of the higher good."[3] Hence the dialectic between good and evil that Hegel writes about refers only to these two contraries. In these terms, history indeed goes back and forth between action and reaction, while the hope for a final resolution or synthesis is vain. For the one term is continuously replaced by the other.[4] The kind of good that replaces evil is itself evil under the guise of good. Thus, for example, theft and the bourgeois respect of property, or adultery and bourgeois "virtue" are on the same level, according to Weil. Though the respectable woman may feel far superior to the adulteress, as does the person of property to the thief, this feeling is hardly a reflection of the reality – at least if nothing else comes into play. This righteousness is of the pharisaical kind, not true virtue.[5]

Ultimately, the question of evil cannot be addressed without God. All accounts will be false if they fail to include the existence of a loving God and the cross. This may seem strange, for the belief in an omnipotent and loving God raises the question of theodicy. If we are the mere products of random chance, then there is no one to blame for suffering and evil (except ourselves, in the case of moral evil). But in that case, evil has the last word, and despair, the escape into Pascalian *divertissement*, rebellion, or a stoic posture are the only options.

But from a supernatural perspective, evil, though overwhelming and crushing, can become the very vehicle for the victory of the good. Indeed, it needs

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a personal and not a collective one (Emmanuel Gabellieri, *Être et Don: Simone Weil et la philosophie* [Leuven: Peeters, 2004], 226-27). Otherwise, this would mean putting people into a situation of affliction that they are incapable of accepting in a spiritually fruitful way. Weil desired to live this folly of love by becoming a frontline nurse who not only gave wounded soldiers invaluable medical help and moral support, but whose self-sacrifice would also be the spiritual answer to Nazism, but her proposal was rejected by the Free French Government in London.

[1] Weil summarizes this point in the following way in her *Cahiers*: "The good is essentially different from evil. Evil is multiple and fragmented, while the good is one" (*OC* 6.2:126).

[2] *OC* 6.2:103.

[3] Ibid. 125.

[4] See *OC* 6.3:329.

[5] *OC* 6.2:125-26. The choice is ultimately between a loving gift of self and selfish autonomy. For, as Jean Luc Marion writes in "Evil in Person," the choice for autonomy leads ultimately to hell; self-enclosure leads to the eternal spiritual death that annihilates itself continuously without ever bringing out a complete disappearance (26-27).

to be transformed through love into suffering, a process that is at the very heart of the human vocation. Weil writes, “The crucifixion is the conclusion, the accomplishment of a human destiny. How could a being whose essence it is to love God and who finds himself situated in space and time have any other vocation than the cross?”[1]

Hence all suffering, whether caused by moral evil or not, can become an expression of love if born in the right way; otherwise, it becomes the path to spiritual annihilation. That which seems to lack all rhyme or reason, the apparent purposelessness of suffering, can paradoxically become the most meaningful act of human existence if transformed by love. But this too can be seen only *sub specie aeternitatis*: “The Cross of Christ is the only source of light that is bright enough to illumine affliction.”[2] Ratzinger also makes the point that the cross is a universal paradigm and essential to humanity:

> For to be the man for others, the man who is open and thereby opens up a new beginning, means being the man in the sacrifice, sacrificed man. The future of man hangs on the cross – the redemption of man is the Cross. And he can only come to himself by letting the walls of his existence be broken down, by looking on him who has been pierced (Jn 19:37), and by following him who as the pierced and opened one has opened the path into the future.[3]

To conclude with Weil: “[N]othing fulfills the heart as much as the knowledge of a “Love who holds us in his arms from the beginning.”[4] The cross is the cradle of that loving embrace.

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[1] *OC* 6.2:375.
[2] *OC* 4.1:370.
[3] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 241-42.
[4] *Seventy Letters*, 137.

The Bishop: Icon of the Beautiful Jesus

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ABSTRACT: In virtue of his office, the bishop is called to be perfected in supernatural charity. Deeply united to the Lord, the bishop becomes an icon of Christ, mediating him to the faithful in a visible, beautiful manner. Returning to the theology of the episcopacy of St. Thomas Aquinas is a key to the renewal of this office. Aquinas calls the episcopacy a "state of perfection" in which the bishop mediates Christ by the example of his life, by preaching, and by governing – animated, above all, by an abundant charity for God and neighbor.

WHEN ST. PAUL SAYS to Timothy, "Whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a good work [καλοῦ ἔργου, also translatable as a *beautiful* work]" (1 Tim 3:1), he is not asserting that the desire to be a bishop is a good or beautiful *desire*. Rather, to desire the episcopacy is to desire an office that is a beautiful or good work – a καλοῦ ἔργου. It is another question altogether whether it is licit to desire the episcopacy as such. The consensus of the early Church fathers and of the medieval doctors was that such a desire is not licit since it would either be presumptuous or perverse.[1] In the face of episcopal failures and scandals, it may be refreshing and edifying to reflect with some great saints and theologians on the essence and qualities of the episcopacy as established by Christ.

Hans Urs von Balthasar touches on the heart of the bishop's office: "To understand what the episcopal office really is, we must think of it as embodied in one who has reached perfection, who possesses the fullness of contemplation, the highest degree of initiation into the mysteries of God."[2] Further, the bishop mediates the spiritual perfection of charity to the faithful insofar as he decreases and Christ increases in him (Jn 3:30), so that he manifests Christ by becoming a living icon of Christ. Being perfected in charity conforms him deeply, mystically to Christ, and this becomes manifest in his visage, by the way he carries and

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[1] Desiring the episcopacy because one deems oneself spiritually perfected in charity and exceedingly gifted at being able to perfect others spiritually is presumptive; desiring the episcopacy for power, influence, or some other private gain is perverse.

[2] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1: *Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 184.

conducts himself, in his words, and in his deeds. The beauty in such a bishop is Christ's beauty, the beauty of the eternally begotten Logos, the perfect image of the Father, supremely lovable and desirable. This divine transcendent beauty is mediated by the bishop to the faithful.

Augustine's prayer in *Confessions* 10.27 is well known: "Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new." In his *De Trinitate*, he continues his reflections along these lines: "For in that Trinity is the supreme source of all things, and the most perfect beauty, and the most blessed delight" (6.10), and in particular,

> The Son is from the Father, so as to be, and so as to be co-eternal with Him. For if an image perfectly fills the measure of that of which it is the image, then the image is made equal to that of which it is the image.... And in respect to this image [St. Hilary of Poitiers] has named *form*...on account of the quality of beauty, where there is at once such great fitness, and prime equality, and prime likeness, differing in nothing, and unequal in no respect, and in no part unlike, but answering exactly to Him whose image it is.

Commenting on this passage, Aquinas notes that the eternal Son has "integrity" and "perfection" precisely as *Son*, possessing the same nature as the Father; "proportion" and "harmony" precisely as Image, being the expressed image of the Father; and "brightness" and "clarity" precisely as Logos, being the light and splendor of the intellect.[1] In a word, the Son is beautiful; or, rather, he is Beauty itself.

The bishop mediates Christ's beauty to the faithful precisely as a minister and icon of Jesus Christ. The bishop ought to mediate Christ by his words and deeds but also, most fundamentally, by his being conformed to Christ, so that he is made into an icon of Christ. He is to be perfected in charity and, endowed with other necessary gifts, he is thereby enabled to perfect others in that same charity. The bishop is an icon of Christ precisely as *mediator*. To mediate, one must possess what he wants to give to or produce in others – the perfection of charity. What is needed for this is both a supreme and excelling love of Christ (in other words, outstanding holiness)[2] and the skill to produce the perfection of charity in others by preaching and governing. *This* is the "beautiful work" (καλοῦ ἔργου) of the episcopacy that St. Paul praises in 1 Timothy 3:1.

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[1] *ST* I, q. 39, a. 8.

[2] See Jn 21:15, where Jesus asks Peter if he loves him more than these. Many patristic and medieval commentators have noted that the dialogue reads like an examination to determine Peter's suitability for ministry. Specifically, the principal characteristic that makes one well-suited for pastoral office is that the person love Christ in an excelling fashion. See, for example, Aquinas's commentary on Jn 21.

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores gregis*, following the 2003 Synod on the Episcopacy, Pope St. John Paul II wrote:

> Objective sanctification, which by Christ's work is present in the sacrament [of Holy Orders] through the communication of the Holy Spirit, needs to coincide with subjective sanctification, in which the Bishop, by the help of grace, must continuously progress through the exercise of his ministry. The ontological transformation brought about by episcopal consecration, as a configuration to Christ, demands a lifestyle that manifests a 'being with him'.... Pastoral charity...[is] the fruit of the character bestowed by the sacrament and of its particular grace. Charity...is in a sense the heart of the ministry of the Bishop, who is drawn into a dynamic pastoral pro-existence whereby he is impelled to live, like Christ the Good Shepherd, for the Father and for others, in the daily gift of self.[1]

These beautiful insights of the late Holy Father are, sadly, exceptional since theological reflection on the episcopacy in recent centuries has been increasingly dominated by the canonical-theological categories of the bishop's *potestas ordinis*, the power of order (for example, overseeing the sacraments) and the *potestas iurisdictionis*, the power of jurisdiction (that is, teaching and governing). These powers are often seen principally in a juridical not a metaphysical key; not that it has to be one or the other – it should be both: the juridical manifesting and flowing from the metaphysical.

Around eight centuries ago, when these notions were first being formally deployed, St. Thomas reflected on the thought of St. Paul and of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and envisioned the episcopacy fundamentally as a state of perfection (a *status perfectionis*) in which all of the pastoral actions of the individual bishop – whether teaching, governing, or overseeing sacramental activity – are ordered to the spiritual perfection of the faithful in Christ, where such perfection consists above all in the theological and supernatural virtue of charity and divinization/*theosis*, partaking in the supernatural life of the Trinity. Understanding the episcopacy as a state of perfection, for St. Thomas, forms a necessary and proper framework for a fuller understanding of the episcopal exercise of the powers of order and jurisdiction. The spiritual perfection of charity, as manifested particularly in a bishop moved by fraternal charity, ought to form the basis of all episcopal actions on behalf of the faithful. Charity should serve as the "soul" that animates all the actions of the episcopal powers. Without it, a bishop's official acts either would be seriously impeded or would simply not *be*, strictly speaking. Moreover, animated by charity, these official acts are empowered to bring about the spiritual perfection of the faithful in divine love, precisely in the way that something or someone already "in act" (in this case, the bishop actually animated by charity) can move something or someone else from

[1] *Pastores gregis*, 11.

potency to act (namely, the actualization of charity in the faithful). This foundational understanding of the episcopacy suffuses the episcopal theology of Aquinas and it constitutes the very beauty of the mission of Christ for the salvation of souls.

Theological discourse on the episcopacy in the centuries after the Council of Trent has gradually moved away from these insights. To do so leaves us with the (otherwise laudable) theology of the *potestas ordinis* and *potestas iurisdictionis* in danger of losing its foundation in the supernatural grace of the episcopal state. We have been losing a sense of the beauty of Christ and his ministers.

Returning to the medieval sources on the episcopacy will help renew the understanding and exercise of this office. Aquinas's immediate predecessors and principal contemporaries – above all St. Albert the Great – had already begun to incorporate Dionysius's teachings on the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies into their theology. Regarding the episcopacy in particular, this signaled a development or, more accurately, a medieval recovery of the notion of the bishop as a hierarchical mediator who brings his subordinates to the spiritual perfection of charity.

St. Albert the Great

The late Fr. Edward Mahoney wrote,

> Albert the Great was one of the first philosopher-theologians of the thirteenth century to adopt a conceptual scheme of metaphysical hierarchy that had its roots in the writings of Proclus, pseudo-Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*, as well as in some relevant texts in works by Avicenna. The young Thomas Aquinas, one might add, evidently learned about this scheme during the time that he spent at Cologne following Albert's lectures on Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus* [composed around 1250].[1]

In his writings on hierarchy in his commentary on the *Sentences*, in his *Summa theologiae*, in his commentary on Dionysius's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and in his commentary on Luke's gospel, St. Albert employs the dominant Dionysian principle throughout, namely, "the lowest in a higher rank touches the highest in a lower rank."[2] Following Hugh of St. Victor, Albert identifies the essence of the hierarchical state as a participation in the grace of divine illumination in which the hierarch pours forth that same illumination on his subordinates.[3] For one to enter

[1] Edward P. Mahoney, "Albert the Great on Christ and Hierarchy," in *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, ed. Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 365.

[2] Ibid., 365.

[3] See Hugh of St. Victor, *Commentaria in Hierarchiam Coelestem S. Dionysii Areo-*

the fullness of the hierarchical state, it is required that he first undergo a conversion by way of purging; second, that he be illuminated in divine knowledge assimilating him to the divine life; and third, that he enter perfection properly speaking, consisting in the activity of illuminating his subordinates.[1]

Albert sees the divine hierarchy of the Trinity as the ground and source for the angelic and ecclesial hierarchies, though Dionysius himself did not explicitly make this connection.[2] Albert places Christ at the center of both the angelic and ecclesial hierarchies as the one from whom all illumination proceeds to creatures. The ecclesial hierarchy, for its part, is illumined by the third and lowest angelic hierarchy.[3] Closely following Dionysius, he identifies the three orders of the ecclesiastical hierarchy: deacons who purge, priests who both purge and illuminate, and bishops who purge, illuminate, and purify.[4]

St. Albert strongly affirms that Christ is the head of the Church, the chief member of the ecclesial hierarchy. Thus, not only do clerics hold and exercise their juridical and sacramental power in subordination to Christ, but Christ is the preeminent model to which all clerics, but especially bishops, must conform their lives and ministries.[5] It is on this point in particular that we may discern the formative influence of Albert on Aquinas's writings on the episcopacy. Mahoney summarizes Albert's insights on the qualities of a good bishop in his Lucan commentary as follows:

> Only someone who humbles himself for the benefit of his subjects makes good use of the power that he has received within the Church.... Indeed, nothing is easier than to rule subjects if one does so in humility and meekness. In the early Church (*primitiva ecclesia*), there was not great concern for power and all paid heed to examples of humility and love (*caritas*). Only with the increase of wicked people in the Church has severe rule become necessary and serving as a prelate become intolerable.[6]

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pagitae I, cap. 5, PL 175:934. In this work, Hugh comments on Pseudo-Dionysius's writings on the angelic, not the ecclesiastical, hierarchy.

[1] Albertus Magnus, *Summa theologiae* II, tr. 10, q. 37, m. 2, ed. Augustus Borgnet, 34 (Paris: Vivès, 1890), 533; also Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysium de ecclesiastica hierarchica*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 36.2, ed. Maria Burger (Cologne: Monasterii Westfalorum in Aedibus Aschendorff, 1999).

[2] Albertus Magnus, *In II Sententiarum*, d. 9, a. 1 (ed. Borgnet, 27:190).

[3] Mahoney, "Albert the Great," 368. See Albert, *Summa theologiae* II, tr. 10, q. 39, m. 2, ad 3 (ed. Borgnet, 32:469–70).

[4] Albertus Magnus, *Super Dion. De eccl. hier.*, cap. 5 (ed. Borgnet, 14:736 n. 29, referenced by Mahoney, "Albert the Great," 373).

[5] Albertus Magnus, *Super Lucam* (ed. Borgnet, 22:601).

[6] Mahoney, "Albert the Great," 376–77. See Albertus Magnus, *Super Lucam* on Lk 9:46 (ed. Borgnet, 22:677). Albert cross-references his comments by citing Mt 18:4 and 11:29–30.

In his commentary on Luke (especially 9:49 ff), Albert argues that one who is not conformed to the profound humility of Christ should actually be barred from ministry.[1] Such persons, preferring their own wealth, power, and luxury to the good of the faithful, simulate self-effacing virtue in order to mask their invidious malice and self-adulation. Mahoney explains why Albert denounces such persons so scathingly:

> Albert excoriates contemporary prelates for being tyrants and oppressors of the souls entrusted to their care rather than being their physicians. Such prelates act most evilly, since they bring about the evil reign within the Church and cause the name of Christ to be blasphemed. Albert considers some prelates of his day to tolerate and even to favor the wicked, since they are more committed to the self-indulgent Sardanapalus [a legendary evil king of Assyria] than they are to Jesus Christ. Popes [sic], cardinals, archbishops and bishops, who should be sources of light (*illuminatores*) for others, are in fact darkened because of their ignorance and evil life (*nigra vita*). Given Albert's harsh judgment of highly placed prelates by reason of their failure to live up to the model of Christ, one may conclude that it is not only his theoretical conception of the ecclesiastical hierarchy that is Christocentric. So too is his conception of the practical life of the hierarchical Church, in regard both to the celebration of the Eucharist and to what should be expected of its ministers, that is, its priests, prelates, bishops, cardinals and popes.[2]

Clearly, Albert's concerns are of great value for those who serve the Church at any time throughout her history.

St. Albert develops the speculative principles and theological conclusions of a Christ-centered hierarchical office of the episcopacy. Drawing from the Dionysian corpus and scripture, he begins to identify the moral and spiritual qualities that ought to be found in one suitably disposed for this office. He thus establishes a solid theological platform on which his pupil, St. Thomas Aquinas, builds his highly refined insights demonstrating that the beauty of the episcopal office consists in an active state of perfection.

Thomas wrote the following in his *Sentences* commentary on the mediatorial role of those holding a degree of order in the Church:

> The ministers of the Church are not placed over others that they [namely, the subjects] may attribute to them [namely, the ministers] anything by virtue of their own holiness, because this belongs to God alone; but they are placed over others as ministers, and in a certain sense as instruments of the outpouring from the Head to the members.[3]

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[1] Albert, *Super Lucam* on Lk 9:49 (ed. Borgnet, 22:686).

[2] Mahoney, "Albert the Great," 377–78. Albertus Magnus, *Super Lucam* on Lk 9:16, 21:25–27, and 22:26 (ed. Borgnet, 22:633, 644, 682).

[3] Aquinas, *In IV Sent*., d. 24, q. 1, a. 3, qua. 5, sol. 3, ad 2, 7.2:894; in this article, Thomas answers the question, "Whether goodness of life is required for those receiving orders?" Cf. *In IV Sent*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 1, qua. 1, 7.2:808–10.

The main principle that Aquinas deploys when discussing the episcopal office is the Dionysian insight that inferiors are led back to God by their superior.[1]

Aquinas on the State of Perfection

In *ST* II-II, q. 184, Aquinas treats the state of perfection in general and holds that it consists principally in charity (a. 1).[2] To be perfect spiritually requires one to remove from his affections everything contrary to charity and to remove from the mind's inclinations everything that hinders it from tending wholly to God (a. 2). Charity consists primarily in the observance of God's commandments and secondarily in observance of Christ's evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are directed toward charity (a. 3). Aquinas notes that some who are spiritually perfect are not in the state of perfection, and some who are in the state of perfection are wicked and imperfect (a. 4).

The State of Perfection in Bishops

In article 5, Aquinas teaches that bishops solemnly bind themselves to the pastoral duty of perfecting others to the point of laying down their lives for their flock, and they make this commitment by a profession with a "certain solemnity of consecration."

Yet he notes that one who is not spiritually perfect may still enter the episcopacy as long as he has the intention of reaching perfection (a. 5, ad 2). In accord with the patristic tradition, he holds out martyrdom as the most perfect act of charity (ad 3). Ultimately, bishops are to live and act for love of neighbor prompted by their love for God above all else (a. 7, ad 2). To fulfill these solemn duties, prelates must be foremost both in contemplation and in action (ad 3). Aquinas says that bishops must lead a mixed life, one that is both active and contemplative where the bishop contemplates divine truths not only for his own benefit but also that he may instruct others in them.[3]

The Bishop Is Both the Mediator and the Icon of the Beauty of Christ by Preaching and Governing

In *De veritate*, q. 9, a. 3, Aquinas notes that bishops perfect others above all by preaching. He describes the perfecting duty of bishops as uncovering the spiritual riches concealed in the mystical symbols of scripture and the sacraments.

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[1] *De veritate*, q. 9, a. 2, s.c. 1.

[2] See Thomas's remarks in *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus* (1272) where, in q. 2, a. 11, obj. 6 and ad 6, he notes that bishops are in the state of perfection which consists chiefly in charity.

[3] *ST* II-II, q. 184, a. 7, ad 3.

It falls to the office of bishop to uncover and explain spiritual things to the faithful, things that have been veiled in the signification of the sacraments.[1]

In his question on baptism in the *Summa theologiae* (III, q. 67, a. 1, ad 1), Thomas explains that the principal way by which the bishop perfects the flock is by explaining the meaning of the Gospel: "To teach, that is, to expound the Gospel, is the proper office of the bishop, whose task it is to perfect, according to Dionysius (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, V); now to perfect is the same as to teach."[2] And in the next article (a. 2, ad 1), Thomas argues that the principal office of the episcopacy is the preaching office:

> Our Lord enjoined on the apostles, whose place is taken by the bishops, both duties, namely, of teaching and of baptizing, but in different ways. Because Christ committed them to the duty of teaching, that they might exercise it themselves as being the most important duty of all: wherefore the apostles themselves said (Acts 6:2): "It is not fitting that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." On the other hand, He entrusted the apostles with the office of baptizing, to be exercised vicariously; wherefore the Apostle says (1 Cor 1:17): "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." And the reason for this was that the merit and wisdom of the minister have no bearing on the baptismal effect, as they have in teaching, as may be seen from what we have stated above (q. 64, a. 1, ad 2, 5, 9). A proof of this is found also in the fact that our Lord Himself did not baptize, but His disciples, as John relates (4:2).[3]

Teaching is more difficult than simply baptizing since to teach well, merit and wisdom are required. Again, in q. 71, a. 4, ad 3, Aquinas recognizes that persons in different states of life teach the faith. In comparing the differences between the teaching given by deacons, priests, godparents, and bishops, he notes that the kind of teaching that distinguishes the episcopal office from the others is the bishop's instruction on the profound mysteries of faith and the perfection of the Christian life.[4]

The bishop's mediatorial role demands that he be (or strive to be) perfect both morally and in contemplation. He must not only pass on to his subjects the

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[1] "The office of bishops is to uncover the spiritual mysteries which are veiled in the signification of the sacraments." *De veritate*, q. 9, a. 3.

[2] *ST* III, q. 67, a. 1, ad 1. This text is cited by Noel Molloy, O.P., "Hierarchy and Holiness: Aquinas on the Holiness of the Episcopal State," *The Thomist* 39 (1975): 238. Compare this to Aquinas's lectures on the *Pastoral Epistles* (1 & 2 Tim and Tit), especially his comments on 1 Tim.

[3] *ST* III, q. 67, a. 2, ad 1. Also Molloy, "The bishop, then, being the only prelate in the strict sense, is the one on whom the preaching office primarily devolves. Among the offices of the bishop this one, and not the administration of the sacraments, is the one that is absolutely primary [*principalissimum*]." Molloy, "Hierarchy and Holiness," 237–38.

[4] *ST* III, q. 71, a. 4, ad 3. See also Molloy, "Hierarchy and Holiness," 238. See Aquinas's *De perfectione spiritualis vitae* for further elaborations on these points.

doctrine of charity; he must also copiously work to produce charity in their souls by governing, that is, guiding their behavior according to the divine law of charity and, when necessary, imposing punishments for public and egregious violations of charity.[1] Later in his *Sentences* commentary, Aquinas argues that any priest who has received the *cura animarum* must have a basic knowledge of faith and morals, but bishops, entrusted with the care of their churches, should have a more perfect knowledge of the law: "To the higher priests, namely the bishops, it belongs to know even those points of the law which may offer some difficulty, and to know them better insofar as they are placed in a higher grade."[2] This loftier knowledge comes from a profound contemplation that is impossible to attain without possessing a high degree of moral perfection in virtue.[3] And to announce and enforce God's law requires excelling, if not heroic, courage and prudence.

In calling the episcopacy a *status perfectionis*, it is essential to keep in mind that Thomas is speaking about it prescriptively not descriptively. Following his master, St. Albert, he has a realistic grasp of the fact that there have been many legitimate bishops who were notably immoral. Aquinas notes that some bishops lack charity altogether: "Some are in the state of perfection who entirely lack charity and grace, such as evil bishops and evil religious."[4] In fact, he goes so far as to say, "There are many prelates or religious who do not have the interior perfection of charity."[5] In his commentary on 1 Cor 4:14–21, Thomas insists that the faithful should not follow the evil example of bad prelates; rather, they must imitate their bishop only to the degree that he imitates Christ, who is the infallible rule of truth:

> Therefore, they ought to have imitated him as a father, insofar as he imitated Christ, who is the principal father of all. And this removes from subjects the occasion of adhering to the evil examples of prelates. Thus, subjects ought only to imitate their prelates to the extent that they imitate Christ, who is the infallible rule of truth.[6]

According to Aquinas, the ultimate rule of faith is God the Word incarnate. The Church's teaching is also a rule of faith, but it is only a "secondary" or "derivative" rule, subordinate to and in strict conformity with Christ and his

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[1] See, especially, Aquinas's commentaries on 2 Tim and Tit where he discusses at great length the bishop's duty to discpline the faithful and even excommunicate heretics when necessary. I treat this at length in chapters 5 and 6 of my book, *The Ideal Bishop*.

[2] Aquinas, *In IV Sent*., d. 24, q. 1, a. 3, qua. 5, sol. 2, ad 1, 7.2:893. The matter at hand in this *quaestiuncula* is whether those with the *cura animarum* ought to know all of scripture.

[3] Compare this with Aquinas's remarks in *ST* II-II, q. 15, a. 3, and q. 153, a. 5.

[4] *ST* II-II, q. 184, a. 4, s.c.

[5] *ST* II-II, q. 184, a. 5, obj. 2.

[6] Aquinas, *In 1 Cor*., chap. 4, lect. 3.

teaching. In this regard, if a prelate fails in word or example the faithful must continue to follow Christ's teaching and example.

Attending to these insights may significantly benefit the contemporary recovery of an essential feature of the episcopal office that is infrequently discussed but greatly needed, namely, that of conversion and holiness both for the individual bishop and for his flock.[1] Yves Congar noted that the very ontology of the episcopal office has at its core moral uprightness, that is, holiness – fidelity to the gift of the Holy Spirit.[2] By describing the episcopacy as an active "state of perfection," Pseudo-Dionysius and Thomas along with him situate the quintessential element of holiness in the very ontological description of the episcopacy itself. It should be evident that holiness is not automatic, nor does this term, "holiness," always correctly describe episcopal office-holders at any given place or time. Yet, as von Balthasar insists, "To understand what the episcopal office really is, we must think of it as embodied in one who has reached perfection, who possesses the fullness of contemplation, the highest degree of initiation into the mysteries of God."[3] When said of the episcopacy the phrase *status perfectionis* signifies something too often foreign to our current way of thinking about bishops, namely, the idea that suitable candidates for the episcopal state ought to enjoy a high degree of spiritual perfection in charity so that they, in turn, may perfect others spiritually.

When those who enter this office pursue a life of holiness in Christ, they are conformed to the eternal beauty of the Second Person of the Trinity, and they themselves become beautiful mediators and icons, visible conduits in integrity, proportion, and clarity of the perfection of supernatural charity that defines the human life of Christ and constitutes the essence of our supernatural life in him.

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[1] For a recent treatment of the importance of conversion to Christ as constitutive of ecclesial authority and as the ground of the exercise of effective ministry, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Authority and Conversion or: The Limits of Authority," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 21 (2000): 207–29.

[2] See Yves Congar, "Apostolicité de ministère et apostolicité de doctrine: Essai d'explication de la Réaction protestante et de la Tradition catholique," in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: du Cerf, 1971), 91–92, as cited in Komonchak, "Authority and Conversion," 227.

[3] Von Balthasar, *Word Made Flesh*, 184.

Book Reviews

Piotr Jaroszynski and Lindael Rolstone. *Europe: Civilizations Clashing – From Athens to the European Union*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019. 192 pp.

Reviewed by Curtis Hancock, Rockhurst University

This book provokes controversy. Few readers will agree with all its conclusions, but even fewer will doubt their significance for stimulating further discussion. The authors intensively examine Europe's identity crisis, partly manifest today in disturbances afflicting the European Union. Loss of identity is related to loss of memory. Accordingly, the authors first exercise their skills as historians to report Europe's genesis. By recognizing where Europe has come from, they can better judge her present and future.

This book argues that the European heritage has been formed mainly by three historical conflicts: (1) between ancient Greece and Persia, (2) between medieval Christianity and Islam (and later between Catholics and Protestants), and (3) between the Enlightenment and the enduring Christian society.

The clash between Greeks and Persians was decisive because it forged a sense of freedom among the Greeks. While Greek communities (each a discrete *polis*) were scattered across the Hellenic peninsula and the west coast of Asia Minor, they found kinship in resisting the invading Persians early in the fifth century B.C. While the Persian Wars determined Greek survival, they also revealed that the Greeks valued freedom (even if limited to life in city-states). Having witnessed the bellicosity of the Persians, the Greeks contrasted their love of freedom with the Persian affinity for despotism and imperial conquest (37). Through Greek influence, the institution of laws to protect freedom and autonomy became a defining feature of Western culture. Accordingly, Hellenism contains beliefs about human freedom and dignity that would become constitutive of European identity (38).

The collision between Christian and Islamic culture in the Middle Ages also has had profound influence on European identity. During the Middle Ages and beyond, Christian states in Europe fought wars against Muslim invaders. Charles Martel repulsed the Muslim armies at Poitier in 732; the Moors were removed from Spain in the thirteenth century; an Ottoman invasion was foiled at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571; and King Jan Sobieski of Poland defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. These battles are just a sampling of events on which the destiny of Europe depended. Because of Muslim defeats, Europe remained Christian.

The authors also entertain the question whether Islam as a religion can be, in principle, compatible with European identity, given Europe's Hellenic and Christian provenance. They highlight three Islamic teachings that appear to make an Islamic religion incompatible with a Christian culture. (1) God's relationship with nature is a complete determinism. The will of Allah is absolute, so much so that even natural laws (so-called secondary causes) do not operate independently of God's will, making science a theological project instead of one pursued by the hypothetical method. Acceptance that Allah is the primary cause of everything suffices to explain all knowledge and behavior in nature (70, 84, 86). (2) Of course, this implies a determinism about human life and action that is incompatible with Christian teachings about free will and personal responsibility (72). For these and other reasons, a culture shaped by Islam simply cannot be the kind of culture that Europe became.

The authors explain that they do not intend to pass judgment on the Muslim faithful (88). Christian–Muslim dialogue should be encouraged. After all, Muslims too are People of the Book, who, like Jews and Christians, have ties back to Abraham. Chastened by this realization, the authors qualify their critique of Islam by observing that "[o]n an individual level the differences between Christianity and Islam may not be easily recognized" (88). Nonetheless, neither reluctance to judge another religion nor motivation for ecumenism should blind one to some stark theological differences that have had bearing on Europe's destiny.

The clash between Christianity and the Enlightenment generated considerable changes in Western civilization. Before the Enlightenment undermined Christian civil society, it borrowed from Christianity and the classical tradition the belief that humans have dignity on account of reason and autonomy. A human life is an autonomous life. Accordingly, culture and government ought to adjust to accommodate the desires of individuals, otherwise culture and government are oppressive.

While this Enlightenment vision shares with Christianity a regard for the individual, it has a different conception of freedom. Whereas traditional Christians and Jews, as well as ancient Greeks and Romans, understood freedom principally to involve cultivation of virtue and self-control, so that one does not desire and act in a way that harms self or society, the Enlightenment reduced freedom to individual wants and desires, and the right to act on them without encumbrance. Accordingly, the task of Enlightened society is to remove barriers, even if such impediments are long-established institutions, like Church, family, government, and custom.

In the wake of these changes, a progressive ideology, mainly rationalized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, emerged (96, 120). This ideology pronounced that

society's chief responsibility is to protect the liberties of individuals, an attitude additionally supported by the Protestant Reformation, with its aims to separate from Catholic tradition and to institute a priesthood of all believers (94). Mesmerized by the success of empirical science and technology, unleashed during Renaissance and Enlightenment times, ideologues became convinced that society could provide utilitarian comforts along with securing human rights. However, since Christianity, classically at least, valued tradition, the common good, and personal sacrifice, the Enlightenment model of unhindered individualism had to erode Christianity (and European traditions, laws, and customs) as part of its progressive project. The Enlightenment accelerated change that, arguably, Protestantism had already stimulated. The European Union is the heir to this Enlightenment ambition to transform civil society.

Against this backdrop, the authors challenge Europe's effort to create a new identity, which is being socially engineered through the European Union. This project is failing because it is trying to manufacture a Europe different in kind from the Hellenism and Christianity that originated it. Europe's genius lay in cultivating the salutary outcomes of Christian personalism (82). Christianity accepted the conviction of the ancient Greeks that human beings had dignity on account of reason and liberty. Christian wisdom reinforced this belief by explaining human nature as a gift of a personal Creator. A person is an existent with the powers of reason and free choice. This means human persons are made in the image and likeness of God (74). God is a person, in fact a Triune community of persons. For this reason, each person must be accorded respect on account of his or her God-given dignity, which provides a basis for universal human rights (135).

The authors recognize that the person is a social being, whose happiness depends on being in relation with others. For this reason, regard for the family is a cornerstone of civilized life (157). Civilization requires the cultivation of a civil society, in which citizens are nurtured optimally by long-term interpersonal relations. Christian principles imply a vision of limited government, so that the viability of the civil society is unencumbered by the state, a limitation that supports individual and national sovereignties (157). But today the cooperation (or at least coexistence) of civil society and state is being lost as the European Union encroaches on and overregulates the heretofore autonomous life of civil society. Because of its secular, progressive ideology, the European Union seeks to marginalize the Christian personalism on which European culture has depended. The government's intrusions into citizens' lives are rationalized in the pursuit of a collectivist utopia. As the foundations of Christian civil society have been gradually eroded, the threat of a Continental socialism is on the horizon. The book is a warning about that threat.

The book is not just a warning. It is also a prescription, encouraging European citizens and leaders to recover and defend the vitality of the Christian personalism that has made Europe authentically Europe.

Bronwen McShea. *Apostles of Empire: The Jesuits and New France.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. xxix + 331 pp. Cloth, $60.00.
Reviewed by Thomas W. Jodziewicz, University of Dallas

In the conclusion of her imaginative and well-written discussion of French Jesuit missionary activity in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Bronwen McShea notices Pope Benedict XV's 1919 admonition directed at Catholic missionaries. He accused them of identifying too closely with the nationalisms that had inflamed the world and contributed to the carnage of the Great War. These missionaries had forgotten that they were not agents of their countries but "ambassador[s] of Christ." Any missionary who worked "to increase and exalt the prestige of the native land he once left behind him" would surely "destroy his reputation with the populace." His only object should be "their spiritual good" (261). While in no way discounting the intentions of the Jesuits to bring Christ crucified and the Gospel to the natives of New France, McShea argues that

> Broadly understood..., the mission was not strictly a clerical, religious project. The Jesuits rather conceived of their own labors as the spearpoint of a greater mission by the French and their new spiritual "brothers" and "sisters" in America to save souls, improve the earthly condition of an emerging transatlantic community, and defeat enemies of these causes. (xx)

For McShea, these Jesuit agents of French imperialism were the self-conscious carriers of upper-class Parisian interests in uplifting the poor and sick not simply through the Gospel but "by means of commerce and large-scale philanthropy." Combining contemporary knowledge of the natural with the supernatural, the Jesuits were sure that "imperial France was God's chosen conduit for the Church at all levels of her mystical experience – *militans, dolens, triumphans* – as Native Americans' Christian communion was to be achieved through interleavings of grace and shared experiences with the French" (259). Typically, "American exceptionalism" is a phrase pronounced and promoted with an Anglo-American accent: the Puritans' (and Quakers') "city on a hill" (Mt 5:14) and the mid-nineteenth-century imperialist "Manifest Destiny," for example, reveal a sturdy founding myth regarding the heartening experience of a New World. McShea

suggests that we might enlarge our historiographical perspective by the inclusion of an "Exceptionnalisme franco-américain."

McShea's scholarship is marked by close reading of far more sources than simply the celebrated *Relations de la Nouvelle France,* or *Jesuit Relations* (1632-1673). Even in these documents, though, the effort of the authors was not simply to report about the evangelization of the natives but also to give certain intimations of the emerging French empire. The Jesuits actively sought the patronage of elite Parisians, including some who were well connected with the royal court. Wherever they themselves might come from in France, the Jesuits who served in the New World were part of a French *entrada*, bearing the Cross and a banner with the royal *fleur-de-lis* that was threaded already with Enlightenment sensitivities regarding commerce, capitalism, and modern social welfare sensibilities. These were men very much of their times, both *in* and *of* that already secularizing world, for they embraced what they saw as the means necessary for success in New France. And yet the author is not suggesting that the missionary impulse was simply a disguise:

> New emphasis on the metropolitan base of the mission and the missionaries' this-worldly goals should not be mistaken for a suggestion that the Jesuits of New France were disloyal to the papacy or unmotivated by a corporate Jesuit identity that transcended other loyalties.... [But also] the missionary experience intensified some Jesuits' identification with France, to which they not rarely longed to return – making all the more painful the spiritual detachment demanded of them in their ministry by the foundational counsels of the Jesuit order. (xxi-xxii)

By the turn of the eighteenth century, however, the Jesuits found themselves more and more distant from a government now centered in Versailles as they continued to champion "holy war" in North America against first the Dutch and then more significantly their fellow imperialists, the English. Jesuits pushed back against royal indifference, unsuccessfully, when they argued for New France to be restored to the forefront of French imperial interests.

Apostles of Empire is a thoughtful, deeply researched, and fresh consideration of the Society of Jesus and its labors in early modern North America. It combines asceticism and adventure, evangelization and social welfare, selflessness and patriotism in an accessible presentation. Numerous French Jesuits are limned in some detail. One might wonder, though, if there might be more than a few similarities to the efforts of Spanish Jesuits and Spanish Franciscans in New Spain. One might wonder also at the relationship between the French Jesuits and the papacy, and between the French Jesuits and the corporate Jesuit identity: to speak of disloyalty to the pope and to the Society would seem to say too much, but perhaps there was at least a bit of friction between nationalities.

Clemens Cavallin. *Art and Sacrificial Love: A Conversation with Michael D. O'Brien*. Ottawa: Justin Press, 2018. 93 pp.

Reviewed by Jeff Koloze, DeVry Univ. and Lorain County Comm. College

This brief book lives up to its implied purpose. Early on, Cavallin states: "I hope to show [Michael D. O'Brien's] understanding and ideas more effectively than disjointed fragments would do, or...the analytical distance of a systematic work could achieve" (21). Thus, the scholarly reader who wants a detailed analysis of O'Brien's works and writing style should enter appropriate search terms in a database like Academic Search Premier to find the relatively few scholarly articles discussing his oeuvre.

The merit of Cavallin's work, however, rests in the conversational tone that underscores his explicit purpose: "In this volume, I would like to give particular attention to [O'Brien's] art, and try to convey something of the same inspiration and healing that I myself experienced from it" (20). Lest this stated purpose be reduced to the genres of autobiography and biography, Cavallin is aware of his audience and clarifies that his intent includes the volume's persuasive function: "While writing this book, I had in mind especially those of you who are now in their late teens or early twenties and feel drawn to art as an expression of a strong Christian vocation" (21). St. John Paul II's *Letter to Artists* (1999) may provide a more systematic account of the Christian's role in contemporary art, but Cavallin's work illustrates the anxieties, frustrations, and joys of two artists (visual and literary) who attempt to implement the saint's ideas in their respective creative professions.

Although the book is ostensibly organized around a weekend that Cavallin spent with O'Brien at his home in Canada (the chapters are titled simply "Prologue," "Friday," "Saturday," "Sunday," and "Epilogue"), the two main concerns of the book are suggested in the title. The first two-thirds of the book discuss O'Brien's pertinent biographical details and his philosophy of art. It is only in the remaining thirty pages that Cavallin shifts the conversation to the importance of sacrifice for the purification of artists so that they can create works in cooperation with their divine calling. Scattered throughout the book are didactic statements showing how O'Brien's artistic philosophy is inseparable from his Catholic faith.

Details about the lives of Cavallin and O'Brien are indeed interesting and would not necessarily be found in scholarly analyses of an artist's work. Cavallin includes two specific details that serve an important function in the study of O'Brien's novels. First, O'Brien's poverty throughout his career is mentioned numerous times. O'Brien quit his secure job in 1976 in order to pursue his art. He claims that since then "my wife and I, and our children, have lived on the bottom

of the economic structure of Canada" and that the "sacrifice was a constant testing" (59). Cavallin elaborates on how severe that poverty was and cautions that "one should not romanticize the lack of resources" (15).

To understand the importance of the second case it is necessary to mention the circumstances in some detail. When he was twenty-one, O'Brien

> sensed the presence of radical evil. I was confronted by a spirit which was powerful, extremely malevolent, and wished to devour my soul. It was a being that suddenly appeared to me. I was not hallucinating: I was sane. But I – I who had completely rejected any notion of the transcendent or the spiritual – was suddenly confronted by a spiritual being who wanted to destroy me – or at least to devour me. (29)

If it were not for "something deep in my soul [crying] out: 'God save me!'," he would have succumbed. This crucial event in O'Brien's life led to his spiritual transformation, encapsulated in the statement that "I realized in that instant that there was a great war in the heavens" (30). The event is perhaps the moment in which O'Brien understood that "the darkness that afflicts the modern era is dismantling Western Civilization, Christian civilization, into something far more sinister than the pagan age – into an apostate age" (30-31).

Cavallin offers autobiographical details throughout his conversation with O'Brien, suggesting that the two men have many things in common: "My own story was so different, but at the same time so similar" (17). While it is obvious that O'Brien enjoyed his interaction with the younger Swedish scholar, Cavallin (a faithful Catholic in a Sweden that lost not only its Catholic but also its Protestant Christian roots on the altar of secularism) discloses much more the therapeutic effect of his collaboration with O'Brien in the composition of this book and in their communications throughout the years. "Being in Canada and listening to Michael O'Brien was, then, part of a healing process: a quest for personal and professional wholeness" (19).

Sometimes Cavallin's descriptions border on the awkwardly poetic and hagiographic, as when he writes, "I sensed a cloud of grace surrounding Michael, something of which, I think, he was quite unaware" (13), or when he recalls "that first day of our meeting in 2011, when after lighting the candle, he walked by the portraits of Jesus and Mary. It was as if he had sunk into water, was submerged for a moment, and then came back to normal life, with something of that luminous water still clinging to him" (16).

Despite these flaws in language, Cavallin's work includes numerous statements summarizing O'Brien's ideas about art that can assist the researcher and avid literary fan in trying to appreciate his ideas and to understand why most of his fictional works are massive and often, as some critics have pointed out, verbose tomes. For example, an image of a sapling growing out of rocks manifests

for O'Brien not only his love of nature but also God "speaking through nature" (33). O'Brien's analysis of the major fault of contemporary philosophy and art – deconstruction, whereby art is viewed as a social construction and that "True Art" is "not God-given but made by us; and therefore unstable" – leads to his ineluctable conclusion:

> As their creations could not partake of what they signified, they became signs of the only thing their creators were sure of, that is, themselves. The anxiety that then naturally crept up on the wannabe artists, like a malicious black shadow hiding in a remote corner of the studio, biding its time, was precisely this impossibility to stretch out and establish a link with the real, with the pulsating nature of life. (35, 37)

The "black shadow," of course, refers to the signal episode of the "spirit which was powerful, extremely malevolent, and wished to devour my soul." Including this language (the simile could have easily been edited out) reinforces the crucial spiritual event that frames O'Brien's world.

Besides recording O'Brien's negative comments on modern art, Cavallin's work is notable for presenting the positive tenets of O'Brien's philosophy of art. Although the secular world wishes to obliterate its Christian roots and silence faithful persons, O'Brien recognizes in a simple assertion: "We are marginalized, and not allowed to enter the mainstream of culture – to speak the word. But we are speaking. We *are* speaking" (52, italics in original). O'Brien also expresses a grander hope when he argues that, in order to accomplish the desire "to make true, beautiful, and good work, we must be willing to sacrifice. We must risk losing everything" (63).

O'Brien's novels are reportedly popular; ranging from 500 to 1,000 pages per volume, they are lugubrious works as well. Evaluating the literary merit of O'Brien's work, Cavallin himself notes, is not the intention of this brief book and must be relegated to someone who has the interest and time to plow through O'Brien's thick novels. However, the busy person of faith may want to postpone reading O'Brien's volumes and instead read Cavallin's much briefer (by 400 pages) summary of the novelist's views. Doing so may intrigue and prompt the reader to investigate at least one of O'Brien's novels to determine whether the philosophical statements offered in Cavallin's weekend conversation match the literary artifacts.

Luanne D. Zurlo. *Single for a Greater Purpose: A Hidden Joy in the Catholic Church.* Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2019. 185 pp.
Reviewed by Joseph Koterski, S.J., Fordham University

This book is a beautiful contribution to the understanding of vocations to the single lay life. The question about whether one can rightly speak about such a vocation has suffered from a tendency to think about vocations only in terms of the priesthood and religious life. Remembering that at the heart of any genuine vocation is a call from the Lord is crucial for answering the question whether marriage and the single life can be properly described as vocations.

Trained by such Dominicans as Fr. Wojciech Giertych (Theologian of the Pontifical Household and author of the Foreword to this volume) in the Thomistic insistence that distinctions need to be grounded upon real differences to be legitimate, Zurlo deftly distinguishes between the cases of those who happen to find themselves single and those who are called to be what she prefers to speak of as dedicated singles, who see their state of life as a permanent and providentially ordained means to love and serve God wholeheartedly and to make a definitive gift of themselves to Christ in an exclusive way. On this basis she makes a case for the possibility of having a vocation to the single lay life in contradistinction to the wide variety of situations that are also possible for those in single life, including among others a life of license and pleasure and a life of willful independence that is focused on self, a life of holy patience waiting for a spouse or discerning a religious call, a life of bitterness for not having found a spouse, and a life of sacrificial self-offering to family duties that impeded other options.

Among the crucial sources for Zurlo's reflections is St. Francis de Sales's definition of a true vocation as "the firm and constant will possessed by the person called, to want to serve God in the manner and in the place where the Divine Majesty calls her." To the elements of constancy, the desire to love and serve God, and the embrace of the circumstances in which God calls us, Zurlo adds the element of self-gift that St. John Paul II stressed in his 1988 *Christifideles laici* in light of Vatican II's account of the universal call to holiness of all Christians by virtue of their baptismal consecration.

Like those who are called to marriage, those called to a single lay life have various advantages and challenges that are quite different from those typical of the priesthood and of consecrated forms of religious life. Zurlo's point is thus not that being single itself is a vocation, but that there is ample evidence that the Lord has given a vocation to be a dedicated single to any number of people. Some of the later chapters in her book are devoted to practical considerations about how to recognize this call and how to respond to it. After making the case for considering

it to be a genuine type of vocation, she distinguishes it from membership in one or another of the various societies of apostolic life and from consecrated virginity, which involves public profession of a certain state of life.

Zurlo's book also contains many insightful reflections on current trends, including sections on sociological and economic factors that have weakened religious life and that have made it harder to find spouses. The analysis that she presents about the rise of easily available pornography, the changes that digitalization has effected regarding employment prospects, and failures in ecclesial discipline adds considerable background for better understanding the problems that singles have in making marriages, in discerning religious vocations, and in keeping promises.

But an even more valuable aspect of this book, it seems to me, is the wealth of anecdotes and personal testimonies about the reliable ways to discern God's call to be a dedicated single, about the personal fruitfulness of a life lived according to this call, and about the new avenues of charity opened up within the Church.

Bradley C.S. Watson. *Progressivism: The Strange History of a Radical Idea*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. 252 pp. Cloth, $45.00.

Reviewed by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., Fordham University

Ideological fervor can steadily decimate even the security normally provided by revealed religion, the principles of the *philosophia perennis*, and constitutional order. Brad Watson's new book is a remarkable analysis of the destructive effects that the ideology of progressivism has caused in our nation and even within the Church. The book gives not only a penetrating account of progressivism as an intellectual movement intent on undermining the republican principles at the basis of the American Constitution but also a revealing depiction of the reluctance of most historians of our political order to be candid about the revolutionary character of contemporary liberalism.

This volume is about history and about historiography. The formal study of history, after all, needs to consider the full array of meanings of the term "history": what actually happened, particular accounts of what happened, and the various types of accounts that are given of what happened. This distinction is significant here, for Watson not only recounts the stories of prominent people who acted on the stage of American politics. He also reports on the ideological alignments of the historians of progressivism and provides a scholarly analysis of the type of historical writing that results from their commitments.

While the term "progressivism" nowadays tends to be used by extreme leftists such as Senator Bernie Sanders, Mayor Bill De Blasio, and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, historically its partisans ever since the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth included both Republicans like President Theodore Roosevelt (with his "New Nationalism") and Democrats like President Woodrow Wilson (with his "New Freedom"). What justifies including all these figures under the same rubric is their common desire to re-imagine American politics on a basis entirely different from what they consider the stultifying commitments the founders and their followers have had to various principles and institutions.

After locating the philosophical roots of progressivism's revolt against the Constitution in pragmatism and social Darwinism (chapter 1), Watson reviews the effects of religious language (ideologically transformed) to rally support for their subversive agenda through appeal to the hope given by secular messiahs like Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Barack Obama (chapter 2). In the third and fourth chapters he traces, decade by decade from the 1940s on, the way in which professional historians often ignored the standards of objectivity and critical judgment expected of their profession when addressing the innovations in public policy and popular consciousness by the New Deal. The final two chapters treat the implications of progressivism and of the scholarship on progressivism for our governing institutions and for political theory. By juxtaposing with them certain recent scholars who have questioned the progressivist interpretation of history and of the Constitution, these chapters are able to assess the responsibility that the progressivist chroniclers bear for failing adequately to clarify the matters that they have chosen for study. Watson finds them liable for complicity in promoting a pernicious agenda by the kind of historiography they have employed.

In Watson's analysis, one thing that especially marks progressivism as a political program is its determination to uproot the institutional safeguards that the founders made central to our Constitution. These safeguards include federalism and the separation of powers. The rhetoric of the "living Constitution" has proven to be a kind of code for promoting a system that involves a constant process of adjusting political forms to changing social needs. One can see this at work, for instance, in the many calls for the abolition of the Electoral College when the system devised by the founders does not deliver the results that progressivists want. Under the founders, who tried to devise a system of government with a Constitution that could be amended but only with difficulty, the emphasis was on establishing a balance that would check destructive excesses of pressure from extreme positions. By contrast, the progressivist movement has tended to see the very idea of nationalism, borders, republican forms of governance, and ordered liberty as obsolete.

Even a brief review of the amendments that the progressivist movement has seen as a salutary modernization of the Constitution reveals the influence that this movement has wielded. The Sixteenth Amendment (ratified in 1913) authorized Congress to enact a national income tax. The Seventeenth removed senators from election by the states and made them subject to popular election (1913). The Eighteenth (1919) banned the production, sale, and transport of liquor, while the Nineteenth (1920) brought about women's suffrage. While the merits of each of these innovations can certainly be debated, it is important in this context to understand the radical nature of the changes they brought to the political order established by the founders. It included a federalist understanding of the role of states within the Union and the protection of private property. To use the laws of commerce for the cure of social ills arguably went beyond and against the limitations they imposed on governmental power and had the unintended effect of creating the mafia. The change in regard to voter eligibility altered an implicit principle within our constitutional arrangements when it substituted the individual for the family as the unit of society that was to be represented in the voting process.

The section of Watson's book given to the philosophical foundations of progressivism turns our attention to such figures as John Dewey and William James. Instead of concentrating on the identification of what is stable and unchanging in human nature and of seeing in human nature the justification for creating a stable and relatively unchanging form of government that would help to give good order to such unstable aspects of human nature as the passions, the philosophers of progressivism championed a vision of human nature that put emphasis on openness to change and indefinite adaptability. The result is not merely an easy-going relativism or a general agnosticism about moral standards, Watson reminds us, but a vision of human society that exhibits a stern commitment to promoting social evolution, a willingness to enforce social progress as determined by the decisions of central authority, the abolition of the rights of conscience, and the need for submission to the judgments of elites.

Watson's portrait of Woodrow Wilson, the first political scientist ever to become president, illustrates the effect of philosophical assumptions like these. Watson recounts the story of Wilson's dismissal of the founders' "Newtonian" view of history as a recurrent pattern of motions blindly obeying the changeless laws of human nature (especially self-interest). Wilson labeled his own view of history as "Darwinian" so as to emphasize its respect for the ongoing evolution of human nature and of government in accord with the changing challenges of the social and economic environment. Watson also traces the influence of John Dewey, who employed a biological model for knowledge and for society in his argument about the need for a shift from a static worldview to one that embraces

recurrent change as pragmatically useful and normal.

Why, Watson asks, have academic historians been so reluctant to promote frank discussion of the history of liberalism? Long sections of the book are given to analysis of the works of such notable thinkers as Charles Beard, Richard Hofstadter, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. In these passages he shows how deeply partisan the accounts of the rise and dominance of progressivism have been.

The account that Watson gives us in this book is indeed a "strange history." It us strange not only because of the complicity of academics in the dissemination of a certain ideology to which their professional standards should have applied rigorous scrutiny but also because the readers of standard histories will find the story told here so unfamiliar. To have this sort of account of the progressivist movement is extremely valuable for the way it provides solid evidence for holding that there has been a "revolution against the Constitution" and for the way in which it helps remind those entrusted with the care of young minds about the need for respecting the will of God and the canons of sound reason rather than the persuasive rhetoric of ideologically driven elites.

Books Received

Aidan Nichols, O.P. *The Theologian's Enterprise: A Very Short Introduction*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020. 100 pp. Paper, $14.95.

The Fellowship's 2020 Convention

Fellow Catholic Scholars:

We hope you will be able to join us for our upcoming convention in St. Louis from September 25-27 2020 on the theme, "Renewing Catholic Intellectual Life on Campus." The program committee is now accepting proposals from all fields for the satellite sessions. Please consider submitting a proposal and encouraging at least one or two of your colleagues – whether an existing member of the Fellowship, or a prospective new member – to submit a proposal.

In line with this year's theme, we are especially interested in satellite presentations that showcase and reflect on new or innovative enterprises to renew Catholic intellectual life within higher education. However, proposals on any topic that intersects with the faith will also be considered.

Proposals may be submitted to Fr. Joseph Koterski, SJ by June 15, 2020 at this address: <koterski@fordham.edu> by June 15, 2020.

Fr. David Meconi, S.J.
St. Louis University

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