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The Difficult Good: A Thomistic Approach to Moral Conflict and Human Happiness
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Defending Probabilism: The Moral Theology of Juan Caramuel
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Can a Catholic Be a Democrat? How the Party I Loved Became the Enemy of My Religion
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A Student's Guide to Liberal Learning
by James V. Schall, S. J. Robert F. Gotcher

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EX CATHEDRA..... J. Brian Benestad



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

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

by Bernard Dobranski
*Dean and Professor of Law,
Ave Maria School of Law*

This past September marked the tenth anniversary of the death of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. The event was commemorated by release of the personal letters she wrote to her spiritual directors. In a collection titled *Come Be My Light* we are gifted with a window into the inner life of perhaps the most beloved person of the past century, one who is undoubtedly a saint.

The feelings which Mother Teresa expressed in these highly personal writings—feelings of sadness, spiritual emptiness, and abandonment by God—have prompted charges of duplicity from some reviewers reading her reflections with secular eyes. Charges have been made that her smile was phony. She has even been diagnosed as being depressed.

Such commentators have little knowledge of *ascetical theology*, the examination of the spiritual life. The great Christian writers trace a series of movements in souls that seek union with God. These stages are well described in a classic work by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. *The Three Ages of the Spiritual Life: Prelude of Eternal Life* (1948). Far from duplicity or depression, what Mother Teresa experienced was what's known as "the dark night of the soul," which by Garrigou's description, is indicative of her having attained a high degree of perfection in the spiritual life. (I am grateful to Father Michael P. Orsi, the Chaplain and Research Fellow in Law & Religion at Ave Maria School of Law, for these insights.)

It has long been recognized that growth in holiness is achieved only by conforming one's own will to the will of God. Jesus most exemplifies this union in his complete submission to the Father during the Passion. In the *agony in the garden*, Jesus demonstrates ultimate humility through His words, "Not my will, but yours be done." Yet, His "dark night of the soul" is tellingly revealed when He cries from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me." But in the end, His complete emptiness of self and total trust in God are evident in His final words, "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

This is the model which has been replicated in the lives of the saints. Despite spiritual darkness, the absence of warm feelings, or the loss of any sense of God's presence, saints keep doing God's will and trusting in Him. In this way they are

truly joined to the crucified Christ.

It is understandable that secular commentators would misinterpret the revelations of spiritual dryness described in the letters of Mother Teresa. Worldliness offers ideals of success, not sanctity. From the secular perspective, to expend effort without tangible reward or even a feeling of affirmation is to waste oneself. By that measure, dryness can only be interpreted as a sign that one is headed in an unproductive direction.

Mother Teresa's spiritual testimony gives us pause to reflect on the importance of our personal growth in the spiritual life and the central role of the cross in bringing us to God. The message of the cross is certainly quite different from the message of the world. It's even alien to many who consider themselves Christians. One could point to the so-called "self-help Gospel" preached in many of the "mega-church" congregations that have become a prominent fixture of American Evangelicalism in recent decades. Here we find messages of self-fulfillment and a wide range of spiritual services offered to aid in the quest. What's too often missing is the call to sacrifice implicit in Jesus' warning that we must "count the cost" of our identity as Christians.

This outlook bespeaks the mood of our age, a pervasive secularization that inhibits reflection and action geared toward a transcendent end. It's a problem often referred to by Pope Benedict XVI. Sad to say, it is not unknown in Catholic circles.

Mother Teresa's letters remind us of three things which

I believe are critically important for us to address, both as individuals and as members of The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars:

First, it is vital that we personally continue to strive for spiritual perfection. There is a rich literature on spirituality that has been developed throughout Christian history. I recommend the following as aids (although there are many more which could be suggested as well): *The Interior Castles* by St. Teresa of Avila; *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*; and *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean Pierre De Causade.

Secondly, I think our Fellowship should seriously consider a future symposium on the topic of the spiritual life. We could explore the work of the masters. We could also invite practitioners to guide us in our quest for spiritual growth.

Lastly, I highly advise our membership to read Mother Teresa's letters. Her example of perseverance despite her inner sense of darkness will inspire us to continue to do God's work despite life's problems. On this point, I found especially poignant Mother's advice to one of her sisters which has put discipleship in perspective for me:

"Once I saw a Sister with a long face going out to her apostolate, so I called her to my room and asked her, 'What did Jesus say, to carry the cross in front of Him! Or to follow Him?' With a big smile she looked at me and said, 'To follow Him.' So I asked her, 'Why are you trying to go ahead of Him?' She left my room smiling. She understood the meaning of following Jesus." ❧

Rehearsal for Deconstruction

by James F. Hitchcock

Professor of History, St. Louis University

From the beginning of his career, Christopher Dawson was convinced that modern society was moving inexorably towards a kind of secular totalitarianism but that the obstacles to curing modern ills came not primarily from the secular world itself, whose destructive features were irreversible in their own terms, but from the ignorance, timidity, and indifference of Christians, so that the revival of modern culture could only occur through Christians (mostly Catholics) recovering an understanding of their own tradition.

As other possibilities seemed precluded, Dawson, in the inevitable way of reform-minded intellectuals, settled on education as the best hope for social and cultural renewal, and the last decade of his active life was largely devoted to sometimes acrimonious controversies over it.

The great obstacle to the conversion of the modern world was the assumption that religion had no intellectual significance, while Catholics were often purely defensive.¹ Making men aware of the objective importance of religious knowledge was in itself the mere threshold of faith,² but Christian culture could be approached in that way, something that might at least remove anti-religious prejudice.

Secularists were aware that something was lacking and that Catholic culture was humanistic—much wider and richer than secular culture itself,³ so that the study of Christian culture could serve as the integrative principle even of secular education.⁴ As the study of one of the great civilizations of the world, the study of Christian culture would be liberating, not narrowing, in some ways even more necessary for secularists than for Christians.⁵

Anticipating certain ideas of Post-Modernism, Dawson rather daringly argued that historical relativism ("relatedness") was actually valuable, as an antidote to a metaphysical

relativism that denied the transcendent value of theology and philosophy. There was a danger that secular education would push towards an extreme metaphysical relativism and Catholic education towards metaphysical absolutism, making the two mutually exclusive and incomprehensible to one another.

Religious education in the widest sense should use all the organs of culture.⁶ Historically, Christian education had not been carried out by words alone but was connected to worship. It was the unveiling of new realities—catharsis and illumination, a religious sense,⁷ not mere knowledge but the discipline of the whole man, initiation not only into a community but also into an entire world. True education was liturgical in nature, as in the church buildings that once dominated the landscape as powerhouses of the spirit and in the Holy Week liturgy that was one of the greatest expressions of the Catholic concept of history.⁸ The starting point had to be religion in the widest sense, where it touched the individual psyche in worship, making the real classics not Augustine and Aquinas but the Bible, the liturgical texts, and the *Acta Sanctorum*.⁹

The historian of Christian culture should use the indispensable but neglected sociological-anthropological concept of a culture as a unity¹⁰ and study the culture process itself. For each period theology had to be studied in relation to all other dimensions of the culture, because for Catholics society was a universal community—the City of God—whereas Catholic education as it existed was too abstract and systematized and gave no immediate vision or sense of direct contact with the past. Theologians approached history from above (“*ex parte Dei*”), while students of Christian culture approached it from below (“*ex parte hominis*”), studying the leavening process on the human plane, not so much Christian culture’s inner nature as its external expression.

Theology was the crown, not the basis, of the curriculum and could be introduced through the liberal arts. Philosophy too had an honored place in the curriculum, but the study of philosophy alone was inadequate, because it attempted too abstract a system of pure ethics without an accompanying civilization. If faith had no culture around it, it would be reduced to a mere skeleton.¹¹

Dawson thought that Catholic students accepted Thomism on faith rather than by philosophical reasoning,¹² with their metaphysical education leaving little room for criticism, since they were not introduced to rival schools of thought, as in the Middle Ages. Philosophy and theology were treated as infallible and therefore inculcated students with an authoritarian ideology, unless they had a deep grounding in the history of culture.¹³

None of this was in opposition to Thomism, Dawson insisted,¹⁴ but the ultra-Thomistic view of higher education was utterly unrealistic—there could be no return to the medieval

trivium and quadrivium¹⁵ and “Heaven forbid that we should return to it [logic]!,” he exclaimed, because it had ruined medieval Scholasticism and led to the anti-theological reaction of the Renaissance,¹⁶ just as the dictatorship of theology at the Sorbonne had undermined French Catholic culture in the eighteenth century.¹⁷

The study of literature was imperative, because poetry was an extremely intense expression of a culture and literature gave a direct experience of the life of an age,¹⁸ but Dawson feared that literature departments had a vested interest in the modern and would be hostile to his program.¹⁹

He admitted that science was neglected in that program, because it had no close connection to Christian culture or to religious truth and the study of the history of science was therefore likely to be possible only for students who had already studied comparative cultures.²⁰

But, like the adjustments made in accommodating the study of “Western civilization” to specific academic programs, the study of Christian culture could be coordinated with vocational programs.²¹

In the late 1940s Dawson began to see the United States as providing the best hope for his program, since only in the United States was there a comprehensive system of Catholic education. In 1958 he made his only trip to America, arriving at Harvard University as its first professor of Catholic studies.²² He wrote continually about his Christian culture program and in 1961 published *The Crisis of Western Education*.

Catholics fit with America except on the crucial point that they alone were fully committed to religious education, standing for a principle that was actually part of the American heritage.²³ The chief weakness of the Catholic colleges were their limited resources, the inadequate culture of the students’ own homes,²⁴ the fact that higher education was originally for clerics only, and the need to keep up with secular institutions.²⁵ But the system was nonetheless remarkable, and the demands for excellence by John Tracy Ellis and others were a sign of progress. The Catholic school system would continue to expand until it transformed the nature of the US, since the Church had a much wider vision than any other religion.²⁶

There were two opposite tendencies in American Catholic education—abstract philosophy and empirical science²⁷—leaving Catholic education stranded between specialized seminary education for priests and “scraps and fragments” of Catholic culture in universities.²⁸

The clerical mind was susceptible to the “practical approach,” and American Catholicism seemed bifurcated between the abstractions of the Thomists and a narrow empiricism,²⁹ with Thomism of little use as a synthesis,³⁰

thereby leaving an enormous gap between philosophy and the prevailing vocationalism. Theology needed to be studied, but except for Etienne Gilson the neo-Thomists were not helpful, while advances in theology had not penetrated to the level of the colleges or seminaries.³¹

Dawson suggested a chronological approach to Christian culture: the early church, Christian empires and the development of cultures (fourth to sixth centuries), the conversion of northern Europe and the Christian-barbarian culture (sixth to eleventh centuries), medieval Christendom (eleventh to fifteenth centuries), divided Christendom and the age of humanism and the baroque (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), and secularized Christendom.³²

Thematically this would include: the Incarnation, the church as the people of God and the City of God, the Communion of Saints and the cult of the saints, holy places and holy images, and the Bible as Christian literature, while on a more secular level it would encompass: the family, the state, liberty and authority, wealth and poverty, education, and comparative institutions, and including Hellenism and Christianity, the conversion of the Roman Empire, the rise of Islam, monasticism, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, modern technology, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, world missions, slavery, the French and American revolutions, and socialism.³³

Besides obvious classics, works to be studied would include: *The Song of Roland*, Latin hymns, Byzantine art, Joinville's *Life of St. Louis*, the trial of Joan of Arc, and *Everyman*, including non-Catholic writers such as Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Richard Hooker, the Metaphysical Poets, John Milton, John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Jonathan Edwards, Edmund Burke, Johann Goethe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, Fyodor Dostoevski, Henrik Ibsen, Friedrich Nietzsche, and T.S. Eliot.³⁴

Several years before his arrival in America Dawson tried to discern how much support he might have. John Courtney Murray wrote privately that the program was a "needed and brilliant idea," and the Lutheran historian Jarislav Pelikan affirmed the need to return to the authentic Christian tradition.³⁵ One of Dawson's admirers pronounced him the single most acute diagnostician of the general cultural crisis,³⁶ and a young Jesuit theologian, Bernard Cooke, was interested.³⁷

Dawson was initially encouraged by the response of Theodore M. Hesburgh³⁸ but, when it turned out that the program was not feasible at Notre Dame, he felt "exceedingly disappointed" and began to think of Catholic educationists in the way St. Paul thought of the Jews—it was time to turn to non-Catholics.³⁹

The idea of Christian culture seemed to get a more favorable response from non-Catholics, Dawson lamented,

because Catholics themselves seemed to have a blind spot as far as the social concept of culture was concerned⁴⁰ and Catholic educators were not helpful because they had to spend so much time concentrating on practical problems.⁴¹ He wondered why it was so difficult to persuade the clergy of the importance of Catholic culture for apologetic purposes, especially in view of the fact that in America the clergy in effect *were* the colleges.⁴² But there was some hope for the younger people in the Catholic schools, and it was also necessary to reach Catholics teaching in elite universities.⁴³ (But when approached about the possibility of founding a lay Catholic college, Dawson replied simply that there was no precedent for such a thing.⁴⁴) In the end only one institution attempted to implement a program based on Dawson's ideas—St. Mary's College of Notre Dame (Ind.), which in 1956 inaugurated it as an interdepartmental undergraduate major.⁴⁵

Dawson feared that his proposal would be too "reactionary" for the liberals and too daring for those who defended the traditional classical curriculum,⁴⁶ and he anticipated opposition from theologians and philosophers, academic specialists, and utilitarians,⁴⁷ anticipations that, as it turned out, were correct.

From the conservative side a philosopher accused Dawson of fostering cultural relativism,⁴⁸ and another objected that the proposal appeared to bypass Greco-Roman culture, thereby implying that Christianity had no foundation in natural reason.⁴⁹

A Jesuit educator and editor conceded that history was important, but it was more important to introduce students to a body of truth, so that Dawson's proposal could not be the center of the curriculum. Catholic colleges had reversed the secularizing trend as far as possible, and the United States did not suffer from the cultural diseases that Dawson diagnosed, so that, paradoxically, the fact that some American colleges might be interested in his program might actually prove that they did not need it.⁵⁰ Another Jesuit characterized Dawson's proposal as a kind of "despair," because "it crushed out all else."⁵¹

A dean at the Catholic University of America thought that the study of Christian culture had less claim to be at the center of the curriculum than did philosophy, theology, or history and could not be studied without the intellectual power that philosophy and theology provided. Christian culture might be strange to many students and would have to begin with a freshman survey, thus could not be the course to which students would subsequently refer everything else.⁵²

Dawson believed that democratic countries needed to create an elite who were aware of the dangers of mass cul-

ture, but in America the Catholic elite had reacted too strongly against the Catholic past⁵³ and the lack of Catholic influence in America due partly to Catholics being ashamed of their own culture,⁵⁴ a judgment that seemed to be borne out in the fact that most criticism of Dawson's program came from the "liberal" side, foreshadowing by only a few years deep conflicts in Catholic education and in the wider Church.

The Jesuit classicist Herbert Mursurillo in a sense straddled the fence between the traditionalists and the liberals. He argued that some Christian works might be of no value, while, if classical literature were mentioned only in footnotes, it would be "the greatest disaster in the history of human achievement." For students to read works in poor translations with inadequate commentaries was "too terrifying to contemplate" and a disservice to the Fathers of the Church. It was not possible to study Augustine or Dante without having digested Homer and Virgil, nor could such "sprawling" works as the *City of God* and the *Roman de la Rose* ever be reduced to proper pedagogical limits. It was also not clear what a "cultural process" was, how it could be studied, or whether it was even valid.

Paradoxically, Mursurillo's conservative defense of the classics merged into the liberal attitude towards secular culture then germinating in Catholic circles. Any program that restricted itself to Christian culture would not be truly Christian, Mursurillo contended, and would in fact be a form of totalitarian education. For Catholic academics to "immure ourselves in a monastery" would be a "gesture of despair" and actually un-Christian, a grim irony whereby the Christians of the New World would voluntarily create a ghetto "...at a time when all religious groups are striving to promote civil tolerance among themselves...". Theological answers should not be offered for questions that were not theological in nature. Dawson's problem was a lack of understanding of the nature of education itself.

Modern education was not chaotic. Rather past systems of education were based on incomplete knowledge, whereas modern people were simply less sure of their knowledge than were the people of the Middle Ages. Catholic colleges did not need a unified curriculum, because they filled a concrete need in the educational environment—"spiritual (and transitory) tabernacles of God's poor, holding up lamps in a dark world, waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom"—and no specific program would serve that purpose. Because "ours is a growing civilization," Mursurillo proclaimed, "I'm prepared to remain in the twilight of those who have not yet seen the dawn."⁵⁵

A few years later Mursurillo published a highly complimentary account of Dawson's activities at Harvard, calling him a "prophet" and lamenting that his message—that there was a religion at the basis of every culture—was not being

heeded. Disagreement over Dawson's views of education were merely "familial," and he had produced a genuine theology of history, although he was perhaps not patient enough with those who did not understand it.⁵⁶

Other liberal critics extended Mursurillo's objections:

—Was there ever a Christian age in Dawson's sense?

A Christian was at home in all ages, because there were no alien truths, only alien systems. Synthesis was easier in Aquinas's day, because less was then known about both God and man. It was not possible to integrate religion and culture, and education could only give students the tools to do so.⁵⁷

—The meaning of "Christian culture" was uncertain.

Dawson's proposal had about it the "heavy atmosphere of the Ghetto," and he was actually proposing a divorce of religion from culture.⁵⁸

—It was no longer possible to entertain the "illusion of Christendom." There was no such thing as Catholic sociology or philosophy, and dogma should be taught through a curriculum based on Scripture and theology. Many secularists themselves wanted to junk Western civilization, and it was better for Catholics not to study past cultural achievements but simply to read the Gospel. There should be no more talk of "Catholic" societies and cultures, because Christians did not know what to do in the midst of a great cultural crisis and should be content simply to study the Gospels to obtain guidance.⁵⁹

—Dawson confused Christian culture with medieval culture, and his proposal would make Christian culture as irrelevant as Sanskrit. There was no place for nostalgia; Christians had to develop new institutions.⁶⁰

—The program neglected Protestant culture, recognizing the US as Protestant but having no sense of what that meant concretely.⁶¹

Dawson's most sustained opponent was Justus George Lawler, an editor and literary critic, who agreed with Dawson's idea of "a direct intuition of reality by imaginative vision" but found the renewed interest in Christian culture "disturbing."

No historical period could be taken as representing the fullness of Christian culture, and if the medieval period were taken as such the repressiveness of the period had to be faced. Jacques Maritain had pointed out that the Middle Ages were less admirable in reality than in "the refined memories of history." Although Dawson did see Christian culture as far wider than the Middle Ages, he seemed to place it entirely in the past and did not seem to think that it had ever begotten anything bad.⁶² With an unverifiable romantic notion of the past as somehow more "spiritual" than the present, Dawson judged the religion of the past by its great monuments and the present by opinion polls.

He was not interested in education as such but in using education to safeguard certain values, but the racism of Catholic students showed that the Catholic schools were not Christian at all.⁶³

More mundane issues also surfaced in the debate. Thus Mursurillo regretted that the issue of a distinctively Catholic higher education had arisen at a time when the Catholic schools were trying to “elicit the attention of the State,”⁶⁴ and a nun-educator warned that “...we cannot altogether ignore the legitimate demands of our American college benefactors and those who are responsible for our government grants in aid,” concluding that Catholic colleges could not be made “different from the rest.”⁶⁵

Dawson seldom responded publicly to his critics, but privately he characterized them as extreme specialists, philosophical and theological extremists, vocationalists, and a “small but fierce group of anti-Chesterbellocians.”⁶⁶ He protested “most strongly” what he considered to be his critics’ misreading of his proposal, a misreading that seemed to deny the very existence of Christian culture.⁶⁷

The claim that the study of Christian culture was too narrow was like saying that students could not study English literature without also studying Chinese or Arabic, and “...by this principle no one could study anything until they had studied everything.”⁶⁸ It was no more “reactionary” for Catholics to study Catholic culture than it was for secularists to study secular culture.⁶⁹ Christian culture was not narrow or something to be ashamed of and could scarcely damage “civil tolerance,” since religious understanding was promoted precisely by promoting an understanding of religion.⁷⁰

Some of the criticism showed “what we are up against ... the narrowness of the ghetto without its intellectual autonomy, the utilitarianism of secular education without its width of range.”⁷¹ Catholic education was perhaps more affected by utilitarianism than was non-Catholic education and, contrasting Harvard or Robert M. Hutchens’s University of Chicago with his own critics, Dawson found the former to be the more enlightened.⁷²

Some of his critics were fundamentally anti-historical and anti-cultural, simultaneously nihilist and puritan, denying all esthetic and spiritual values. There was a Catholic Puritanism in America, attributable to a strong ethic and to strong “religio-cultural-political-nationalist feelings” derived from “Irish folk ways,” Senator Joseph Maccarthy [*sic*] and Father Leonard Feeny being examples.⁷³

The Jesuit communications theorist Walter J. Ong had an ampler view of Christian history than Mursurillo, Dawson conceded, but had failed to realize that Christian culture was always in conflict with the world and therefore saw the present as a revolt against the Christian past. Ong criticized

a false medievalism that produced pseudo-gothic churches, without realizing that this was precisely an argument for the study of Christian culture, which would show how that culture always created new styles.⁷⁴

Dawson charged that Mursurillo used high spiritual language to cover his intellectual nakedness, since he actually wanted Catholics to think of dollars above all,⁷⁵ letting slip the fear that Dawson’s program might prevent Catholic schools from getting government aid, a hope that Dawson sarcastically said was “waiting for Godot.” Mursurillo used the exalted image of the Catholic college as a lamp, but it was a lamp without oil, and some of Dawson’s critics had the attitude that American Catholicism was so well off materially that it would be foolish to criticize the culture that had made it possible.⁷⁶

Daniel Callahan, the Catholic graduate student who was Dawson’s assistant at Harvard, was not in sympathy with most of Dawson’s ideas,⁷⁷ and Dawson was aghast at another Catholic graduate student, Michael Novak, who was “anti-clerical and anti-European” and wanted the Church to “adapt to American democratic culture.” How, Dawson asked, could Novak overlook “the glaring evils in the American way of life?”⁷⁸ (Years later Callahan acknowledged “the profundity of Dawson’s principle that the informing genius of any culture is its religion” and urged that “thoughtful men everywhere must recognize the poisons he saw,”⁷⁹ confessing that “in heady days I did not appreciate what he was doing” but that “we are finding out the hard way that he was right about the need of every culture for a religious foundation.”⁸⁰)

In the Spring of 1962 Dawson suffered a series of strokes and returned to England, where he died in 1970.⁸¹

Although he had anticipated that the Thomistic establishment would be one of his chief opponents, there was in fact little response from that quarter, possibly because Thomists felt so secure as to require no defense. But in less than a decade the Thomistic establishment had all but disappeared, leaving Catholic higher education without a center, whereas Dawson’s proposal might have served as an alternative principle of integration.

Ironically, while Mursurillo saw Dawson’s program as a threat to the role of the classics, the classics too would also soon fall into desuetude, a victim of the same forces that doomed Dawson’s project. If Dawson’s emphasis on the history of culture seemed to some people to be a kind of relativism, his most vigorous opponents were those for whom any distinctively Catholic curriculum threatened a return to a ghetto from which they were determined to escape. As Dawson perceptively observed, high-sounding professions of “openness” also functioned as a rationale for secularizing Catholic education in order to attract financial support, a

manifestation of what he characterized as clerical pragmatism.

In the 1950s the Catholic educational system seemed tenaciously resistant to change, but change would in fact occur with amazing speed, something that at the time perhaps only Dawson foresaw: “If it [Catholic higher education] is to be changed it will be changed all at once, and from the top downwards — ‘right about face, quick march!’”⁸² ❧

ENDNOTES

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3. *Crisis*, 113-4, 135-6, 140, 183-4
4. “Ploughing a Lone Furrow,” *Christianity and Culture*, ed. J. Stanley Murphy (Baltimore, 1960), 19
5. *Crisis*, 135-6, 140
6. *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (New York, 1960), 90-2, 103
7. *Understanding Europe* (New York, 1952), 207-8, 242-6
8. Dawson to John J. Mulloy, Apr. 14 (?), 1954. Mulloy was Dawson’s principal American disciple. His papers are in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame.
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12. “The Study of Christian Culture,” *Thought*, XXXV, 139 (Winter, 1960), 491; Dawson to Mulloy, July 30, 1954
13. Dawson to Mulloy, Aug. 24, 1954
14. Dawson to Mulloy, July 30, 1955
15. Dawson to Mulloy, Aug. 31, 1955
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30. Dawson to Mulloy, Sept. 25, 1954
31. Dawson to Mulloy, Apr. 22, 1954
32. Dawson to Mulloy, Oct. (?), 1955; Jan. 7, 1958; *Crisis*, 141
33. *Crisis*, 210-3, 235-6; “Christian Culture, Its Meaning and Value,” *Jubilee*, IV, 1 (May, 1956), 38-9
34. *Crisis*, 216-7, 219-20, 227-8
35. Bruno Schlesinger, “Responses to Dawson in the US,” *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture*, ed. Peter J. Cataldo (Lanham, Md., 1984), 172-4
36. John W. Simons, “Liberal Arts as Transmitters of Values,” *Thought*, XXX, 117 (Summer, 1955), 166-7. Simons was a priest-professor at Immaculata College, Philadelphia.
37. Dawson to Mulloy, Sept. 30, 1955
38. Dawson to Mulloy, Oct. 13, 1955
39. Dawson to Mulloy, Jan. 2, 1956
40. Dawson to Mulloy, Apr. 3, 1955
41. Dawson to Mulloy, Mar. 5, 1952
42. Dawson to Mulloy, Oct. 28, 1954; Apr. 30, 1955
43. Dawson to Mulloy, Jan. 6, 1955
44. Dawson to John T. Noonan Jr., Mar. 27, 1961 (Saint Thomas)
45. “An Answer for Catholics: the St. Mary’s Program,” *U.S. Catholic*, XXXI, 7 (Spring, 1965), 25-31; J. Philip Gleason, “A Program of Christian Culture,” in Dawson, *Crisis*, 239-46, and “The Study of Christian Culture,” *The Educational Record*, XL, 2 (Apr., 1959), 155-8; Gleason and Schlesinger, “A Practical Experiment in Education,” *The Chesterton Review*, IX, 2 (May, 1983), 167-71; *St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Culture, an Interdepartmental Program* (Saint Thomas). The program was started by Schlesinger, who encountered some opposition within the college (Schlesinger [letter], *The Dawson Newsletter*, V, 1 [Spring, 1986], 14).
46. “Study of Christian Culture,” 485-8
47. Dawson to Mulloy, Mar. 27 (?), 1-2. References in the letter indicate that it was written in 1954.
48. Gleason and Schlesinger, “Practical Experiment,” 172-4. The philosopher was James Mullaney.
49. Bernard E. McGoldrick, “Education and the State,” *The Commonweal*, LXV, 20 (Feb. 15, 1957), 513
50. Robert Hartnett, “The Dawson Challenge,” *America*, XCIII, 3 (Apr. 16, 1955), 74, 76, 88-90
51. Gleason and Schlesinger, “Practical Experiment,” 172-4. The Jesuit was Richard Rousseau.
52. James M. Campbell, “Dawson’s Challenge,” *America*, XCIII, 3 (Apr. 16, 1955), 66-74
53. Dawson to Mulloy, Dec. 22, 1960
54. Dawson to Mulloy, Sept. 21, 1957
55. Mursurillo, “II. Dawson’s Program, a Critique,” *Thought*, XXX, 117 (Summer, 1955), 174-87; “The Problem of Catholic Education, a Reply to Christopher Dawson,” *The Catholic World*, CLXXXIV, 1100 (Nov., 1956), 95-8
56. “Christopher Dawson, Prophet at Harvard,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, LIX, 3 (Dec., 1958), 231-8
57. John Cogley, “Education—and All That,” *The Commonweal*, LXII, 4 (Apr. 29, 1955), 104. Cogley was an editor of *Commonweal* who later left the Catholic Church and became an Episcopalian. Dawson thought that Cogley’s article was “exceedingly bad” and hoped that someone would answer it (Dawson to Mulloy, May 6, 1955) but later suggested that Mulloy “tone down” his response, because of Cogley’s connection to *Commonweal* (“we need to keep the channels of publicity open” [Dawson to Mulloy, June 6, 1955]).
58. James H. McMahon, “Christian Culture” (letter), *The Commonweal*, LXI, 14 (Jan. 7, 1955), 382-3
59. Charles Stinson, “Christian Culture” (letter), *Ibid.*, LXI, 18 (Feb. 4, 1955), 478-9
60. Bernard J. Entner, “Education and the State” (letter), *The Commonweal*, LXV, 20 (Feb. 15, 1957), 512-3
61. Otis Brooks, “Clarifying Higher Education,” *The Christian Scholar*, XLV, 1 (Spring, 1962), 71-4
62. *The Catholic Dimension of Higher Education* (Westminster, Md., 1959), 10, 184, 211-2, 215-8, 292. Lawler was a professor at St.

- Xavier College, Chicago, and later editor of Herder and Herder and Crossroads publishing houses.
63. Review of *Crisis*, in *Harvard Educational Review*, XXXII, 2 (Spring, 1962), 215. Dawson exasperatedly wondered “what diabolical influences” had brought Lawler together with the journal, since Dawson thought his differences with each were the opposite of one another (Dawson to Schlesinger Jan. 18, 1962 [Saint Thomas]).
 64. “Problem,” 97
 65. Sister Helene Margaret, “Barriers to the Organic Curriculum,” *America*, XCI, 23 (Sept. 4, 1954), 540
 66. Dawson to Mulloy, Apr. 19, 1955
 67. “Western Culture and Mystical Body” (letter), *The Catholic World*, CLXXXVII, 1118 (May, 1958), 134-5
 68. Dawson to Leo Ward, Nov. 5, 1955 (Notre Dame). Ward was a priest-professor at Notre Dame.
 69. “Study of Christian Culture,” 200-1
 70. “Mr. Dawson Replies to Father Mursurillo,” *Thought*, XXXI, 120 (Spring, 1956), 159-60
 71. Dawson to Mulloy, May 8, 1955
 72. Dawson to Mulloy, Mar. 1, 1955
 73. Dawson to Mulloy, Feb. 17, 1955
 74. Dawson to Mulloy, Nov. 11, 1957
 75. Dawson to Mulloy, Aug. 27, 1957
 76. Dawson to Mulloy, Sept. 16, 1957
 77. Scott, *Historian*, 189. Dawson praised Callahan, whom he called “a good Catholic” and “sympathetic” (Dawson to Mulloy, Feb. 1, 1959). In 2004, Callahan again acknowledged that Dawson had been right about the relationship of religion and culture but dismissed him as “nostalgic to the core” and said that he had failed to resolve the problem that traditional religion is hostile to modern liberal society (“Europe’s Problem —or Ours?” (letter), *First Things*, 143 [May, 2004], 2-3).
 78. Dawson to Mulloy, Dec. 12, 1960
 79. Callahan, *et. al.*, “Christopher Dawson, 12 October 1889 —25 May 1970,” *Harvard Theological Review*, LXVI, 2 (April, 1973), 176
 80. “Dawson Up Close,” *Commonweal*, CXXIII, 7 (Apr. 5, 1996), 20
 81. Scott, *Historian*, 204-7
 82. Dawson to Mulloy, Oct. 13, 1955 pen

The Theological Significance of the Consummation of Marriage, Contraception, and Using Condoms to Prevent HIV, and Same-Sex Unions

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I will first consider the theological significance of the consummation of marriage and then show how it bears on contraception and the morality of using condoms to prevent HIV.

Before describing the Church’s understanding of the consummation of marriage, it is important to recognize that, according to the teaching of the Church, marriage comes into being when a man and a woman consent to give themselves to one another irrevocably as husband and wife.¹ Thus the reality of marriage is *in being* immediately once this consent is freely given, and this reality is a grace-giving sacrament if the persons consenting to marriage are baptized Christians. The technical term for a marriage brought into existence by the free consent of the spouses prior to its being consummated is “ratified.” But marriage is not consummated by consent, and the Church, as Canon 1142 in the *Code of Canon Law* affirms, has the power to dissolve non-consummated sacramental marriages for a just reason: “A non-consummated marriage between baptized persons or between a baptized

party and an unbaptized party can be dissolved by the Roman Pontiff for a just reason, at the request of both parties or of either party even if the other is unwilling.” “A marriage which is ratified and consummated cannot be dissolved by any power or by any cause other than death” (Canon 1141).²

DEVELOPMENT IN THE CANONICAL UNDERSTANDING OF “CONSUMMATION”

But what consummates” a marital union? Here there has been an important development in the canonical understanding of consummation. In the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* the following is the relevant canon:

A valid marriage of the baptized is called ratified if consummation has not yet been completed. It is called ratified and consummated if between the spouses the conjugal act has taken place, to which the contract is ordered by its nature and by which the spouses become one flesh (Canon 1015, par.1).

Canon lawyers understood the conjugal act by which the spouses become one flesh to be carnal copula, and canon 1081, par. 2 further refined the description of the conjugal act or carnal copula by which marriage is con-

summed by stipulating that the copula must be an act *per se* apt for the generation of children, i.e., a reproductive-type act. Peter Jugis has summarized the 1917 *Code's* understanding of consummation as well as the views of major commentators on the 1917 *Code*. He shows that commentators on the *Code* were unanimous in affirming that the conjugal copula which consummated marriage is a free human action dependent on the will. But he emphasized that

the only elements of this human action which continued to be juridically significant for the consummation of marriage were the physiological elements: penetration of the erect male member into the vagina of the woman and deposit of true semen by the male member in the vagina. This was the conjugal act by which the spouses became one flesh and by which the marriage was consummated. The presence of absence of volitional elements was juridically insignificant. ³

Thus, in applying Canon 1141 canon lawyers regarded carnal copulation forced on one spouse by another without that spouse's reasonable consent an act consummating the marriage, with the result that such a marriage was dissoluble only by death and hence could not be dissolved by the Roman Pontiff on the grounds that it had not been consummated.

In the revised 1983 *Code of Canon Law* we find a much different juridical understanding of marital consummation. The relevant canon in the 1983 *Code* is Canon 1061, which reads:

A valid marriage between baptized persons is said to be merely ratified, if it is not consummated; ratified and consummated, if the spouses have in a human manner engaged together in a conjugal act in itself apt for the generation of offspring; to this act marriage is by its nature ordered and by it the spouses become one flesh.

The source of this new canon is the teaching of Vatican Council II on marriage. In a beautiful paragraph on conjugal love the Council Fathers explicitly taught that conjugal love is uniquely expressed and perfected in the conjugal act. Continuing, they declared: "Expressed in a manner which is truly human (*modo vero humano exerciti*), these actions signify and promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and thankful will" (*Gaudium et spes* 49). Commenting on this text, Jugis writes:

Due to Vatican II's teaching on *modo vere humano*, canonists completely reversed their thinking on the manner of intercourse which was juridically appropriate for consummation. Prior to Vatican II the common canonical view opinion for centuries had been that violent consummation with an unwilling spouse validly consummated marriage....After Vatican II the common opinion of almost all canonists became that a violent consummation with an unwilling spouse did not validly consummate marriage.⁴

Thus, in the 1983 revision of the *Code of Canon Law* the teaching of Vatican II on conjugal love and the consummation of marriage was codified in canon 1061,1, which reads as follows:

A valid marriage between baptized persons is called ratified only if it has not been consummated; it is called ratified and consummated if the parties have performed between themselves in a human manner the conjugal act which is *per se* suitable for the generation of children, to which marriage is ordered by its very nature and by which the spouses become one flesh.

In applying this canon since the promulgation of 1983 *Code*, canonists have regularly ruled that if the only carnal copula between spouses was violently imposed on an unwilling spouse, the marriage was not consummated and that therefore the Roman Pontiff had the power for just cause to dissolve such unions.⁵

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON MARITAL CONSUMMATION

First of all, the act consummating marriage is one in which husband and wife, literally becoming "one flesh," form one procreative unit. It is, in short, a *procreative* or *reproductive* type act, and remains this kind of act even if the spouses, because of non-behavioral factors over which they have no control, for example, the temporary or permanent sterility of one of the other, are not able to generate human life in it. Their act remains the kind of bodily act "apt" for generating human life. It is in fact the *only kind of bodily* act through which human life can be given, for it is only in this kind of act that a man and a woman can exercise their procreative powers; they cannot exercise those powers, as they can their digestive, respiratory, and cognitive powers, as *individual* men and women, nor can they exercise these powers in a bodily way with member of the same sex.

Moreover, non-married males and females can exercise their procreative powers in acts of fornication and adultery because they are equipped with genitals. But they do not have the *right* to do so because doing so violates the right of a child who can be begotten to the home it merits. Such children are indeed precious and irreplaceable human persons, but the act generating them does not properly respect their personal dignity.⁶ But as Paul VI points out in a much neglected and badly translated passage of *Humanae vitae*, “the conjugal act, while intimately uniting husband and wife, makes them *fit* (the Latin text reads, *eos idoneos facit*) of generating human life according to laws inscribed into their very being as men and women” (no. 12). This passage is badly translated in most English language editions as “the conjugal act... makes them capable of generating human life...” This is grossly inaccurate. Fornicators and adulterers, who have no right to generate human life, are capable of doing so because they have genitals, but spouses have the right to do so because they have made themselves fit to do so by giving themselves irrevocably to one another in marriage.

From this we can see that the marital act is not simply a *genital act* or *carnal copula* between a man and a woman who just *happen* to be married. It is rather an act that is uniquely capable of expressing and perfecting their marital union. It is an act that is both *unitive* and *procreative*.

CAN SPOUSAL CONTRACEPTED ACTS “CONSUMMATE” MARRIAGE?

As we have seen, *canonists*, in their application of Canon 1061, conclude that an act of carnal copula violently imposed on an unwilling spouse does *not consummate* marriage because this kind of act is *not engaged in humano modo*. I agree with them, but in addition I am certain that an act of genital union between a man and a woman who *happen* to be married is also not engaged in *humano modo*, and consequently does not consummate the marriage, if it is a *contracepted* act, that is, one that intentionally violates the *procreative meaning* of the conjugal act.⁷ Thus in my opinion, if every act of genital union between husband and wife has been contracepted and if their marriage has not, for that reason, been consummated, it is the kind of marriage that the Roman Pontiff can, for just cause, dissolve.

My argument that contracepted intercourse by spouses does *not consummate* marriage because, like violent sex, it is not engaged in “*modo vere humano*” is supported by the text of *Gaudium et spes* 49 where “*modo vere humano*” appears, the text that all concerned agree

inspired the new canon on consummation. Here is the Latin text with my emphasis in boldface.” Actus proinde, quibus coniuges intime et **caste** inter se uniuntur, honesti ac digni sunt et, humano vere modo exerciti, **donationem** mutuam significant et fovent qua sese invicem laeto gratoque animo locupletant.” GS 51 continues by stressing the objective criteria “*ex personae eiusdem actuum natura desumptis*” that are to be used in harmonizing conjugal love and respect for human life, and it emphasizes that these criteria “*integrum sensum mutuae donationis ac humanae procreationis in contextu veri amoris observant quod fieri nequit nisi virtus castitatis coniugalis sincero animo colatur.*” GS 51 then declares: “*Filiis Ecclesiae, his principiis innixis, in procreatione regulanda, **vias inire non licet, quae a Magisterio, in lege divina explicanda, improbat.***” And this is followed by the famous footnote 14 that refers *explicitly* precisely to those passages in Pius XI’s *Casti Connubii* and Pius XII’s *Allocutio Conventi Unionis Italicae inter Obstetrices* of 10.29.51 where contraception is declared intrinsically and always evil. Moreover, in *Evangelium vitae* 12 Pope John Paul II explicitly says that contraception by married persons is a sin against the virtue of *chastity*. I believe that all these magisterial texts support my conclusion that “*modo vere humano exerciti*” excludes contracepted intercourse by married couples—as well as violent sex—as an act that *cannot consummate marriage*.

This interpretation of *humano modo* is supported in my opinion by another neglected passage from *Humanae vitae*, that namely in which Paul VI first observed that everyone would agree that a conjugal act forced upon one’s spouse would violate the right moral order and then went on to say that similarly people should recognize that contracepted acts, i.e., those making use of God’s gift of generating life while repudiating its end, are also acts that violate the right moral order (see *Humanae vitae*, 13).

I have discussed this issue with two canon lawyers—Edward Peters, currently professor of canon law at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, and Rev. John Doerfler, Chancellor of the Diocese of Green Bay who has just completed an S.T.D. at the John Paul II Institute. They tell me that one major problem here is to provide viable evidence that every act of sexual congress between spouses after consent was indeed contracepted. They also pointed out that even if such acts would not consummate marriage and that therefore such unions *could* be dissolved by the Roman Pontiff on grounds of nonconsummation, there might be very good reasons not to dissolve such unions—contracepting couples might seek to abuse this power of the Roman Pontiff by deliberately contracepting each act of sexual congress with the aim of having their marriages dissolved.

IS IT INTRINSICALLY EVIL FOR SPOUSES TO USE CONDOMS TO PREVENT HIV?

On July 10, 2004 the noted philosopher/theologian Martin Rhonheimer published an article in the *London Tablet*, “The truth about condoms,” in which he argued that spouses could legitimately use condoms as a means of preventing the transmission of HIV.” He argued that such use need not be contraceptive, insofar as the moral object specifying their choice was not necessarily to contracept.⁸ I wrote a letter to the editors of the *Tablet* to reply to Rhonheimer’s essay but it was never printed. I sent Rhonheimer an email in which I included a copy of the letter I had sent to the *Tablet*, in which I maintained that condomistic sex between married persons was not the marital act but a perverted sexual act. In fact, in my email I said that the act was a perverted sexual act because a free choice was made “to ejaculate deliberately into a rubber and insert the rubber-covered penis into a vagina,” an act similar to masturbation. In replying to my email Rhonheimer declared: “What really is chosen when a person uses a condom to prevent infection is in my view is not “to ejaculate etc...” but *a marital act*.” He went on to say that since this act includes no contraceptive choice, we can, if we consider the intentional activity involved, conclude that “the unitive and procreative meaning of the act are not separated.”⁹

It should be noted that several Cardinals agree with Rhonheimer, among them, Carlo Cardinal Martini, emeritus Archbishop of Milan, Godfrey Cardinal Daneels of Belgium,¹⁰ and Georges Cardinal Cottier, O.P. former theologian to the papacy. It should also be noted that in a talk in June 2005 to African bishops Pope Benedict XVI himself said that the only “fail-safe” way to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS was abstinence. His exact words are the following: “The Catholic Church has always been at the forefront both in prevention and in treatment of this illness. The traditional teaching of the Church has proven to be the only failsafe way to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. For this reason, ‘the companionship, joy, happiness and peace which Christian marriage and fidelity provide, and the safeguard which chastity gives, must be continuously presented to the faithful, particularly the young’” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 116).¹¹

What amazed me is that the position presented by Rhonheimer in 2004 had been set forth in 1987 in a booklet published by the Catholic Truth Society of England by James Alison, O.P. under the title, *Catholics and Aids: Questions and Answers*.¹² In fact I had, in June 1988, published an essay in the *Fellowship of Catholic*

Scholars Newsletter in which I noted that several theologians argued that the use of condoms for such a purpose is not contraceptive, because the intent of those who use condoms is not to prevent conception but rather to avoid the transmission of a deadly disease. I agreed that such use may not be contraceptive because the object freely chosen need not be to impede procreation. For instance, assume that the husband of an aged married couple contracted HIV through a blood transfusion. His wife was known to be past the age of childbearing so that there would be no reason to use a condom for contraceptive purposes. Why waste money to impede procreation when one realizes that although the behavior in question is the kind of bodily union through which life can be transmitted (it is a procreative kind of act) for factors independent of the agents’ behavior (e.g., sterility) conception will not occur. But, I argued, “condomistic intercourse is, of itself, an “unnatural” or perverted sexual act, and cannot be regarded as a true act of marriage. In my 1988 essay I noted that the Catholic tradition repudiated condomistic intercourse not only because it was usually chosen as a way of contracepting but also because it was against nature. Older theologians judged that in such intercourse the male’s semen was deposited in a *vas indebitum* or “undue vessel” Although this language is not in favor today, the judgment it embodied is, I was convinced, true. When spouses choose to use condoms they change the act they perform from one of true marital union (the marriage act) into a different kind of act. The “language of their bodies,” as Pope John Paul II would say, is changed. “In the marital act their bodies speak the language of a mutual giving and receiving, the language of an unreserved and oblation gift. Condomistic intercourse does not speak this language; it mutilates the language of the body, and the act chosen is more similar to masturbation than it is to the true marital act.”¹³

I agree with Rhonheimer that couples using condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS may not be *intending* to impede procreation, and thus their chosen act is *not* an act of contraception. Here I appeal to the teaching of St. Thomas and Pope John Paul II to support this matter. Some acts, as *acts of nature* may be contraceptive, but as St. Thomas and John Paul II make clear, *as moral*, human acts receive their *moral species* from the act freely chosen by an agent. St. Thomas expresses this briefly in many texts, e.g., in *Summa theologiae* 2-2, 64, 7, where he declares: “actus autem morales recipient speciem *secundum id quod intenditur*, non autem ab eo quod est praeter intentionem.” A particularly important Thomistic text on this matter, mak-

ing it crystal clear that the primary moral specification of an act is rooted in the object freely chosen, is the following:

Will can be considered in two ways: (1) as intention (*secundum quod est intendens*), insofar as it bears on an ultimate end; and (2) as choice (*secundum quod est eligens*), insofar as it bears on a proximate object ordered to that ultimate end. If (1) will is considered in the first way (as intending) the will's badness suffices to make the act bad, for whatever is done for a bad end is bad. But the goodness of the intending will is not sufficient to make the act good because the act may be bad in itself (*actus potest esse de se malus*) an act which in no way can be made good. But (2) if the will is considered insofar as it is choosing (*Si autem consideretur voluntas secundum quod est eligens*) then it is universally true that from the goodness of the will the act is said to be good and from the badness of the will it is said to be bad.¹⁴

John Paul II made the same point in *Veritatis splendor* 78. There he declared:

The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the "object" rationally chosen by the deliberate will (emphasis in original).... In order to grasp the object of the act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person (emphasis in original). The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behavior (emphasis added). To the extent that it is in conformity with the order of reason it is the cause of the goodness of the will; it perfects us morally, and disposes us to recognize our ultimate end in the perfect good, primordial love. By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision [=choice] which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person (emphasis added here. I did so because in this text what Aquinas called the "natural species" of the act, as distinct from its "moral species," John Paul II calls "a process or event of the physical order, to be assessed on its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world").

Be that as it may, I now recognize that many couples who use condoms to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS also *intend to contracept*. After all, many of these couples are young and fear that if a child were conceived, it would be exposed to the threat of a dread disease, and hence they would intend both to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS and the transmission of life.

But the major reason why such use of a condom is *always seriously evil* is the following: if spouses who wish to have intercourse use a condom to prevent HIV transmission, their choice is *not* to engage in the marital act *because their freely chosen act is not unitive*—that is, it does not realize, express, and allow spouses to experience their unity as a married couple.

To be unitive the act chosen by the spouses must have at least two properties: (1) It must be voluntary, done "*humano vere modo*"; (2) it must be "*actum per se aptum ad prolis generationem, ad quem natura sua ordinatur matrimonium, et quo coniuges fiunt una caro.*"¹⁵ The Latin phrase, "*per se aptum ad prolis generationem,*" can be described as "sexual behavior that, if other necessary conditions are present (e.g., the fertility of both man and woman), would result in conception." From this it follows that if spouses who are going to have intercourse use a condom to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS, the act is always objectively wrong because they are choosing to engage in behavior that would not result in conception if other necessary conditions were present.

The reason why proceeding with a condom cannot realize one-flesh unity is that one-flesh unity is the oneness of the couple as the different but complementary subjects of the same act, one that can be rightly called a "reproductive" or "procreative" kind of act. Here I need to repeat something affirmed earlier in this paper, namely, that the act consummating marriage is one in which husband and wife, literally becoming "one flesh," form one procreative unit. It is, in short, a *procreative* or *reproductive* type act, and remains this kind of act even if the spouses, because of non-behavioral factors over which they have no control, for example, the temporary or permanent sterility of one of the other, are not able to generate human life in it. Their act remains the kind of bodily act "apt" for generating human life. It is in fact the *only kind of bodily* act through which human life can be given, for it is only in this kind of act that a man and a woman can exercise their procreative powers; they cannot exercise those powers, as they can their digestive, respiratory, and cognitive powers, as *individual* men and women, but only as a "mating couple," in an act in which they in truth do become "one flesh."

In summary, use of condoms to prevent transmission of a disease is intrinsically evil because the object freely chosen that specifies the moral nature of the act is *not* the marital act, an act in which husband wife give and receive one another and become literally “one flesh,” but a different kind of act, one that in no way unites them but rather changes utterly the “language of the body.” ❧

ENDNOTES

1. On this see Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), 48; *Code of Canon Law* (1983 revised edition), canon 1057.
2. I cannot here explore the very important (and difficult) theological question, “what does consummation add that makes marriage absolutely indissoluble so long as the spouses are alive.”
3. Peter Jugis, *A Canonical Analysis of the Meaning of Humano Modo in Canon 1061.1* (of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*): The Catholic University of America Canon Law Studies No. 541 (Washington, D.C.: 1992), p. 131. See also pp. 121–122.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
5. Jugis devoted *ibid.*, pp. 244–346 to demonstrate that this is indeed the case.
6. On his see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk 3, ch. 122; Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, Girous, 1980; reprinted Ignatius Press), ch. 4.
7. I emphasized the word “contracepted” to show that contraception is itself not a genital act (contraceptive intercourse) but an act of genital union in which those engaging in it have done something prior to, during, or subsequent to their chosen genital act, precisely to impede procreation (see *Humanae vitae* 14).
8. Martin Rhonheimer, “The truth about condoms,” *Tablet* 0/07/04.
9. In an email to me dated Wednesday August 04, 2004.
10. For the views of Martini and Daneels see an Associated Press release dated 4.04. pm ET, April 21, 2006 available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12424425>. For Cottier, see *Catholic News* at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/502/10.php>.
11. The text of Pope Benedict XVI’s Address to the Bishops of South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland, Namibia and Lesotho on their “Ad Limina Apostolorum” Visit on June 10 2005 is found on the official Vatican website at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/june/documents/hg_ben-xvi_spe_20050610_ad-limina-south-africa_en.html. The relevant paragraph is n. 4.
12. Alison subsequently left the Dominicans and is now living in Canada.
13. William E. May, *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Newsletter* 11.3 (June 1988).
14. St. Thomas, *In II Sent.* 40, 1, 2c: “...voluntas dupliciter potest considerari: vel secundum quod est intendens, prout in ultimum finem fertur; vel secundum quod est eligens, prout fertur in obiectum proximum, quod in finem ultimum ordinatur. Si consideretur primo modo, sic militia voluntatis sufficit ad hoc quod actus malus esse dicatur, quia quod malo fine agitur malum est. Non autem bonitas voluntatis intendens sufficit ad bonitatem actus; quia actus potest esse de se malus, qui nullo modo bene fieri potest. Si autem consideretur voluntas secundum quod est eligens, sic universaliter verum est quod a bonitate voluntatis dicitur actus bonus, et a malitia malus.”
15. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, canon 1061, par. 1.

Kierkegaard and Proofs for the Existence of God

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Søren Kierkegaard’s attitude toward proving the existence of God was quite clear: he did not think that it was possible. In his view, all attempts to prove God’s existence were, at best, little more than exercises in futility. Kierkegaard does not simply state his position, he argues on its behalf, and powerful polemicist that he was, his arguments have a telling tone to them; some readers might find them compelling. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to provide an accurate account of the general attitude Kierkegaard takes toward philosophical proofs for the existence of God; second, to examine the various assumptions that lie behind his attitude, and to scrutinize with a critical eye the arguments he puts forward to support it. The thesis I propose is that the position Kierkegaard takes in this matter is irreparably problematical, and it will be my task, in defense of the

thesis, to show that Kierkegaard’s arguments, supporting his position, are seriously flawed.

It is an interesting enough aspect of the thought of this dynamic and provocative Christian philosopher that he should have rejected an enterprise with so long and distinguished a history behind it, an enterprise which was respected and actively engaged in by giants of the intellect of the likes of St. Augustine, St. Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas. But more interesting, I think, is the reasoning he used to support his position. Why did he reject the arguments for the existence of God? It is important that we give as complete an answer to that question as we can, for we thereby meet the critical obligation of doing full justice to Kierkegaard’s thought, and at the same time put ourselves in the position of deriving maximum benefit from that thought. Kierkegaard is the type of thinker who, because of the fertility and energetic agility of his mind, can offer us profitable instruction even when he is follow-

ing rather errant trains of thought.

In order adequately to understand Kierkegaard's negative attitude toward proving the existence of God, it is important that we come to at least a rough understanding of his ideas regarding four subjects that figure prominently in all of his thought: the nature of truth, faith, Christianity and the Church, and, philosophy. His various ideas relating to these key subjects constitute important presuppositions which underlie his attitude toward proofs for God's existence. In the sections immediately following, I will consider each of these subjects in turn, in the order just listed. My principal purpose will be to give a clear and faithful explication of Kierkegaard's thought as it bears on each subject, but my explications will be interlaced with critiques, the purpose of the latter being to show that the problems that beset his arguments against proving the existence of God are traceable to, and ultimately best explained in terms of, problems relating to his ideas concerning the nature of truth, of faith, of Christianity and the Church, and of philosophy. After this necessary preliminary work has been completed, in sections one through four, I will turn my attention, in section five, to the article's chief concern, Kierkegaard's own arguments against proving the existence of God. The final section of the article will be taken up with summary observations.

I

Kierkegaard's understanding of the nature of truth is radically at odds with the conventional understanding. We commonly take truth—what we would specifically identify as logical truth—as having generally to do with a relation between the subjective and the objective realms, between the mental and the extra-mental. More specifically, we would say that our ideas, as expressed through the statements we make, are true if they reflect what actually obtains in the external world, and that any given statement is true because there is a happy correspondence between what it says and what is the case. The realist philosopher would accentuate the objective realm, as providing the measure against which the truth of our ideas is to be tested; our ideas must correspond to things. But even the idealist philosopher, whose penchant is to attach more weight to ideas than to things, would not entirely abandon the notion of correspondence, although in his case he tends to think that there is more to be said for things corresponding to ideas rather than ideas corresponding to things.

Kierkegaard had little patience with either the realist or the idealist position, and that is because he does not see truth—which most significantly he calls subjective truth—as having to do with a correspondence which human

reason is ever capable of grasping. Truth, subjective truth, which for him is the only kind of truth to be taken seriously, is not a shared experience. It is something that takes place entirely within the subject, and is a critically important defining factor of the individual person, establishing as it does the person's very subjectivity. The truth does not link the subject with the objective world, or, for that matter, with other subjects; it is highly, indeed exclusively, individualized.

Subjective truth could never be called absolute. It lacks finality and completeness and—paradoxical as it may sound and, Kierkegaard insists, as it in fact must be—it has nothing to do with what we ordinarily understand by certainty—what he calls “objective certainty.” Subjective truth is an on-going approximation, ever tending toward a goal which it will never reach, at least not in this life. Kierkegaard describes truth as “an inward transformation, a realization of inwardness;”¹ it is “the subject's transformation of himself.”² Not only does the truth, as subjectivity, imply no relation to the objective, it positively precludes objectivity. To think “objectively,” for Kierkegaard, is just to remove oneself from the realm of truth. Again, truth is a matter of approximation, of bringing things within the ambit of one's subjectivity and there appropriating them to oneself. To think objectively is to orient oneself away from oneself, and hence to distance oneself from one's subjectivity, the seat of truth.

Truth is subjectivity, and subjectivity is passion. When Kierkegaard conjoins truth and passion he does not have in mind by the latter the sense appetites. In other words, he is not saying that truth is merely a matter of emotion.³ The passion which is truth would seem to be something like an intensely personal, single-minded, all-consuming commitment, on the part of the self, to an object which preeminently concerns the self just as self. The most fitting object for this absorbing commitment, or “interest,” is immortality. It is only when a person becomes conscious of his immortality, which would represent the most private kind of consciousness, that he becomes unqualifiedly subjective, which is to say, when he enters into the realm of truth. And it is precisely this passionate interest in immortality on the part of the subject, Kierkegaard claims, which serves as the “proof” of immortality.⁴ We must keep that claim in mind when, later, we consider his critiques of the proofs for the existence of God.

Because truth is subjectivity, because subjectivity precludes objectivity, which is to be regarded as antipathetic to the truth, then it is clear why, for Kierkegaard, any attempts on the part of human reason to establish bonds between the subjective realm and the objective realm

would be not only unnecessary, but positively counter-productive. Why look outward when truth has only to do with inwardness? But Kierkegaard provides us with some distinctly philosophical reasons why truth cannot exist in any relation of correspondence between subject and object which might be established by the human mind. He does this by citing, and then analyzing, the only two ways by which reason could attempt to prove that ideas connect with things. I will call them respectively the way of idealism and the way of realism.

When Kierkegaard refers to “speculative philosophy,” almost always pejoratively, what he generally has in mind is idealism, and what he particularly has in mind is Hegelianism. For the idealist philosopher, ideas are primary; in fact, they are effectively everything, for in the end he reduces everything to ideas. So, “being,” for the idealist, is virtually synonymous with “idea.” Thus, whenever the idealist makes the claim that he is proving the existence of being, he is doing no more than going around in tautological circles, for the claim, “being exists,” is the same as the claim, “my idea of being exists.” In the final analysis, therefore, the speculative philosopher is simply saying “I-am-I.” He is operating completely within the subjective realm, and proves nothing at all about the objective realm. Kierkegaard writes: “But if being is understood in this manner, the formula [i.e., truth is the correspondence between thought and being] becomes a tautology. Thought and being mean one and the same thing, and the correspondence spoken of is merely an abstract self-identity.”⁵ His analysis here is quite sound, and we can easily concur with his conclusion.

Kierkegaard looks more favorably upon realist thinkers, those who have their feet planted firmly upon mother earth and abide by empirical criteria in their reasoning; in the end, however, he does not believe that they are any more successful in their endeavors than are the idealist thinkers. His reasons for thinking so are very interesting. The realist thinker, he argues, in attempting to prove the existence of being, begins in the realm of things, concrete existents, and from there he attempts to demonstrate, through reason, real extra-mental existence. He wants to show that there is a correspondence between his idea of being and being itself, that the former depends upon the latter. But he fails in this attempt, and the reason for his failure is to be found in the reality of becoming, or, to be more precise about the matter, in Kierkegaard’s understanding of the reality of becoming.

In order for the realist philosopher to be able to succeed in establishing a bridge between the subjective and objective realms, between mind and being, he would need

a stable context within which to pursue his task, but there is no such stable context, and that is because of the pervasiveness of the reality of becoming. There is no stability on the part of the philosopher, on the one hand, for he is in a state of becoming, and, on the other hand, there is no stability on the part of the physical world which the philosopher investigates and where he seeks the material with which to build his arguments, for the physical world too is in a constant state of becoming. On the part of the philosopher, “the very existence of the existing individual is sufficient to prevent his continuity from having essential stability.”⁶ That instability applies as well to the world he investigates, and he is thus prevented from demonstrating a correspondence between the subjective and the objective. He is attempting to do what is simply impossible for man. But what is impossible for man is not impossible for God. “This conformity [i.e., between subject and object] is actually realized for God,” Kierkegaard explains, “but it is not realized for any existing spirit, who is himself existentially in the process of becoming.”⁷ God can clearly see the correspondence that man is blind to, because of the difference in their existential status: God *is*, but man is only becoming.

The metaphysics that would seem to inform Kierkegaard’s understanding of becoming is beset with serious problems. It is suggestive of Heraclitus, or, closer to home, of Hegel. It is as if this adamant anti-Hegelian succumbed to the Hegelian notion that there is a legitimate category, called “becoming,” which is primly set between the categories of being and non-being, and that somehow enjoys equal status with them. Metaphysically, this makes no sense. There is only one place where becoming can be located, and that is totally within the embrace of being itself. The reality of becoming is obviously not to be denied nor denigrated, but we have to be clear as to just what kind of reality we are dealing with. Becoming exists, of course, but how does it exist? It exists as a feature of being. Becoming is simply change, but there is no such thing as change just as such, no independently existing entity to which we can give that name. There are only things that change. Before there can be change, there must be that which changes, an entitative subject of change. First act, the act that posits existence, necessarily precedes second act, the sum total of the ways existing things manifest their existence. These are all very rudimentary principles, but it is not at all clear that Kierkegaard was aware of them, or, if he was, that he accepted them.

Kierkegaard speaks of the existing individual as lacking “existential stability.” Consider the implications of that altogether remarkable claim. If we were to take it literally,

we would be hard pressed to know precisely what entity, if indeed any at all, we have before us. In point of fact, there can be no essential instability, in the strict sense, for an essence, or a nature, is either existentially in place or it is not. There is no third possibility, no no-man's land of amorphous becoming with respect to essence. Kierkegaard is confusing becoming and that which becomes, or, he concentrates so intently on the former that he forgets the latter. Kierkegaard himself was, to be sure, "becoming" throughout the course of his life, just as all of us are as we make our way through this vale of tears as *viatores*, but he was becoming precisely as Søren Kierkegaard, and not as Hans Christian Andersen, or anyone else. And, to be sure, the world around him was constantly changing, as our world is constantly changing around us. So, there is instability, unquestionably. But we know instability, can identify it as such, only in terms of stability, specifically, in terms of the stability provided by essences. The individual subject is essentially stable as subject, for he is what he is, and his knowledge can truly correspond with things in the world, thanks to *their* essential stability.

We rightly consider truth and certainty to go hand in hand. If something is in fact true, then it is certainly true, and our knowledge of it is certain knowledge. But the nature of Kierkegaard's subjective truth, as he continuously reminds us, is paradoxical. He provides us with a definition of paradoxical truth: "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual."⁸ A little further on he elaborates on the notion: "The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite."⁹

In our ordinary thinking about human knowledge we commonly make the distinction between objective certainty and subjective certainty, and we recognize the first to be foundational with respect to the second. Objective certainty refers to the indisputable facts of the matter, what actually obtains in the real world. The value of subjective certainty, in any give instance, depends on its being a faithful reflection of objective certainty. My subjective certainty has very little value if what I am subjectively certain about at the moment is that Duluth, Minnesota is south of Minneapolis.

Kierkegaard's epistemology effectively removes the category of objective certainty. The only thing objectivity can offer us is uncertainty. But it is precisely objective uncertainty upon which subjectivity thrives, for it seizes upon that objective uncertainty and makes it the fueling source of its subjective truth. Kierkegaard's prime example of an objective uncertainty, which is transformed

into the highest truth for the individual, is immortality. For Kierkegaard, immortality cannot be anything but objectively uncertain, but by the passionate interest the individual takes in it, the objectively uncertain immortality becomes subjectively certain. How so? Is the individual suddenly possessed of a clear-eyed, fully confident rational conviction of the truth of immortality? Not at all, for this would represent just the kind of intellectualizing of truth to which Kierkegaard was so vigorously opposed. Rather, the truth of immortality is the result of the individual's single-minded commitment to immortality. Immortality becomes certain because the individual's passion makes it certain.

It is enough simply to describe Kierkegaard's understanding of truth to see the difficulties with which it is fraught. It is no exaggeration to say that he completely redefines truth, and the most important aspect of his redefinition is the absence of the crucial element of relation, the relation between subject and object, the knower and the known. Truth, properly understood, is the foundation of the common, of the community, of communication. It is what frees the individual from obsessive concern with self, and opens him up to the other. For Kierkegaard, truth is a quintessentially private affair. It would seem to be like a process by which the self is continuously attempting to come to terms with the self. Subjective truth is unavoidably isolating, for, as Kierkegaard points out, truth is inwardness, and it is precisely inwardness that leads us away from one another.¹⁰ According to this view of things, each of us would seem to be comparable to a windowless, non-communicating, Leibnizian monad, working out his destiny with passionate, but perfectly self-enclosed, intensity.

II

There are any number of similarities between Kierkegaard's ideas on truth and his ideas on faith, and, in fact, truth and faith, as he understands them, can be regarded as essentially the same thing, looked at from different perspectives. Faith is subjectivity. It is, as it were, the product of infinite interest in immortality. Faith is passion, indeed infinite passion, and what that means is that faith is set over against any kind of intellection. The philosophical inquirer is "not in an attitude of faith, but objectively in an attitude of contemplation, and hence not infinitely interested in the determination of the question."¹¹ *The* question to be determined is that of immortality, but this is something which the philosopher will never be able to do because, for him, to determine a question means to arrive at a state of objective certainty concerning it, through

the exercise of reason, but this is precisely what cannot be done regarding something like immortality. It must remain objectively uncertain, but it is just this objective uncertainty upon which faith feeds and thrives.

Kierkegaard asserts that, "There is only one proof that the Eternal exists: faith in it."¹² In this he would seem to be echoing the Pauline dictum that faith is the evidence for things not seen.¹³ His use of "proof" here would have to be understood figuratively, for proof or demonstration, taken in the literal sense, must necessarily have to it a pronounced public dimension. If faith is a subjective state, and Kierkegaard would insist that it is preeminently that, then it could not have any demonstrative effect on anyone other than the individual who possesses the faith. But Kierkegaard, we may safely assume, would have no patience with this kind of analysis, for he regards the very notion of proof or demonstration, as the philosopher understands it, to be completely antithetical to faith. If philosophical proof is necessarily public, faith is necessarily private, intensely so—we might even say, exclusively so. Kierkegaard's man of faith is very much a loner.

Consider the believer's acceptance of the existence of Christ: "if he had assumed it by virtue of any proof, he would have been on the verge of giving up his faith."¹⁴ To demand proof, in the philosophical sense, for one's beliefs is to commit oneself to the futile search for objective certainty; but this would be to remove oneself from the realm of subjectivity, which, because faith is subjectivity, would be simply to abandon one's faith. What, then, is this "proof" which the believer has for the existence of God, for the fact of immortality? It is simply faith itself, which is to say the infinitely passionate commitment to the existence of God, to the immortality of the soul. Christian faith, for Kierkegaard, is the riskiest thing in the world. It is casting off all certainty and heading out to sea without compass or life jackets. With his inimitable poetic prowess, he can provide us with a moving description of the "venture" of faith: "If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving the faith."¹⁵

The distinction between faith and knowledge has been a central element of Christian theology for centuries. To have knowledge, in the precise sense, is to accept something as true either because its truth is self-evident, or because its truth has been made evident through demonstration. To have faith, on the other hand, to believe, is to accept something as true on the word of a trustworthy witness. A further distinction is made between natural faith and supernatural faith. Natural faith, upon which

rests the major portion of our everyday knowledge of the world in which we live, is our accepting certain things as true on the word of other human beings. Supernatural faith, though it may be mediated through human communication, is our accepting certain things to be true on the word of God Himself. Kierkegaard is certainly aware of these venerable distinctions, but as is so often the case in his dealing with the Christian religion in general, he brings to these distinctions some novel interpretations, interpretations which represent a marked departure from the orthodox understanding of the issues involved.

Kierkegaard effectively drives a wedge between faith and knowledge, regarding them as if they occupied two utterly different and mutually exclusive realms. He is right to warn us against "the temptation to confuse knowledge with the faith,"¹⁶ but, in this critically important matter, real distinction does not necessarily entail separation. There is, in the first instance, the knowledge of the contents of the faith that has to be taken into account, as specifically exemplified in our knowledge of the mysteries, such as the Incarnation. This is real knowledge; what is more, in contradistinction to what Kierkegaard holds, it is certain knowledge, indeed according to one understanding, it is the most certain kind of knowledge we have. Secondly, there is the natural knowledge that leads up to, and continues to accompany, the knowledge which we have through supernatural faith. Faith is of course a gift, but it is left to us to make the choice of either accepting or rejecting the gift, and in order to be able to accept the gift we have to have sufficient knowledge of the nature of the gift. We do not make the assent of faith in an intellectual vacuum; that assent depends upon knowledge which we gain through natural reasoning. To make the assent of faith is, to be sure, to cross a boundary of the most significant sort, as a result of which crossing everything is henceforth transformed. But before we reach that boundary we must traverse a stretch of territory, representing the natural knowledge upon which knowledge of faith depends.¹⁷

The phrase, *Credo quia absurdum*, "I believe because it is absurd," provides us with an exact description of Kierkegaard's understanding of the nature of faith. To believe, in his terms, is passionately to embrace something as true even though, or precisely because, it makes no sense. The object of one's faith is the completely improbable, to which he gives the name absurd. As a primary example of the completely improbable or the absurd, he offers the Incarnation. In accepting the Incarnation as true, the believer puts reason aside and gives himself over to passionate intensity. Kierkegaardian faith can be likened to the famous leap into the dark, whereas faith, properly

understood, is more like, as someone once put it—was it Chesterton?—a deliberate stepping into the light.

Kierkegaard writes powerfully on the subject of faith, and there is no calling into question his own passionate interest in the subject. His dramatic development of the critical decision which introduces one into the realm of faith is especially commanding. When it comes to faith, one cannot opt for philosophical disinterestedness. There is no room here for non-committal tepidity, or supercilious neutrality. A choice must be made for or against; it is Either/Or of the starkest and most insistent kind. “The answer of faith,” he writes, “is therefore unconditionally yes or no.”¹⁸ And the consequences of that choice are of monumental proportions. We owe much to Kierkegaard for bringing into the highest kind of relief the total seriousness of faith. No one can read him and continue to entertain the notion that Christianity can be regarded with indifference. You may repudiate it, but you will never be able to convince yourself that you have repudiated something of little import. Once its essence is grasped, Christianity prohibits an indifferent response to it. But for all that, there is something in Kierkegaard’s treatment of faith which, in the final analysis, is deeply unsatisfactory. One of the explanations for this is that, while giving due emphasis to the divine dimension of faith, he seriously undervalues its human dimension, and the specific way he does this is by denigrating human reason. What lies at the very heart of the human dimension of faith is the fact that it is a response to the divine on the part of creatures whose very essence is rational. Kierkegaard wants to see faith as a circumvention of reason, whereas in fact it is inextricably bound up with it.

The Catholic understanding of faith stands in marked contrast to Kierkegaard’s. We believe as rational creatures; our reason is not at war with our faith. The intellect, far from being detached from faith, effectively defines it, for the act of faith is an intellectual assent. And far from mirroring us in a slough of uncertainty, faith brings to us the firmest kind of certainty. And rather than positioning us permanently before a blank wall of absurdity, faith elevates us to heights of translucent meaningfulness. Undeniably, there is an important subjective element to belief; each of us must pronounce his own “*Credo*,” yet that pronouncement is never made in splendid isolation. It is voiced within the community of the Church, and all the “*Credos*” together, we might say, are summed up in a single, resounding *Credimus*.

III

Unsurprisingly, many of the ideas that Kierkegaard develops in his discussions of truth and faith are also found

in his thought as applied to the larger phenomenon of Christianity. But what is especially noteworthy, when we compare Kierkegaard’s thought as applied to the individual with his thought as applied to Christianity and the Church, is the marked lack of continuity between the two. For example, whereas the quality of inwardness is to be found in the individual Christian, it would seem to have no place in Christianity or the Church. In general, there is no significant transference of ideas from the individual level to the communal level, and that is because Kierkegaard simply does not attach much significance to the latter. To the extent that he can be said to concern himself with it all, his understanding of community has a certain vaporous quality to it. It is evident that he does not regard Christianity or the Church in terms of genuine community. A genuine community is not to be confused with a mere collective; it is more than the sum total of the members that compose it. Community is of course founded upon the individuals that make it up, but it transcends each of them as individuals, principally representing not what is peculiar to this or that member, but what is common to all of them. The way that Kierkegaard looks upon Christianity, or the Church, is reminiscent of the mistaken way the common good is sometimes regarded, as simply the additive result of the individual goods of the members of a polity. This is to miss the qualitative nature of the common good, as a transcendent reality, and to interpret it in purely quantitative terms.

We have noted the highly individualized stamp that Kierkegaard puts upon faith. The believer stands emphatically alone before God—which would mean, in terms of quotidian existential realities, before the absurd—laboring under the onerous burden of having to work out his salvation pretty much on his own. We have in this interpretation of faith and how it relates to the individual, the most direct and satisfactory explanation for Kierkegaard’s inability to appreciate, if indeed even to see, the communal nature of Christianity, which is given concrete expression in the Church. Community necessarily implies communion, that spiritual bonding of individual members which gives rise to true unity. As Kierkegaard sees things, believers are cut off from one another. Every believer, by definition, is possessed of a passionate commitment to immortality, but this cannot rightly be described as a shared commitment. “The consciousness of my immortality,” Kierkegaard writes, “belongs to me alone, precisely at the moment when I am conscious of my immortality I am absolutely subjective.”¹⁹ He tells us that eternal happiness is “a good which is not distributed wholesale, but only to one individual at a time.”²⁰ Every human being, as a

knowing spirit, exists only for himself.²¹ And it is precisely inwardness, the hallmark of truth, and that which most characterizes the believer, which accounts for, not union, but separation; inwardness is the road that leads individuals away from one another.²²

Christianity, Kierkegaard argues, can have significance only for individuals who are marked by inwardness, for whom Christianity is the absurd.²³ He adheres to the typically Protestant distinction between the visible and the invisible Church, where the latter represents the real reality, and the former becomes almost incidental. In fact, as he presses this distinction, the Church virtually disappears from history. “The invisible Church is no historical phenomenon,” he writes; “it cannot be observed objectively at all, since it exists only in the subjectivity of the individuals.”²⁴ It would seem that the Church, the invisible or real Church, is little more than an idea in the minds of individuals, individuals who are isolated from one another and between whom there can be no communication as spiritual beings. There is no direct relation between individuals “with respect to the essential truth.”²⁵ If the Church exists only in the subjectivity of individual Christians, and if there is no communication among them, then the ineluctable conclusion would seem to be that the Church, visible or invisible, cannot be a community.

In all, Christianity, for Kierkegaard, becomes something very vague and amorphous. He would perhaps agree with this characterization, but then go on to argue that Christianity could not be anything but vague and amorphous. Christianity is not intended to be understood, and he calls attention to “the confusion of considering Christianity a matter of knowledge.”²⁶ Christianity might be considered as subjectivity writ large, in the sense that, like subjectivity itself, any attempt to grasp it according to objective criteria guarantees incomprehension. To objectify Christianity, to attempt to get hold of its essence and meaning through the exercise of reason, is effectively to destroy it, and anyone who takes this approach, even if he should bear the name Christian, “is *eo ipso* a pagan.”²⁷

IV

It is the task of philosophy, specifically that sub-field of metaphysics called natural theology, to put forth arguments that attempt to demonstrate the existence of God. If Kierkegaard looked upon such attempts as so much wasted effort, it was in good part because of his decidedly negative attitude toward philosophy. The principal problem with philosophy, generally considered, was that it had to do with objectivity, and, as we have seen, to traffic with the objective was, for Kierkegaard, to cut oneself off

from truth and reality. For “objective reflection,” which is an integral part of the philosophical way of thinking, “the truth becomes an object, something objective,” but because subjectivity is the one and only path to truth—indeed, subjectivity *is* truth—then to say that the truth “becomes an object, something objective,” is simply to say that it ceases to be the truth.²⁸ The individual who decides to become a philosopher, or, less radically, who decides to think philosophically from time to time, is, just by doing so, divorcing himself from the truth. Worse, to engage on a regular basis with the objectivity which is philosophy, is to alienate oneself from oneself. “But in order to philosophize,” Kierkegaard explains, “he must proceed in precisely the opposite direction, giving himself up and losing himself in objectivity, thus vanishing from himself.”²⁹ It is only through subjectivity that one thoroughly appropriates the truth, to the point where the subject and the truth merge, becoming virtually one, and thus the explanation for Kierkegaard’s claim that truth is subjectivity and subjectivity is truth. The best that philosophical thought can do is to attain “approximations,” not truth itself. It might be permissible to speak of truth as the goal of philosophy, toward which it proceeds, but it never arrives at its goal.

Kierkegaard speaks of the disinterestedness of philosophy. That is not a compliment. To be disinterested is to be objective, and to be objective is to preclude subjectivity, which is simply to preclude the truth. The *sine qua non* condition for the appropriation of truth is not disinterest but its very opposite, interest, and not just interest but *infinite* interest, an interest in which the subject is totally absorbed in himself. As we saw earlier, Kierkegaard does not deny the notion that the truth is the correspondence between thought and thing, but the only way an individual could comprehend that critical relation would be by transcending himself, which is impossible.

One might be tempted, in responding to Kierkegaard’s somewhat rough and ready treatment of philosophy, and noting the weighty problems that beset so many aspects of his view of it, simply to dismiss out of hand whatever he has to say about the subject. This would be an unfortunate reaction, for, apart from the problems to be found in his expatiations on philosophy, there are many valuable insights as well. The first thing we should be continuously mindful of is that when Kierkegaard talks about philosophy he has, as mentioned, something rather limited in mind: idealism, specifically in the form of Hegelianism. As a student, he was fairly immersed in Hegelianism, which was all the rage at the time, and he apparently found the experience to be somewhat suffocating. He was to devote a good part of his adult life contending against it. Kierke-

aard would seem to have had a significant acquaintance with Greek philosophy—Socrates was one of his heroes³⁰—but there is little indication that he had anything like a firm grasp of the full sweep and richness of Western philosophy. There are no indications in his writings that he ever had any serious encounters with the Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition, much less with Thomism. For all practical purposes, then, “philosophy” meant Hegelianism for Kierkegaard, and that being the case, one should not be too hard on him for his negative response to it.

Once we appreciate the fact that, in the main, philosophy meant idealism for Kierkegaard, many of the things which he says about it, which otherwise would be quite puzzling, suddenly become considerably less so. He will often tell us, for example, that for the modern thinker thought and being are one.³¹ Now, to the extent that this can truly be said of the modern thinker—i.e., the thinker since Descartes—it is to the extent that the modern thinker is an idealist, which, to a rather large extent, is just the case. To put thought above being, the idea above the thing, which of course is the common practice of idealism, is, Kierkegaard clearly sees, to open wide the doors to scepticism.³² Kierkegaard regards philosophy—he often uses the term “speculative philosophy”—as chiefly concerned with thinking in abstractions, and ignoring “the concrete and the temporal, the existential process,”³³ the end result of which is that “philosophy and the philosopher proudly desert existence.”³⁴ Philosophy becomes totally preoccupied with thought, and turns its back on the real world. The irony in all this, as Kierkegaard sees things, is that the philosopher’s “objectivity” distances him from the objective order of things.

Particularly commendable is Kierkegaard’s singling out the rejection of the principle of contradiction as one of the most egregious errors of Hegelian philosophy.³⁵ Of course, the rejection of the principle of contradiction, as Aristotle has conclusively shown,³⁶ is an utterly vain gesture, for any supposed rejection of it necessarily entails an appeal to it. But that any philosopher should even make that gesture speaks volumes about the quality of the philosophy which he is propounding. For Kierkegaard, the weightiest ramifications of the Hegelian attempt to deny the principle of contradiction were moral. To deny contradictory opposites on the ontological level—i.e., between being and non-being—is but prefatory to denying contradictory opposites on the moral level—i.e., between good and evil.³⁷ Kierkegaard’s “existentialism” can be said to be built around that seminal Either/Or decision upon which the ultimate destiny of each individual directly depends. We recall that the answer of faith, for Kierkegaard, is an

unconditional yes or no.³⁸ Any philosophy which supposes that, either on the ontological level or on the moral level, the unavoidable choice between A and not-A can be theorized out of existence, is a philosophy which demands to be ignored.

His reflections on philosophy led Kierkegaard to create a category which he refers to as the comical, and which he describes in the following terms: “The comical appears only when the subject with an infinite passionate interest tries to attach his eternal happiness to philosophical speculation.”³⁹ An individual is comic, we might say, because of his confusion regarding the One Thing Necessary. He becomes so absorbed in “objectivity” that the critical importance of subjectivity is eventually completely lost on him. Caught up in a whirlwind of abstractions of his own fervid manufacture, he becomes a stranger to reality. Kierkegaard offers Hegel as an example of the comical.

As noted, Kierkegaard draws a close connection between idealism and scepticism, and he certainly is not wrong in doing so. But his own philosophical outlook is not without its own disconcerting signs of scepticism. For example, he explicitly expresses scepticism toward sense perception, making him sound like a dedicated Cartesian. He asserts that “the certainty of sense perception, to say nothing of historical certainty, is uncertainty, is only approximation.”⁴⁰ In much bolder terms he states: “The apparent trustworthiness of sense is an illusion,”⁴¹ And thus we have this adamant foe of idealism subscribing to one of the favorite preoccupations of idealism—displaying scepticism toward sense knowledge. It is not particularly surprising, then, when we find him traveling yet farther along the idealist road, by raising rather odd questions about the reality of the external world. “Is the real then the same as the external?” he asks. “By no means,” he answers.⁴² This broader declaration of scepticism, however problematical in itself, is actually consonant with the great emphasis he gives to subjectivity. “The real action is not the external act,” he writes, “but an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it.”⁴³ It is one thing, and an altogether proper thing, to give precedence to the internal act over the external act, but it is quite another thing, and a precarious thing, to call into question the reality of the external act.

While calling attention to the presence of distinctly idealist elements in Kierkegaard’s thought, it would be wrong to suggest that we are dealing here with someone who is prepared to deny the existence of the physical world. Kierkegaard was not a 19th century George Berkeley. But his understanding of the precise ontological status

of the external world is not without serious problems. He makes a distinction, helpful enough on the face of it, between ideal being and factual being, the latter referring to extra-mental being, things which actually exist, separate from and independent of the human mind. But then, in discussing the nature of this factual being, he makes the extraordinary claim that, "In the case of factual being it is meaningless to speak of more or less being. A fly, when it is, has as much being as God..."⁴⁴ The statements, "a fly is," and, "God is," are both true, but to suppose, as Kierkegaard seems to be doing, that the "is" following "fly" has the same metaphysical heft as the "is" following "God" is, among any number of other attendant difficulties, effectively to flirt with pantheism. Kierkegaard goes on to explain: "Factual being is wholly indifferent to any and all variations in essence, and everything that exists participates without petty jealousy in being, and participates in the same degree."⁴⁵ The effect of this kind of thinking is that being is regarded as a category, and because the fly participates in being in the same degree as does God, being becomes a category that is superior to God. It is difficult to know what Kierkegaard means, exactly, when he says that factual being "is wholly indifferent to any and all variations in essence," but one way this can be interpreted implies that, existentially considered, variations in essence do not really matter all that much, but if that were to be true we would find ourselves precariously close to a position which regards everything, all existents, as *essentially* the same. And here again, it seems, we would find ourselves face to face with pantheism.

Kierkegaard had a wide range of philosophical opinions, but he did not have a coherent philosophy. Of the greatest consequence for his thought is the fact that he lacked a sound, reliable metaphysics, and it is this which best explains, I believe, the negative attitude he took toward proofs for the existence of God. The best of those proofs cannot be properly understood and appreciated without a thoroughgoing familiarity with the metaphysical principles upon which they directly depend. This point can be given greater clarity by taking a close look at the arguments which Kierkegaard offered to support his position that proofs for the existence of God are ineffective. And that is our next order of business.

V

Perhaps the single most famous set of arguments that seek to demonstrate the existence of God are the Five Ways of St. Thomas Aquinas. Now, one would think that if a philosopher was of the opinion that those arguments

failed to do what they were intended to do, he would take them, one by one, *as stated by St. Thomas*, and carefully show, through his own arguments, how their intended end is not realized. Now, it would not be fair to expect that Kierkegaard should have done this with any of the Thomistic arguments, but the fact is he did not do it with any specifically identifiable argument.⁴⁶ He takes a general approach, dealing for the most part, not with specific arguments, but rather with two large types of argument, which I will label the idealist type and the realist type. The only specifically identifiable argument that can be found in his analyses is the argument from design, his allusions to which will be commented on in the discussion which follows.

We have seen that, for Kierkegaard, the most salient feature of idealist philosophy, epitomized by Hegelianism, is that it fuses thought with being. If a non-idealist were to set out to prove the existence of God, the clear understanding would be that the existence in question, which he is attempting to establish, is extra-mental existence. Such would not be the case for the idealist philosopher. Though he may suppose that he is moving from the world of thought to the world of being, he is in fact, according to Kierkegaard, working entirely within the world of thought. He really has no other choice in the matter, for, having reduced being to thought, his philosophy provides him with only a single world, the world of thought. This being the case, whatever his arguments might be said to prove, they prove only what pertains to thought. For the idealist philosopher, "Thought and being mean one and the same thing, and the correspondence spoken of [i.e., between thought and being] is merely an abstract self-identity."⁴⁷ After citing the classical notion of logical truth, as the correspondence between thought and extra-mental being, Kierkegaard notes that, because the only correspondence for the idealist philosopher is that which exists among his thoughts, his putative proofs for the existence of God tell us nothing about the external world. To the extent that they accomplish anything at all, they only provide us with glimpses into the hazy mind of the idealist philosopher.

In Kierkegaard's observations on what I am calling the idealist proofs for the existence of God, it seems that what he has at least partially in mind, though he does not identify it by name, is the ontological argument, which was given its most famous expression by St. Anselm. The ontological argument is essentially idealist in its mode of reasoning, in that it begins with the idea of God and then attempts to show that that idea, rightly and fully con-

ceived, necessarily entails the existence of God. Kierkegaard cogently argues that the argument fails because it is circular, its fallaciousness consisting in the fact that what it is purporting to prove, the existence of God, is being assumed at the outset, albeit indirectly and in however subtle a way.⁴⁸

Kierkegaard's rejection of the idealist proofs for the existence of God is entirely justified, and one can readily concur with his point of view in this case. When it comes to his analysis of the realist proofs for the existence of God—for a prominent example of which I would cite St. Thomas's Five Ways—he is less definitive and confident in his approach, though his basic response to them is no less negative. In other words, he believes that the realist arguments, employing the “experimental” approach, are, in the final analysis, no more successful than the idealist arguments. But the difference between the two situations is this: whereas he puts forth compelling arguments to show how the idealist proofs fail, his attempts to do the same to show the failure of the realist proofs are, as I hope to make clear, considerably less than convincing.

Let us briefly remind ourselves of the main lines in the approach taken by the realist philosopher to demonstrate the existence of God. In sharp contrast to the idealist approach, which begins *in mente*, with ideas, the realist philosopher begins *in mundo*, with things. More precisely, the approach is by way of *quia* argument, which is to say, it begins with effects, e.g., the physical world, and concludes to the existence of a universal cause of that world—*Causa Prima*, God. Kierkegaard's commentary reveals a firm enough grasp on his part of the basic nature of this approach. Though he accords it some respect—certainly more than he gives to the idealist approach—he is convinced that it is fated to fail.

The reason it must fail is because of a fundamental and inescapable lack of stability in both subject and object, that is, in the individual who is formulating the argument, and in the physical world he is engaging with, and where he intends to find the material which will make up the premisses for his argument. We have already made reference to the peculiarities of Kierkegaard's notion of the process of becoming. That notion is going to be brought into play here. As he saw things, we, and everything about us in the physical world, are continuously being swept along in a grand flux of becoming. He explains that “everything must be understood in terms of becoming; for the empirical object is unfinished and the existing cognitive spirit [i.e., the individual making the argument] is itself in process of becoming.”⁴⁹ As a result of this shared instability between subject and object, there is no fixed

context within which the truth can be arrived at. The kind of epistemological difficulty which Kierkegaard sees as operative here might be roughly illustrated by a situation where two spaceships are approaching one another, and the only reference point each spaceship has is the other spaceship. The one certainty about the nature of their motion that could be determined by the occupants of both spaceships is that the distance between them is closing. But with no other point of reference available to them, those in either spaceship could not determine whether their spaceship is moving and the other stationary, or vice versa, or whether both spaceships are moving. Their peculiar state of “becoming” will not allow them to reach any definitive conclusions.

The best that can be hoped for, in the situation Kierkegaard is describing, where everything is in a state of becoming or constant change, are approximations, but approximations are not the truth. Thus, not only is the subject and the object in a fluid state, so is the truth itself. “As soon as the being which corresponds to the truth comes to be empirically concrete, the truth is put in the process of becoming, and is again by way of anticipation the conformity of thought and being.”⁵⁰ The truth is the conformity of thought and being “by way of anticipation,” but never by way of realization, for any human being in this life, and that is because each of us is in a permanent state of becoming, which, for Kierkegaard, quintessentially exemplifies the human condition.⁵¹

In giving the singular emphasis he does to becoming, Kierkegaard shows himself to be enmeshed in a serious metaphysical confusion, the ultimate result of which is his hypostatizing—in somewhat Hegelian fashion—what is not a hypostasis. In other words, he is conferring substantial existence upon something, the process of becoming, which can only have accidental existence. Put another way, he is making a “thing” out of an aspect of a thing. To review a very basic metaphysical point. Becoming is real, but its reality is not entitative; it exists, but only dependently, as a feature of an independent existent, of a substance, of that which becomes, or changes. Before there can be becoming or change, there must be a subject of becoming or change.

In the language he uses to describe it, then, Kierkegaard treats becoming as if it were a substance. This is disorienting enough, but eventually one comes to wonder about the quality of his very notion of substance itself. There are pronounced problems on display here. For example, he writes that “the very existence of the existing individual is sufficient to prevent his continuity from having essential stability.”⁵² If the claim that the individual has

no “essential stability” means that there is no stability in essence, specifically in a substance possessing a determining essence, then it would not be possible to identify the individual as an individual. If in fact there were no stability in essence, knowledge would be impossible, not just knowledge having to do with proving the existence of God, but any and all knowledge.

The situation is not as Kierkegaard envisions it. We are not all aswim in a broiling sea of homogeneous becoming. The realist philosopher, let us call him George, is of course becoming; he is incessantly changing in one way or another over the course of his entire life, but he is always changing as George. There is the stability from the subjective side. The world with which the realist philosopher is engaged presents him with a vast panorama of constant change. But he is aware of that change, he can only know it precisely as change, because what he is in the first instance aware of are the things that change, the substances, with their fixed essences, which are the subjects of change. And there is the stability from the objective side.

Mention was made of the fact that a particular argument that is clearly alluded to in Kierkegaard’s critique of the realist proofs for the existence of God is the argument from design. Like Kant before him, he acknowledges a certain force to this argument, and his overall response to it is ambivalent. Although he concludes that in the end it must be pronounced ineffective, he makes certain concessions concerning the argument which belie that conclusion. For example, he seems to concede a viability to the central idea on which the argument rests, that the reflective consideration of the physical world can lead to the conclusion that there exists a Creator of that world. However, if this can be taken to be a message that is successfully conveyed to us by the argument, it is a mixed message. Kierkegaard explains: “I contemplate the order of nature in the hope of finding God, and I see omnipotence and wisdom; but I also see much that disturbs my mind and excites anxiety.”⁵³ What is disturbing his mind and causing anxiety is doubt, doubt as to the reliability of the argument’s conclusion. “Are we not confronted with the most terrible temptations to doubt, and is it not impossible finally to dispose of these doubts?”⁵⁴

Kierkegaard assumes that the answer to his question is Yes, but this assumption is unwarranted. If one has serious doubts as to the compelling quality of the conclusion of an argument, the first thing one must do, to allay those doubts, is closely reexamine the argument. Perhaps it is defective, and does not in fact prove what it purports to prove. Kierkegaard speaks of a “temptation” to doubt. If it is truly a matter of temptation, understood in the

theological sense—i.e., as an invitation to sin—then it is to be handled as should all temptations: the invitation should be promptly and emphatically declined. What enhances the difficulty of arriving at a trustworthy reading of Kierkegaard’s estimate of the argument from design is the inconsistency of his thought. For example, he writes that, “Nature is, indeed, the work of God, but only the handiwork is directly present, not God.”⁵⁵ Yet, in another place, he negates that claim and says, “The works from which I would deduce his existence are not directly and immediately given.”⁵⁶ So, the works of God are, and are not, directly present.

In calling attention to the fact that they are essentially circular, Kierkegaard correctly points out the principal logical flaw in the idealist arguments for the existence of God. They are in fact assuming to be true what they should be proving to be true. But this assuming the existence of God at the very outset of the argument is, Kierkegaard maintains, a flaw which necessarily accompanies every attempt to prove God’s existence, idealist and realist alike. They all begin, they must begin, with the assumption that God exists. “In beginning my proof I suppose the ideal interpretation,” he writes, “and also that I will be successful in carrying it through; but what else is this but to presuppose that the God exists, so that I really begin by virtue of confidence in him?”⁵⁷ In response to this, one simply needs to say that to suppose the ideal solution of an argument—i.e., arriving at a true conclusion—and hoping that one will be successful in realizing that ideal solution, by no means necessarily entails presupposing the truth of something whose truth the argument is setting out to prove. In other words, and in the specific case of an argument that intends to prove the existence of God, one does not, and one obviously should not, begin with the presupposition that God exists. If one were to do so, the argument would of course be fallacious. It simply does not hold, as Kierkegaard would have us believe, that one cannot do otherwise than presuppose the existence of God in formulating arguments which are intended to prove that existence. There is no necessity at work here.

As is the case with any demonstration, one must of course have in mind at the outset some idea of what one intends to prove. Without at least that much, one would indeed not even be able to begin. Secondly, one must see that what one intends to prove is a real possibility; it is something that really *could* be true. So, with arguments for the existence of God, one begins with a nominal definition of the term “God,” as, let us say, “the Supreme Being.” And then one asks, Is there such a being? That is the question the argument is attempting to answer. We might say

that, at the outset of the argument, we formulate a hypothesis which is expressed in the statement, "God exists," then, through argumentation, we seek to determine if the hypothesis can be verified. To hypothesize that something is true is not at all the same thing as assuming that it is in fact true. It is, on the most basic level, simply acknowledging that were it to be true, the principle of contradiction would not be violated. Kierkegaard contends that in our arguments, not only do we presuppose the existence of God, but we do not see our presupposition as doubtful, "for the very reason that it is a presupposition."⁵⁸ What actually happens, however, is that we presuppose the *possibility* of the existence of God, and, contrary to what Kierkegaard contends, the presupposition *must* be held as doubtful until it is proven to be otherwise. If the presupposition were not doubtful, there would be no reason for a demonstration. We do not try to prove things about which we are already certain.

Now we come to the heart of the matter. Underlying Kierkegaard's belief that it is impossible to prove the existence of God is his belief that it is impossible to prove the existence of anything. In other words, and in sum, he discounts the validity of scientific reasoning. We may go through the intellectual motions, engage in argumentative gymnastics, but all our activity is in vain. More precisely, Kierkegaard takes the position that we do not prove existence, we only prove essence. We cannot, through our reasoning powers, satisfactorily answer the question *An sit?* whether something exists; all we can do is answer the question *Quid est?* what something is. Kierkegaard argues that "existence itself is superior to any demonstration for existence."⁵⁹ "Thus I always reason from existence, not to existence, whether I move in the sphere of palpable sensible fact or in the realm of thought."⁶⁰ It is incontestably true that we always reason "from existence," in the rudimentary sense that we are existing beings and we always reason within the all-embracing, perfectly comprehensive universe of existing being. It could not be otherwise. But that is not Kierkegaard's point. When he says that we always reason from existence, he means to deny the possibility that we can demonstrate existence.

Contrary to what he asserts, however, we in fact reason "to existence." We can, and regularly do, prove real existence through reasoning. This does not mean, as some idealists would suppose, and are rightly castigated by Kierkegaard for so supposing, that we somehow bring things into being by dint of thought alone, as if demonstration were some kind of conjuring trick.⁶¹ What we do is make something evident, through reasoning, on the basis of and departing from what is self-evident. We establish the ex-

istence of the unseen on the basis of the seen. In natural theology we prove the existence of a Creator, a truth we can grasp with our intellects, by appealing to various aspects of the physical world to which we have immediate access through sense knowledge.

But we need not appeal to natural theology to contest Kierkegaard's claim that we do not prove existence. If the natural sciences were not able to do just that, they would make little progress. But even in our ordinary, everyday experiences we are continually reasoning in ways that prove existence. Let us remind ourselves of what is essentially at issue here: ascertaining the existence of the unseen on the basis of the seen. We do not see gravity or electricity, but we confidently conclude to their existence on the basis of their observable effects. We believe that electrons really exist, but all we see are traces in a bubble chamber, not electrons. We take the traces as proof of the existence of electrons. We believe that a steel-hulled ship creates a significant magnetic field in the water through which it passes. This magnetic field is entirely invisible, but we do not doubt its existence, and that is because its existence can be proven. Let us say that a steel-hulled ship passes through waters infested with magnetic mines, i.e., mines that are detonated by magnetic fields. Minutes after the ship enters these waters several mines explode. The ship sinks. Conclusion: the ship had a magnetic field.

Kierkegaard writes: "I do not, for example, prove that a stone exists, but that something is a stone."⁶² I cannot off hand think of an occasion when we ever have to *prove* a stone is a stone. Usually, we just observe it to be such; its stone nature is self-evident. But there are in fact occasions when we do prove that a stone exists; that is, we can establish its existence by indirection, through argument, even though we cannot directly observe it. The stone I have in mind is a rather large one, and it eventually came to be known as Neptune. Before the existence of that planet was confirmed by telescopic observation, its existence had been concluded to by the otherwise inexplicable perturbations which had been detected in other planets. On the basis of that observed data, the existence of the unobserved was posited before it was actually observed. We do prove existence.

VI

Søren Kierkegaard's negative stance toward proofs for the existence of God was justified with respect to the idealist proofs, not so with respect to the realist proofs. And as for the latter, the problems he saw in the philosophy that engendered those proofs were not to be found there, but rather in his own philosophy. Kierkegaard simply did not

see clearly what was at work in those arguments, and the reason for this was that he was deficient in the metaphysics without which the arguments must remain a closed book. He harbored confused or positively erroneous notions concerning such important matters as the nature of substance, the critical difference between substance and accident (which elucidates the exact status of becoming), the degrees of being, and, generally, the operative principles governing demonstrative argument. Though a formidable philosopher in his own right, he did not have the kind of philosophy he needed to do justice to the proofs for the existence of God, and, on a more basic level, to allow him to give full credit to the intellect and to appreciate the potency of human reason.

Kierkegaard was intrigued by paradox. Faith was a paradox. The human person was a paradox. And Kierkegaard, as we meet him in his works, presents himself as very much a paradoxical personage. He was one of the more scintillating intellects of modern times, and yet, at bottom, there was in him a decidedly anti-intellectual streak. While capable of employing his own intellect with sometimes positively stunning effects, he was profoundly distrustful of intellect. This was Kierkegaard the complete Protestant. From its very inception, Protestantism has been nurturing, at best, a deep suspicion of reason, and, at worst, a positive antagonism toward it. Reason becomes the enemy of faith. This antagonism toward reason is clearly evident in Kierkegaard, for whom it was “to play into the hands of unbelief by proposing to demonstrate.”⁶³ To employ one’s reason to attempt to prove God’s existence is an affront to faith. Kierkegaard lived in a different intellectual world than did someone like St. Anselm, whose motto was *Fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding.” For St. Anselm, faith and reason, rather than being at war with one another, were close companions, for we believe precisely as rational creatures. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, to attempt to understand one’s faith, to try to enrich and deepen it through the exercise of reason, was to put it in jeopardy.

Another paradoxical aspect of Kierkegaard’s thought is to be found in the fact that, though he was always the spirited foe of idealism, specifically in the form of Hegelianism, he was, as we have seen, not without his own definite idealist tendencies. Perhaps these were most prominently displayed in the sceptical attitude he took toward sense knowledge, as well as in the ambiguities to be found in his understanding of the reality of the external world. We noted that while he was sensitive to the link between idealism and scepticism, he was himself, in certain not insignificant ways, a sceptic.

Kierkegaard’s notion of subjectivity is central to his thought, and in the various explorations of the notion scattered throughout his writings we can find a good deal which is stimulating and beneficial. In the end, however, the notion has to be judged, in many of its implications, as considerably more negative than positive. It lends a detrimental imbalance to the whole of his thought. It is not simply that he emphasizes the subjective at the expense of the objective. He effectively destroys the common sense understanding we have of them, by assigning to each altogether new and fantastic qualities. The distorting emphasis he gives to the subjective is to be taken as an explicit expression of his individualism, another mark, in my opinion, of his Protestantism. Kierkegaard was supremely interested in the individual, but that interest was not of the healthiest kind. The Kierkegaardian individual is a radically isolated soul, dwelling eremetically on a deserted island, totally wrapped up in his subjectivity, cut off from the continent of mankind. The decidedly anti-communal tenor of his thought is the logical accompaniment to his individualism. Together they give us a Christianity which “desires to deal with the individual, and the individual alone,”⁶⁴ a Christianity in which it would be difficult to find room for the idea of the Church as the mystical body of Christ. Looked at from a philosophical point of view, his individualism can be seen as undermining the communal nature of truth. Kierkegaard’s subjective truth ends up being something which is exclusively yours, or exclusively mine, but never ours. ✠

ENDNOTES

1. Søren Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. (trans. David F. Swenson) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941, 37.
2. *Ibid.*, 38.
3. In a footnote in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard writes: “Earthly passion tends to prevent existence by transforming it into something merely momentary.” (*Ibid.*, 277) Anything that would “prevent existence”—i.e., “earthly passion” or emotion—would be the direct antithesis to the passion which is truth.
4. *Ibid.*, 155.
5. *Ibid.*, 170.
6. *Ibid.*, 177.
7. *Ibid.*, 170.
8. *Ibid.*, 182.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 221.
11. *Ibid.*, 23.
12. Søren Kierkegaard. *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing*. (trans. Douglas V. Steere) New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956, 84.
13. “Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen.” Hebrews. 11:1-2.
14. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 31.
15. *Ibid.*, 182.
16. *Ibid.*, 30.

17. The extent of the territory to be traversed would, one may say, differ from individual to individual.
18. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 290.
19. *Ibid.*, 155.
20. *Ibid.*, 116.
21. *Ibid.*, 169.
22. *Ibid.*, 221. Kierkegaard writes: "A direct relationship between one spiritual being and another, with respect to the essential truth, is unthinkable. If such a relationship is assured, it means that one of the parties has ceased to be spirit." (*Ibid.*)
23. *Ibid.*, 192.
24. *Ibid.*, 53.
25. *Ibid.*, 221.
26. *Ibid.*, 192.
27. *Ibid.*, 42.
28. *Ibid.*, 171.
29. *Ibid.*, 55. Because he sees philosophy as possibly a way to self-alienation, he is prepared to say that "suicide is the only tolerable existential consequence of pure thought." (*Ibid.*, 273) "Pure thought" here means philosophic thought, thought that is divorced from subjectivity.
30. "Socrates' infinite merit is to have been an *existing* thinker, not a speculative philosopher who forgets what it means to exist." (*Ibid.*, 184) And again: "To accentuate existence, which also involves the qualification of inwardness, is the Socratic position." (*Ibid.*, 185n) He interprets the Socratic ignorance as "an expression of the principle that the eternal truth is related to an existing individual, and that this truth must therefore be a paradox for him as long as he exists." (*Ibid.*, 180) Why must the truth be a paradox for the individual for as long as he exists (in this life, it is to be understood)? Because the individual, on account of his unresolved state, i.e., his being in a state of permanent becoming, is himself a paradox. Finally, Kierkegaard sees Socrates as something like a precursor Christian, and thus the "Socratic inwardness in existing is an analogue to faith." (*Ibid.*, 184)
- Kierkegaard's great admiration for Socrates explains the consistent emphasis he gives to the importance of the dialectical. This might appear a little puzzling at first, for dialectical thinking would seem to have to do with the kind of objective speculation which he so adamantly opposes. After all, could we not say that the dialectical makes for permanent irresolution, because it is essentially a matter of "keeping the conversation going," even though it may be going nowhere? Would not the dialectical then represent a method which could only lead to "approximations," which Kierkegaard sees as just the opposite of truth? Clearly, though, this is not how Kierkegaard understands the dialectical, and the purpose it is intended to serve. I would suggest that the dialectical, for him, is a process by which an individual who is completely dedicated to his own subjectivity, and therefore to the truth, keeps objectivity constantly at bay, thus preserving himself in that state of subjective certainty which is the sign and seal of faith. This interpretation would seem to be corroborated by a passage in which he makes reference to a person who would have "something certain to cling to , and so keep the dialectical at a distance." (*Ibid.*, 43) In other words, the false certainty of objectivity and the dialectical would be opposed to one another, whereas true certainty, the certainty of subjectivity, depends on the dialectical.
31. *Ibid.*, 274.
32. *Ibid.*, 315. He pointedly asserts: "All scepticism is a kind of idealism."
33. *Ibid.*, 267.
34. *Ibid.*
35. "Everyone is familiar with the fact that the Hegelian philosophy has rejected the principle of contradiction." (*Ibid.*, 270)
36. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1007b, 20—1009a, 5.
37. Of course, for Hegel, for whom being and non-being were ideas without referents, the denial of the principle poses no real problem. Once the principle becomes a mere logical distinction, an *ens rationis*, it can be manipulated at will.
38. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 290.
39. *Ibid.*, 54.
40. *Ibid.*, 38.
41. *Ibid.*, 280.
42. *Ibid.*, 288.
43. *Ibid.*, 302.
44. Soren Kierkegaard. *Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy*. (trans. David F Swenson and Howard V. Hong) Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962, 51n.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Although I have no sure knowledge of the matter, I suspect that the best explanation for Kierkegaard's not dealing with the Five Ways of St. Thomas is simply the fact that he had no direct acquaintance with them. Whatever indirect knowledge of them he may have had would very likely have come from his reading the German idealist philosophers, especially Kant.
47. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 170.
48. Kierkegaard gives a concise account of the basic approach taken by the ontological argument in the following example: "Thus when it is argued that God must possess all perfections, existence is a perfection; *ergo* God or the highest being must exist: this entire movement of thought is deceptive." (*Ibid.*, 298) His evaluation of the argument is entirely correct.
49. *Ibid.*, 169.
50. *Ibid.*, 170.
51. Kierkegaard does not deny that truth is the identity of thought and being, but "the knower is an existing individual for whom the truth cannot be such an identity as long as he lives in time." (*Ibid.*, 176)
52. *Ibid.*, 277.
53. *Ibid.*, 182.
54. *Philosophical Fragments*, 52.
55. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 218.
56. *Philosophical Fragments*, 52.
57. *Ibid.*, 52-53.
58. *Ibid.*, 49.
59. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 38n.
60. *Philosophical Fragments*, 50.
61. Kierkegaard writes: "The attempt to infer existence from thought is a contradiction." (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 281) It is only a contradiction if we suppose that thought somehow brings about extra-mental existents, posits actual entities in being. This would be an instance of creation, which belongs to God alone. But there is no contradiction if we understand demonstration to be a way of exercising thought so that we attain certainty of the existence of something whose existence had previously been a matter of doubt for us.
62. *Philosophical Fragments*, 50.
63. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 31.
64. *Ibid.*, 47..

The Pope's Motu Proprio: *What Exactly Did Benedict XVI Decide about the Tridentine Mass?*

By Kenneth D. Whitehead

I.

On 7/7/07 Pope Benedict XVI issued a much anticipated and long-expected apostolic letter in the form of a *motu proprio* (“by his own word”). The two-word Latin title usually assigned to such papal documents is normally taken from the first sentence of the document itself. The first sentence of this particular document reads (in English): “Up to our own times it has been the constant concern of the supreme pontiffs to ensure that the Church of Christ offers a worthy ritual to the Divine Majesty...” Hence the title of this *motu proprio*, taken from this first sentence, became *Summorum Pontificum* (“of the supreme pontiffs”).

Since the subject of this new document concerned the offering of “a worthy ritual to the Divine Majesty,” it should have been no surprise to anyone that, in the Catholic context, this particular *motu proprio* would pertain to the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Specifically, among other things, *Summorum Pontificum* allows any Catholic priest in good standing to celebrate the Mass, not only in accordance with the current liturgical rules laid down in the revised and reformed Roman Missal issued by Pope Paul VI in 1970 (further revised and updated by Pope John Paul II in 2002), but also in accordance with the old Roman Missal used prior to the liturgical reforms decreed by Vatican Council II and thought to have been long superseded. Concretely, what this means is that, under the conditions set forth in the new document, the priest no longer needs the specific permission of his bishop to celebrate this older form of the Mass (although the celebration of this or any Mass, like all the other sacraments of the Church, still remains under the ultimate authority of the bishop).

The old Roman Missal, according to which by Pope Benedict's new ruling the former Mass may now again be more freely celebrated, dates substantially from the year 1570, when Pope St. Pius V, following the Council of Trent, codified and regularized the traditional Roman liturgy that had been transmitted down through the centuries up to that time. This traditional “Tridentine” Roman Missal underwent only a few minor changes and adjustments over the next nearly 500 years. The latest revision of it—which it was thought at the time would be the last, since in the mean-

time the Second Vatican Council was expected to call for a substantial reform of it, and did in fact call for such a reform of it—was issued by Blessed Pope John XXIII in 1962.

What Pope Benedict XVI's new apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum* now provides for, however, is that:

The Roman Missal promulgated by Paul VI is the *ordinary* expression of the *lex orandi* (law of prayer) of the Catholic Church of the Latin Rite. Nonetheless, the Roman Missal promulgated by St. Pius V and reissued by Blessed John XXIII is to be considered as an *extraordinary* expression of that same *lex orandi* (Art. 1, emphasis added).

It is important to take careful note of the meaning and import of the pope's language here. The current Roman Missal, which was thoroughly revised in accordance with Vatican Council II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (issued on December 4, 1963), is to continue to be the *ordinary* form of Catholic worship. Thus, in no way is Benedict XVI annulling or going back on the liturgical reform decreed by the Council; rather, among other things, he is specifically reaffirming the product of that reform as the ordinary form of the Mass. Meanwhile, though, he is also allowing another, older form of worship to be carried on as well under the conditions which he specifies.

The reform of the sacred liturgy was, in fact, the first subject taken up by the Council, and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was the first conciliar document enacted by Vatican II. The Council Fathers saw the Mass of the day, which they themselves were accustomed to celebrate, as solemn and reverent; but many of them also saw it, as did much of the informed opinion developed through the liturgical movement of the previous decades, as too great an extent almost entirely the affair of the priest-celebrant on his own, and as too passive as far as the faithful were concerned; the priest said virtually all of the prayers in Latin throughout the entire Mass, with responses coming only from the acolytes (Mass-servers) “representing” the people. The people themselves, meanwhile, as often as not, knelt in their pews in silence and perhaps said their rosaries, if indeed they prayed at all while the Mass was going on. Through the successful catechesis of that day, the people generally understood that the Mass was a *sacrifice*, a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

on the cross, and they responded accordingly with appropriate reverence and devotion; but otherwise they often understood almost nothing of what was going on at the altar while it was going on—that is why they *could* say their rosaries while the great drama of the holy sacrifice of the Mass was unfolding before them!

The Council Fathers desired a liturgical reform which would accord a greater and more active role to the faithful in the congregation. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was the result of their deliberations on this subject. This first one of the Council's sixteen documents laid out in careful detail the respects in which the Fathers believed the liturgy needed to be reformed. Implementation of it began almost immediately by means of a *motu proprio* of Pope Paul VI's entitled *Sacram Liturgiam*, issued on January 24, 1964, a year and a half before the close of the Council itself.

By means of this earlier *motu proprio*, Pope Paul VI established a special commission composed mostly of clerics who were liturgical specialists and experts. They were charged with the task of producing a reformed liturgy designed to encourage on the part of the faithful “the full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” which *Sacrosanctum Concilium* declared was the primary aim of the liturgical reform (SC 14). This special commission of Paul VI later acquired the name of “the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.” Because of how some of the liturgical reforms in question turned out, however, this “Consilium” and its work later became the object of much criticism.

Nevertheless, the liturgical revisions and texts developed by the “Consilium,” after approval by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship—and by the pope—became what Benedict XVI in *Summorum Pontificum* has now designated to be the continuing ordinary form of Catholic worship in the Roman rite. What Benedict has now also done, however, to the surprise and even the dismay of some, is to allow the celebration of the Mass according to the unrevised Roman Missal in use prior to and at the Council—but as what he has now designated to be an extraordinary form.

As Benedict points out in his new document, the old Missal was never formally abrogated; it was simply replaced by the new Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI. At the time, it was assumed that the old Missal would no longer be used because it had been replaced by the revised Missal. Provision was even made at that time that the old Mass could be celebrated by aged or infirm priests celebrating without a congregation. Otherwise, it was simply taken for granted that the new Paul VI Missal would henceforth simply *be* the Roman rite.

Another development that loomed very large at the same time was that, in addition to going over to the revised new liturgy crafted by Paul VI's “Consilium” and embodied in the new Roman Missal, the Catholic bishops of the world virtually everywhere voted after the Council to celebrate the new Mass in the vernacular rather than in Latin. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* had said that Latin was to be retained in the Mass; but at the same time it had allowed celebration in the vernacular if the bishops so desired and if the Holy See approved (SC 36). In the event, it turned out that the bishops overwhelmingly did so desire, and the Holy See very soon after the Council acceded to their wishes and granted permission for vernacular Masses virtually worldwide.

To reintroduce the celebration of the Mass according to the old Missal thus necessarily also means to reintroduce its celebration once again exclusively in Latin. While the reformed Mass can be and sometimes is celebrated in Latin, it is typically celebrated in the vernacular. The old Mass, however, can *only* be celebrated in Latin. In the popular mind, this remains the most salient distinction between the two forms, in fact, and hence the whole issue is sometimes framed as a question of whether the Mass is being celebrated in Latin or in the vernacular. But this is not an exact distinction.

How has it come about, then, that Pope Benedict XVI should now have decided, more than forty years after the Council, that this earlier form of the Mass should now again be more freely allowed and celebrated in Latin as an extraordinary form? The pope himself explained this in a letter which he sent to the Catholic bishops of the world along with his *motu proprio*. The pope wrote that, following the liturgical reform, “it soon became apparent that a good number of people remained strongly attached to this usage of the Roman Rite, which had been familiar to them since childhood. This was especially the case in countries where the liturgical movement had provided many people with a notable liturgical formation and a deep, personal familiarity with the earlier form of the liturgical celebration.” In other words, the pope decided to allow a freer celebration of the old Mass because the reformed liturgy had not gained universal approval, and what the pope considers to be a significant number of Catholics continued to show that they *wanted* the availability of this earlier form of the Mass.

Perhaps more importantly, though, the pope made the point that “fidelity to the old Missal became an external mark of identity” for Catholic traditionalists, particularly for those who adhered to a movement founded after the Council by a French Archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre. This Lefebvrist movement, as a result of the illicit ordination by

the French archbishop of four other bishops, became, in 1988, the first and so far the only, major formal schismatic movement arising in the wake of Vatican Council II. Thus, one of Pope Benedict's principal motives in now allowing a return to the older form of the Mass, as he very clearly explains in his *motu proprio*, as well as in his accompanying letter to the bishops, is to try to reconcile all or at least some of the estimated 600,000 Catholics who are currently following the Lefebvrist Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), and who are consequently no longer in communion with the Catholic Church. In addition to the SSPX, there are a few other similar, smaller traditionalist groups out there that are also no longer in communion with the Catholic Church. The pope would like to reconcile these SSPX and other schismatics to the Church.

One of the recurring "demands" of the SSPX leadership over the years has been their claim that every Catholic priest ought to have the "right" to celebrate the traditional Mass freely, regardless of the Vatican II reforms. Pope Benedict XVI has thus, among other things, by means of *Summorum Pontificum*, essentially acceded to this SSPX claim, and has granted this "right" to celebrate the old Mass to all Catholic priests. Whether this will serve or help to reconcile the SSPX and other traditionalists separated from the Church remains to be seen. Benedict himself, of course, does not imagine that this is the only outstanding issue; he is quite well aware that "the reasons for the break... were at a deeper level" than simply the form of worship preferred. At the same time, however, he seems to have decided that the form of worship preferred must not continue to motivate separation from the communion of the Church—or to be an obstacle in the way of a possible return to the Church's communion.

As much or perhaps even more than his wish to reconcile Lefebvrist-type traditionalists to the Church, however, there is the fact that Benedict himself, before his election to the chair of Peter, quite often exhibited in his own writings his own great sympathy for the traditional liturgy and for those Catholics who, even while they remain loyal to and in communion with the Church, nevertheless prefer this traditional liturgy. They keenly regretted its replacement by the revised post-Vatican-II liturgy. In his letter to the bishops, the pope characterized such Catholics as desiring "to recover the form of the sacred liturgy that was dear to them. This occurred above all," he added, "because in many places celebrations were not faithful to the prescriptions of the new Missal, but the latter was actually understood as authorizing or even requiring creativity, which frequently led to deformations of the liturgy which were frequently hard to bear."

Here the pope, with characteristic Ratzingerian delica-

cy, touches upon what most knowledgeable Catholics have long since understood to have been some of the serious missteps and wrong turns which too often and too widely were made in the course of carrying out the liturgical reform desired by the Second Vatican Council. It cannot be denied, in fact, that this liturgical reform, though legitimate, and decreed by legitimate authority, was nevertheless in too many ways far from an unalloyed success. This was never something that the Church leadership was usually prepared to admit, but it was something that most Catholics had nevertheless experienced and were well aware of in the post-conciliar years.

For what the pope in his letter so delicately styled "creativity" was sometimes and perhaps even often a good deal more than just "creativity." Sometimes it involved liturgical abuses, even gross ones, that could occasionally even border on the sacrilegious, and cause one to wonder whether the perpetrators of what the pope was so mildly calling "deformations" really any longer themselves believed that they were truly offering worship to the Divine Majesty. These kinds of deformations, or abuses, raised questions in the minds of some Catholics about whether Vatican II and its reforms could even be considered legitimate. Although there has been great improvement since the early post-conciliar years in all this, these questions continue to represent an unpalatable fact about Vatican II and its reforms which the Church has had to try to come to grips with virtually since the end of the Council.

The mistakes and abuses which accompanied the Church's revision of the liturgy, in fact, have constituted a sore point for many Catholics which has persisted up to the present day. Votaries of the new liturgy, including probably most bishops and clergy, have been reluctant to acknowledge that there was any real problem. The official line has generally been that everything has been just fine; many have continued to take that line today; and hence anyone who has complained has customarily been taken to be "pre-conciliar" in orientation and hence has been ignored or disregarded. Occasionally a Roman document might concede that there was a problem here or there and call for a correction. Episcopal documents rarely did; and the experience of most of the faithful has therefore also been, as often as not, that their bishops tended to side with, or at least tolerate, the perpetrators of abuses as if these were legitimate features of the reformed liturgy.

Thus, to the dissatisfaction of many Catholics, there has sometimes been added an acute consciousness of *scandal*, for what the pope now frankly styles "deformations," which, have too often, unfortunately, been *allowed* in the post-conciliar Church.

No one has been more aware of all this than Pope Benedict himself. All along, as a theologian, an archbishop, and then as a cardinal, he has been one of the few prominent Church leaders willing to speak frankly about what was actually going on. He did so, for example, in his well-known 1985 book, *The Ratzinger Report*, in which liturgical “deformations,” among other things, were frankly recognized and denounced. The same thing is true in other writings of his, especially those on the subject of the liturgy. In his letter to the bishops, to take a case in point, he reminds us that: “I am speaking from experience since I too lived through that [post-conciliar] period with its hopes and confusions. I have seen how arbitrary deformations of the liturgy caused deep pain to individuals totally rooted in the faith of the Church.”

For Benedict XVI, then, the consequences stemming from the fact that the Church’s liturgical reforms have not always and in every respect been a complete success, and did not find complete acceptance in various important Catholic quarters, were very serious consequences. His opening up of a liturgical alternative by means of *Summorum Pontificum* now is thus neither a casual nor a superficial thing for him. At the same time, however, we should take careful note of the fact that he does *not* ascribe the problems he recognizes to any defects in the revised liturgy itself, as called for by the Council and enacted by the authority of the Church. Rather, he describes the deformations he deplores to a failure to be “faithful to the prescriptions of the new Missal.” The problem has not resided in the new form of the Mass but in the failure to celebrate it according to the established rules.

In other words, he has definitely not now reinstated the freedom to celebrate the old form more freely because he thinks there is any grave deficiency in the new form. It is true that in his rather copious writings on the subject, Joseph Ratzinger has been critical of what he has called “fabricated” or “man-made” liturgies, and even of such practices as the priest facing the people—liturgy should develop “organically,” he has consistently believed, and not just be put together by a committee or in accordance with somebody’s theories. He is nevertheless fully aware that the Second Vatican Council did call for a reform of the liturgy, and he does not reject the liturgy that was produced as a result of this conciliar call. Rather, he fully accepts and even treasures the reformed liturgy for its positive benefits, and he has plainly said so on more than one occasion. For example, in his 1981 book, *Feast of Faith* (published in English in 1986), Joseph Ratzinger wrote:

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me add that as far as its content is concerned (apart from

a few criticisms), I am very grateful for the new Missal, for the way it has enriched the treasury of prayers and prefaces, for the new eucharistic prayers and the increased number of texts for use on weekdays, etc., quite apart from the availability of the vernacular. But I do regard it as unfortunate that we have been presented with the idea of a new book rather than with that of continuity within a single liturgical history. In my view, a new edition will need to make it quite clear that the so-called Missal of Paul VI is nothing other than a renewed form of the same Missal to which Pius X, Urban VIII, Pius V and their predecessors have contributed right from the Church’s earliest history. It is of the very essence of the Church that she should be aware of her unbroken continuity throughout the history of faith, expressed in an ever present unity of prayer.

In the context of our present situation, it is worthwhile adding what the then archbishop of Munich then immediately went on to note in this book of his, *Feast of Faith*, namely, that “this awareness of continuity is destroyed just as much by those who ‘opt’ for a book supposed to have been produced four hundred years ago as by those who would like to be forever drawing up new liturgies. At bottom these two attitudes are identical...” And, again, in *Feast of Faith*, with regard to possible remedies for the perceived deformities, he writes that it would not “be right, after the upheavals of past years, to press for further external changes. Therefore, it seems all the more important to promote the kind of liturgical education which will enable people to participate in a proper inward manner...”

Elected to the chair of Peter, it seems that the author of *Feast of Faith* has now in *Summorum Pontificum* proceeded to implement some of the same ideas about which he formerly wrote. And in his letter to the Catholic bishops, he also, pertinently, wrote:

There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches that have developed in the Church’s faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place.

But the pope then went on to make a very significant point, one which must be clearly understood if the pur-

pose and scope of *Summorum Pontificum* is to be properly understood:

Needless to say, in order to experience full communion, *the priests of the communities adhering to the former usage cannot as a matter of principle exclude celebrating according to the new books.* The total exclusion of the new rite would not in fact be consistent with the recognition of its value and holiness (emphasis added).

We need to take special note here of the pope's requirement here that those availing themselves of the new freedom to celebrate the old Mass must accept the licitness and validity of the new Mass. The *motu proprio* further specifies that "priests who use the Missal of Blessed John XXIII must be qualified to do so and not juridically impeded" (Art. 4), in other words, they must be in good standing with the bishops; they cannot be separated or alienated from the bishops. However, these requirements could conceivably remain an obstacle in the way of reconciling at least some of the devotees of the old Mass, because there are those among them who do *not* recognize either the validity of the reformed liturgy or that of the Council which called for it.

By specifically including this requirement of acceptance of the new Mass, however, Benedict XVI has made clear in still one more way—besides designating the two forms as "ordinary" and "extraordinary"—that his primary intention was not to attempt to go back on the Council and its reforms in any way, or to bring about any kind of "restoration" of the *status quo ante*, as some have alleged. Rather, the pope has quite genuinely intended to foster what he considers to be legitimate liturgical pluralism in the Church, a position that he has long advocated. For example, in his *Ratzinger Report*, written more than twenty years earlier, the by-then cardinal-prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated that:

Prior to Trent a multiplicity of rites and liturgies had been allowed within the Church. The Fathers of Trent took the liturgy of the city of Rome and prescribed it for the whole Church; they only retained those Western liturgies which had existed for more than two hundred years. This is what happened, for instance, with the Ambrosian rite of the Diocese of Milan. If it would foster devotion in many believers and encourage respect for the piety of particular Catholic groups, I would personally support a return to the ancient situation, i.e., to a certain liturgical pluralism. Provided, of course, that the legitimate character of the reformed rites was emphatically

affirmed, and that there was a clear delineation of the extent and nature of such an exception permitting the celebration of the pre-conciliar liturgy.

This is exactly what Pope Benedict XVI has now effected more than twenty years later with his *motu proprio*. He has been nothing if not consistent in all this. He has carried his conviction in the matter to the point of insisting, in his letter to Catholic bishops accompanying his apostolic letter, that "it is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if they were 'two rites.' Rather, it is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite." The pope seems especially to want to insist on this point as the answer to critics who have contended that the *Novus Ordo*, or Mass of Paul VI, itself represented such a deep break with tradition as to be a separate "rite." He clearly does not accept this viewpoint.

Yet he himself, in the rather extensive quotation included above, nevertheless actually refers at one point to the "new rite"! Quite apart from the semantics or terminology being employed at the moment, it could well be that the long-term effect of the pope's action in all this could well be the legitimization of what could come to be considered a separate "Tridentine rite" in Latin in the Catholic Church. There are, after all, in the worldwide Catholic Church, numerous separate "rites" besides the Roman rite. Besides the historical Eastern rites, there is of very recent vintage, for example, the Anglican Use rite, where the Book of Common Prayer has been adapted for those former Anglicans who came into the Catholic Church along with their priests. "Liturgical pluralism" has long been a fact of life in the Catholic Church, in fact, and the Catholic Church is surely big enough to embrace it.

Only time and practice will show how the consequences of Pope Benedict's action in *Summorum Pontificum* will work themselves out. Liturgical changes of any kind always require time and usage in order to take hold. Failure to understand this was one of the things that helped bring about the dissatisfaction with the revised post-Vatican-II liturgy on the part of some Catholics. What cannot be doubted, however, is the high seriousness and the very careful thought which this pope has demonstrably put into his decision in his *motu proprio*. Contrary to what many press and media reports, and even some supposedly informed commentaries, have assumed and alleged about it, *Summorum Pontificum* was no fly-by-night or casual decision.

II.

Pope Benedict XVI's decision in his *motu proprio* entitled *Summorum Pontificum* to allow a freer celebration of the Holy Mass in the old Roman rite as it was celebrated prior to the reforms mandated by the Second Vatican Council will surely have consequences, some of which cannot perhaps be foreseen. This was to be expected. Nevertheless, we can certainly consider what some of those consequences might be.

First of all, we should note that the pope does not seem to have settled upon an exact vocabulary or terminology to describe the new state of affairs that he has brought about by his action. In his *motu proprio*, as well as in his letter to the Catholic bishops which accompanied it, he spoke variously of the "ordinary" and "extraordinary" forms of the Roman rite which, by his action, now seem to be firmly established on the basis of: first, the 1970 Missal of Pope Paul VI (further revised by Pope John Paul II in 2002); and then the 1962 Missal of Blessed Pope John XXIII as well. Both Missals now appear to be firmly established as authorized liturgical books for use in the Roman rite. It is not quite true, however, that they are *equally* established, as we shall see.

However, what the pope did not do was to refer to the old and new forms of the Roman rite using the terms that, at least in English, have in fact come into general use in the post-conciliar period. These terms are "Tridentine Mass" for the old form, and "New Order," or "*Novus Ordo*," for the new form. Pope Benedict himself, however, denies that there is any such thing as a "Tridentine Mass." In his book *Feast of Faith*, from which we have already quoted earlier, Joseph Ratzinger wrote that "there is no such thing as a 'Tridentine' liturgy, and until 1965, the phrase would have meant nothing to anyone. The Council of Trent did not 'make' a liturgy."

However that may be, the term "Tridentine Mass" has nevertheless now come into pretty general use to describe the pre-conciliar form of the Mass. This form of the Mass was codified and regularized by Pope St. Pius V following the Council of Trent, after all, and the term "Tridentine Mass" therefore does not seem inapt or wrong. In fact, the term seems to have caught on, and everybody knows what is meant by it when it is used. Similarly, when the term *Novus Ordo* or "New Order" is used, everybody knows exactly what is meant by it. So we shall not eschew the use of these terms, even though the pope himself does not employ them.

Furthermore, we should note that, while the celebration of the old form—the Tridentine Mass—is now to be allowed more freely, its use is not entirely unrestricted. For one thing, in the case of private or semi-private Masses, the Missal of Blessed John XXIII may *not* be used for the sacred Triduum—that is, from the Mass of the Lord's Sup-

per on Holy Thursday through the Good Friday services and on through the Masses of Easter Sunday (Art. 2). Yet this is the single greatest celebration of the Catholic faith, if anything is. It is significant that Pope Benedict XVI apparently does not consider the old form completely adequate to this solemn occasion. Moreover, elective Tridentine Masses may only be celebrated with no restrictions and no need for specific permission from the bishop if the priest is celebrating *without a congregation*. The *motu proprio* specifically says that the "right" of the priest to celebrate the traditional Mass applies only to "Masses celebrated without the people" (Art. 2).

At the same time, though, and perhaps somewhat illogically, any of the faithful who "of their own free will" wish to assist at such Masses celebrated "without the people," may do so (Art. 4). This rather strange provision seems to have been formulated in this way—on the one hand, the priest is supposed to be celebrating without the people, but on the other hand, the people may attend if they wish—in order to prevent the Tridentine Mass from becoming the only Mass offered to the people, the extraordinary form thereby becoming the ordinary form, as it were. This is not envisaged, nor indeed is it allowed. What is allowed is that these prescribed "private" Masses may be, in effect, transformed into "semi-private" Masses, at the wish of those people who desire to attend them of their own volition; but these Masses, for all of that, are quite clearly not to be considered equivalent to a "regular" parish Mass. The Tridentine Mass has thus *not* been made "equal" to the *Novus Ordo*, and it is certainly does not seem to be intended by the pope that it should replace the latter over time, regardless of what some of the more ardent votaries of the Tridentine Mass perhaps might wish.

Article 3 of *Summorum Pontificum* speaks of communities or institutes that might wish to celebrate the old form regularly. This must be decided by the communities in question "according to the norm of law and particular laws and statutes," which have thus in no way been abrogated by Pope Benedict's new provisions here.

"In parishes where there is a *stable* group of the faithful who adhere to the earlier liturgical tradition" (Art. 5.1; emphasis added), the pastor is supposed to "willingly accept" their request for a Tridentine Mass, although—another limitation—there may be only one such Mass on Sundays and feast days (Art. 5.2). It is clearly not expected that permission to celebrate the old form will lead to its becoming a parish's principal celebration; on the contrary, it seems to be taken for granted that the numbers opting for a Tridentine Mass will always be small and will consist mainly of what are perhaps rather curiously styled here as "stable" groups already preferring this form. Benedict XVI seems principally

to have in mind here existing groups already celebrating Tridentine Masses under the special “indult” that Pope John Paul II granted in 1984.

Requests for Tridentine Masses for weddings, funerals, and other special occasions are also supposed to be freely granted (Art. 5.3). I personally know of instances in the post-conciliar period where much unnecessary bad feeling and even hostility towards the Church was generated because a funeral Mass according to the Tridentine form was denied, for example, in cases where the deceased had indeed had a life-long devotion to that form. What could have been the harm in celebrating such a funeral Mass in such cases? Now, where legitimate requests for such a Mass are not granted, the faithful are supposed to be able to appeal to the bishop, who is “strongly requested to satisfy their wishes”; and if he cannot, “the matter should be referred to the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*” (Art. 7), established by Pope John Paul II in 1988 in Rome to oversee the Tridentine Masses authorized by that late pontiff’s indult. This *Ecclesia Dei* Commission in Rome remains very much in being and will henceforth presumably oversee the whole phenomenon of expanded Tridentine Masses under Benedict’s new dispensation. Bishops are now specifically allowed (and encouraged) to refer questions concerning the expanded permission to celebrate the old Mass to the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission (Art. 8). At the same time, the Commission itself seems to be the entity within the Roman Curia able to deal with whatever problems or situations that may now arise following the issuance of the *motu proprio*.

Another feature of Pope Benedict’s new and expanded authorization is that in the case of Tridentine Masses celebrated with congregations, the Scripture readings may be in the vernacular and may be taken from “editions recognized by the Holy See” (Art. 6). Of course, Scripture readings were already in the vernacular in most places before Vatican II, but some have interpreted this article to mean that they may now also be taken from the Lectionary for the Paul VI *Novus Ordo* Missal as well. This revised Lectionary has a three-year cycle of readings from both the Old and New Testaments in place of the old Tridentine one-year cycle taken from the New Testament only. But it is hard to see how its use could be combined with the use of the 1962 John XXIII Missal, where, for example, the old “Sundays after Pentecost” would not correspond to the new “Sundays in Ordinary Time.” Perhaps the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission plans to work on ways to integrate the two forms, but barring that it would seem that Article 6 simply requires any vernacular Scripture readings to be from a vernacular translation approved by the Holy See. Pope John Paul II had ruled, however, that the two rites could never be “intermingled.”

Benedict’s *motu proprio* includes yet another provision to the effect that “priests who use the Missal of Blessed John XXIII must be qualified to do so and not juridically impeded” (Art. 5.4). The wording of this provision is somewhat vague, but besides requiring that the priest be “in good standing,” it would seem to encompass also the question of whether a priest is *competent* to celebrate a Mass in Latin, that is, whether he knows sufficient Latin to do so, and also whether he is properly trained in the usages and rubrics of the Tridentine Mass. It is here that the bishop’s normal authority over the celebration of the Mass would seem to come back into full play, since it would seem to be the bishop’s responsibility to see that any priest wishing to celebrate the Tridentine Mass must in fact be qualified to do so.

This certainly cannot be assumed in the case of most priests today, for it has been a good while since thorough training in Latin has been a requirement for ordination. Many, perhaps most, of today’s younger priests, including many of the wonderful young “John Paul II priests” inspired in their vocations by the example of the late pope, would seem to be mostly *not* qualified to celebrate Tridentine Masses in Latin. Some of them, surely, know not a word of Latin!

Pope Benedict XVI appears to be fully aware of this situation. In his letter to the bishops, he notes, correctly, that “the use of the old Missal presupposes a certain degree of liturgical formation and some knowledge of the Latin language; neither of these is found very often.” The pope goes on to add, significantly: “Already from these concrete presuppositions, it is clearly seen that the new Missal will certainly remain the ordinary form of the Roman rite, not only on account of the juridical norms, but also because of the actual situation of the communities of the faithful.” Benedict quite evidently does *not* envisage a mass movement of the faithful back to the Tridentine Mass, but seems to be concerned, rather, with the proper celebration of the Mass in this form for those involved.

The requirement that the priest must be proficient in Latin if he is to celebrate the traditional form properly surely constitutes yet another reason why, as noted above, Article 8 urges the bishop to contact the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission in Rome if and when he is “unable” to satisfy a legitimate request to have a Tridentine Mass. Many and perhaps even most bishops today may not have any priests at all competent to say the Tridentine Mass properly. The same could be true of the pastor who is supposed to provide a Tridentine Mass to any “stable group” in his parish requesting it, according to Article 5.1 of the *motu proprio*. What Pope Benedict seems to envisage here, however, is that the *Ecclesia Dei*

Commission can assist bishops and pastors being asked to provide a Tridentine Mass by putting them in touch with such groups as the Priestly Society of Saint Peter composed of Tridentine-Mass priests who remain in communion with the Church. (Another avenue to follow here, of course, would be for interested diocesan priests to seek training in Latin and the Tridentine-Mass rubrics, as some seem to have done in the case of the “indult” Tridentine Masses allowed by Pope John Paul II.)

Pope Benedict XVI’s *motu proprio* includes a few other provisions, for example, pastors may use the older ritual in administering baptism, penance, marriage, and anointing (Art. 9.1), and bishops may do the same in administering confirmation (Art. 9.2). It is again significant, however, that *ordination* is not mentioned and is evidently not to be conferred according to the old form, since it is not listed along with the sacraments that are specifically mentioned here. It is evidently *not* contemplated, in other words, that there should now be created a new class of “Tridentine Mass” priests to take advantage of the new permission that Pope Benedict XVI has now granted.

The old Roman Breviary may again be used by clerics (Art. 9.3). Bishops may even erect special “Tridentine” parishes in their diocese if they judge this to be helpful or opportune (Art. 10). But it is certainly not required that this be done.

What emerges from all these provisions would seem to be the clear intention of Pope Benedict XVI to allow the revival of the pre-Vatican-II Mass and sacraments for those members of the Catholic faithful who strongly desire them—some of whom have been alienated from the Church in varying degrees in their absence. However, the pope not only does not appear to wish or expect a general or even perhaps a very widespread return to the old ritual; he appears to take for granted that the great majority of Catholics will continue to follow the reformed ritual of the Paul VI Mass in the vernacular. His primary motive, thus, truly does seem to be the reconciliation of disaffected and alienated Catholics who have not been won over to the reformed rite. But his action cannot really be classed as an attempt to turn back the clock, repudiate Vatican II, disfavor the *Novus Ordo*, or go back on the revision of the liturgical books that was, after all, decreed by an ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church a generation ago. Rather, the pope seems truly and sincerely to hold for what he calls “liturgical pluralism,” and he encourages at the same time greater sympathy for traditionalist-type Catholics favoring the old form than has been the case up to now in the post-conciliar era.

The action he has taken in *Summorum Pontificum* has thus hardly been either ill considered or in haste. The problems he is addressing have been around for a good while—for most of the post-conciliar era, as a matter of fact—and they are problems that the Church’s leadership, by and large, has been reluctant to face. It is interesting to compare, for example, the action Benedict XVI has now taken with the actions that his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, thought that he had to take in order to deal with essentially the same problem of disaffected and alienated Catholics on the traditionalist side.

What Pope John Paul II decided that he had to do when significant numbers of Catholics made clear their profound dissatisfaction with the Vatican II reforms as they were experienced by them in their parishes—and also when not insignificant numbers of those same disaffected and alienated Catholics were joining up with schismatic groups that among other things celebrated the Tridentine Mass—what Pope John Paul II believed he had to do in this situation was to allow—actually under quite limited conditions, it turned out—the licit celebration of the old form of the Mass, the Tridentine Mass, as we have been calling it here.

These conditions were first laid out in a document, *Quattor Abhinc Annos*, which the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued on October 3, 1984. This document was the result of an inquiry begun four years earlier by the Holy See asking about the reception of the Missal of Paul VI by the faithful and investigating reports of “opposition to the reform that may need to be overcome.” At first it seems to have been concluded that this opposition was negligible, but this was a conclusion that was impossible to maintain in the face of increasing adherence by tradition-minded Catholics to Tridentine Mass groups such as the SSPX headed by Archbishop Lefebvre.

Actually, except for the well-known, almost legendary traditional Roman slowness, this inquiry should probably have been instituted *years* sooner than it was. However that may be, permission was eventually though reluctantly granted to bishops in *Quattor Abhinc Annos* to grant an indult allowing the celebration of the old Mass according to the Missal of 1962 under certain strict conditions (called norms). These norms were as follows:

1. There must be unequivocal, even public evidence that the priest and people have no ties with those who impugn the lawfulness and doctrinal soundness of the Roman Missal promulgated in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.
2. The celebration of Mass in question must take place exclusively for the benefit of those who petition it; the celebration must be in a church or oratory designated by

the diocesan bishop (but not in parish churches, unless, in extraordinary instances the bishop allows this); the celebration may take place on those days and in those circumstances approved the bishop, whether for an individual instance or as a regular occurrence.

3. The celebration is to follow the Roman Missal of 1962 and must be in Latin.
4. In the celebration there is to be no intermingling of the rites or texts of the two Missals.
5. Each bishop is to inform this Congregation of the concessions he grants and, for one year from the date of the present indult, of the outcome of its use.
6. The pope, who is the father of the entire Church, grants this indult as a sign of his concern for all his children without prejudice to the liturgical reform that is to be observed in each ecclesiastical community (*Quattor Abhinc Annos*).

For a document that was supposed to be a concession, this one certainly seems to be quite severe in both tone and content. It does not seem that very many indults were granted (or requested) under these norms, in fact, and, indeed, some of the traditionalist groups celebrating the Tridentine Mass were quite unwilling to accept the conditions laid down. Nor does it seem that very many bishops were willing to attempt to deal with groups which they saw as celebrating illicit “motel Masses” outside the normal jurisdiction of the Church. Indeed, it was the Catholic bishops nearly everywhere who, after the Council, had quite unceremoniously “banned” the old Mass as soon as the liturgical reforms came into effect after the Council. Pope Benedict XVI says the old Mass never was “abrogated”; what he apparently means is that the Holy See never formally abrogated it. As a practical matter, however, it was to all intents and purposes “banned” in practice by the bishops nearly everywhere from the time that the reformed liturgy came in. Nor were the bishops alone here: the by-now pretty standard collection entitled *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P., includes among the post-conciliar documents a Note on the Obligation to Use the New Roman Missal, *Conferentiarum Episcopaliū*, issued on October 28, 1974, by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome. This document appears to assume that the old form can no longer be used, whether or not it was ever formally “abrogated.” The bishops certainly had good reason to believe that their actions were in conformity with the policy of Rome.

At the Council itself, the American bishops had not been in the forefront of those pressing for liturgical reform or for the vernacular Mass. On the contrary, those American bishops who happened to speak out at the Council on the subject were generally ardent defenders of the Latin Mass.

Once the reforms were put in place, however, most American bishops suddenly became quite adamant in rejecting any indult allowing the celebration of the Tridentine Mass; and many if not most of them rejected the idea of celebrating even the *Novus Ordo* in Latin as well. No suitable liturgical books were ever issued in Latin for the proper celebration of the *Novus Ordo*. There should not really have been any problem about this, but in the minds of the American bishops of the day, apparently there was. And so, suddenly, Latin itself was “banned”; it became *verboten*. It might still be, officially, “the language of the Church,” but it was nevertheless “banned” for all practical purposes in the Church’s official worship in America, as well as in many other places. As a result, the response to *Quattor Abhinc Annos*, in America at any rate, was really quite minimal. The American bishops of the day could apparently not find any way to sympathize with anybody who might even *want* a Latin Mass.

Thus, authorized Latin Tridentine Masses under John Paul II’s 1984 “indult” were really quite minimal in the United States. Nor was the problem limited to America. In his *God and the World*, published in 2002, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed that:

Anyone who nowadays advocated the continuing existence of this [Latin] liturgy or takes part in it is treated like a leper; all tolerance ends here. There has never been anything like this in history; in doing this, we are despising and proscribing the Church’s whole past. How can one trust her present if things are that way? I must say, quite openly, that I don’t understand why so many of my episcopal brethren have to such a great extent submitted to this rule of intolerance, which for no apparent reasons, is opposed to making the necessary inner reconciliation within the Church.

Thus, the future Pope Benedict XVI on the subject of the traditional Mass. For his part, he clearly wished to make “the necessary inner reconciliation within the Church.” It should have been clear long before he was elected to the papacy, in fact, where he stood on such matters; he has certainly shown where he stands now with the promulgation of his *motu proprio*. His predecessor had only allowed the licit celebration of the pre-Vatican-II Mass on a much more limited basis. Benedict was prepared, however, as it turned out, and as we have now seen, to expand this authorization quite significantly in *Summorum Pontificum*.

In the case of Pope John Paul II, it was the disobedient and unlawful ordination by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of four bishops on June 30, 1988, that finally moved the

Polish pope, two days later, on July 2, 1988, to issue his *motu proprio* entitled *Ecclesia Dei*, by which he announced the excommunication of Archbishop Lefebvre and the four new bishops that the latter had illicitly ordained. It was at the same time and by means of the same document, of course, that John Paul established the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission. It was intended to reconcile as many of the followers of the now accomplished Lefebvre schism as possible to communion with the Catholic Church. The pope stated in *Ecclesia Dei* that the task of the Commission was “to collaborate with the bishops, with the Departments of the Roman Curia and with the circles concerned for the purpose of facilitating full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, religious communities, or individuals until now linked to the fraternity founded by Mons. Lefebvre who may wish to remain united with the successor of Peter in the Catholic Church...”

Significantly, Pope John Paul II also emphasized in *Ecclesia Dei* that “respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition by a wide and generous application of the directives already issued some time ago by the Apostolic See for the use of the Roman Missal according to the typical edition of 1962”—the pope was referring here, of course, to *Quattuor Abhinc Annos*.

Thus, it was only in response to an actual schism that Pope John Paul II finally called for “a wide and generous application” of the indult provisions allowing the celebration of the Tridentine Mass that he had authorized narrowly four years earlier. With the encouragement of the new *Ecclesia Dei* Commission, celebration of the indult Tridentine Mass then did become somewhat broadened. In particular, some members of the faithful, including not a few priests, *did* become reconciled to the Church, once it was clear that the Lefebvrists were now actually in schism. So long as Archbishop Lefebvre himself was still engaged in negotiations with the Holy See concerning his status in the Church, many tradition-minded Catholics, and, especially, some of the priests among them, found it possible to reconcile adherence to his movement with their own consciences. Once the archbishop was formally excommunicated, however, this was no longer possible.

This was the situation which Pope Benedict XVI inherited. He evidently thus saw the issuance of his *motu proprio* as the logical and necessary follow-up to the one his predecessor had issued almost two decades earlier. In his letter to the bishops, Benedict explained that John Paul

had “primarily wanted to assist the Society of St. Pius X to recover full unity with the successor of Peter, and sought to heal a wound experienced even more painfully. Unfortunately,” Benedict added, “this reconciliation has not yet come about. Nonetheless, a number of communities have gratefully made use of the possibilities provided by the *motu proprio*.”

However, as Pope Benedict also pointed out, his predecessor’s actions had not included “detailed prescriptions” or “juridical norms” for the continued celebration of the older form of the Roman rite; and hence, another one of his motives for issuing *Summorum Pontificum* was to remedy this lack. The new document now does contain the necessary “detailed prescriptions” and “juridical norms” for the regular celebration of the Tridentine Mass. In addition, as we have seen, the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission remains in existence to oversee the implementation of the new provisions and help in the solution of any difficulties that might be encountered. Bishops are specifically requested to seek the assistance of the Commission if problems or difficulties arise for them in the carrying out of the new provisions (Arts. 7 & 8), and it is to be hoped that they will do so rather than allow the pope’s new prescriptions to go by the board for lack of anyone to carry them out.

Finally, Pope Benedict XVI stressed in his letter to the bishops that “the new norms do not in any way lessen your own authority and responsibility, either for the liturgy or for the pastoral care of your faithful. Each bishop is the moderator of the liturgy in his own diocese...” The pope also invited the bishops to report to him on how the *motu proprio* has worked out for them three years after the effective date of the document itself, which was to be on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, 2007. No doubt this date will mark only the beginning of what must be considered the new liturgical era inaugurated by Pope Benedict in his *motu proprio* entitled *Summorum Pontificum*, according to which both an “ordinary” and an “extraordinary” form of the Roman rite will now henceforth be authorized. ✠

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From the Carnal to the Incorruptible: Margaret of Cortona, a Saint for Our Times

By Anne Gardiner

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Born in 1247 in Laviano, Tuscany, Margaret of Cortona became one of those saints whose body is incorruptible centuries after her death. What is even more surprising about her, what makes her a special saint for our times, is that her spiritual journey began in sexual sin and ended in virginal purity. Indeed she is a Magdalen to whom, paradoxically, Christ promised a seat among the heavenly choir of virgins.

Her story demonstrates that purity in the sight of God is something different from what the world conceives. Not only is Margaret's spiritual journey a revelation in itself, but in addition she received many revelations from our Lord regarding such matters as wicked bishops, sexual sins, unworthy reception of Communion, the dark night of the soul, and the reality of hell. Within a decade of her death on 22 February 1297, her confessor Friar Giunta Bevegnati compiled the *Life and Revelations of Margaret of Cortona* at the command of the inquisitor, drawing mostly from the accounts she had dictated during her life in obedience to her spiritual directors. Friar Giunta's work was revised by another friar who had directed her,¹¹ so that the information we have about Margaret is remarkably well attested.

Our Lord told Margaret that he had clothed her in "splendor" to "give even the most despairing full confidence in divine mercy." Her story was meant "to glorify the little ones, to justify sinners, and to make precious stained and detestable objects." In that day impure women were seen as forever "stained and detestable," but our Lord declared, "I have made you the mirror of sinners" and the "trumpet" of "fruitful mercy." Just as her early life had "cried out" against him, so now her repentance and holiness would everywhere "cry and call to penance" sinners who would learn from her "that I am full of mercy."

For nine years Margaret had lived in sin. It is thought that she was seventeen when she eloped with a young cavalier—perhaps the son of Guglielmo di Pecora, lord of Valiano—who took her to his castle near Montepulciano and promised to marry her, but never did. Even then, it is said, she cared for the poor and dreamed of a life of virtue. When her partner was murdered on a journey and she was left to fend for herself, she promptly returned all the jewels he had

given her to his relatives and set out for her father's house.²² But there, at the instigation of a stepmother who had never loved her, her father shut the door in her face.³³ Margaret sat under a fig tree and fought off a temptation to look for "rich and voluptuous masters" who would love her for her beauty. She prayed to Christ and asked him to be her master, father, spouse, and Lord. In answer he filled her with an impulse to go to the Friars Minor at Cortona.

She went and asked to be admitted to the third order of Saint Francis. A three-year probation ensued, for she was young, beautiful, and perhaps inconstant. When she finally received the habit of the Franciscans, Friar Giunta says, "This new Magdalene desired nothing but to unite herself intimately to the King of the world, by meditation, prayers, tears, and fasts." She heard Mass daily, recited the Divine Office, and practiced the greatest austerities. First she served as midwife to the noble ladies of Cortona, later she nursed the sick-poor, and lastly she lived as a contemplative.

GOOD CONFESSION

Our Lord began to visit her, addressing her as *poverella*, "my poor child."⁴⁴ After a time, she asked him when he would call her "my daughter." He replied that he could not call her "daughter" when she was still the "daughter of sin," but when she had made a general confession he would number her among his daughters. Margaret prayed to make a "perfect confession" and brought to mind the sins of her previous life for which she had not "sufficiently accused herself." Her general confession to Father Giunta lasted eight days, after which she went up to Communion with "a halter round her neck, like a criminal." Our Lord met her there and called her "My daughter." At the word she fainted in a transport of joy, and though some women pulled her hair, thinking she was only pretending, she remained insensible.

Later our Lord said, "Know, O My Daughter, that a confession so general and detailed as yours is a special grace that I have granted you." Since he intended now to make her a "light to penetrate the guiles of darkness," she was henceforth to keep pure the book of her conscience in which he wrote his "lessons" and to guard the throne of her soul, his "resting-place." He commanded her "to judge and despise none; and above all, to guard yourself against a feeling of rancor and bitterness towards any person whatever." If she wanted to "know" him, she had to love him ardently as her Creator and love all creatures from the depths of her heart, including

the “infidels.” She was to go to daily confession to Father Giunta, “whom she feared most” because he would chide her “more than the others,” and “lay bare” her life so that “no temptation or deceit may take you by surprise.”

As Margaret grew in holiness people came from afar to have her touch them, but she refused, saying her touch would worsen their conditions. Even so, a possessed man was delivered within sight of Cortona, the demon declaring that he could not “bear the presence of Margaret, whose prayers increase my fire.” Our Lord revealed to Margaret the secrets of many hearts, and Father Giunta made use of this knowledge in the confessional, asking prudent questions and uncovering sins that his penitents were too ashamed to confess. Our Lord also revealed to Margaret the faults of her confessor, advising Giunta first “to be less pompous and more decisive, to abhor the praises of men, and not to hasten through the Mass,” and later urging him to be more “condescending and agreeable to sinners” when he preached.

HUMILITY

One time Margaret grieved over how “late” she had begun to love her Redeemer, but our Lord answered: “My daughter, late and early did you begin your penitent life; late as to time, but early as to the fervor of your love.” Then he added, “love Me, my little flower, whom I have placed in the garden of the ever-blessed Francis and made the instrument of my grace.” Despite such assurances Margaret ranked herself among the “vilest of living beings.” Once, when the devil tempted her to pride by enumerating all who revered her, she ran out of her cell, awakened her neighbors with cries, and accused herself of her past life. She even wanted to go back to Montepulciano —where she had once walked about with jewels in her hair “rejoicing in the wealth of a man who was not her husband” —but this time as a beggar with a shaven head, led by a woman who would denounce her for her former life. Father Giunta forbade this mortification for the danger of it, for despite all her austerities, Margaret was still beautiful.

On a certain Christmas-day her guardian angel listed all the gifts Margaret had received, including “humility with regard to your reputation,” and declared that Christ admitted her to his “nuptials” with “a ring.” Then our Lord came and called her “My Spouse” and said “I am the Spouse Whom alone you love, and I dwell with you.” But he also warned her to prepare for great afflictions. Already some friars in Cortona thought her deluded and some women openly reviled her. She was to bear all this with patience, for “many have doubted Me, the true God and the Son of the living God.” She was to endure their “contempt and ridicule” meekly, for “I remained unknown to the end of My life, and the world supposed that I had failed in My mission.” If

she suffered “from the murmurs of men,” she was to recall “that they murmured also against Me, the true and sovereign Good.” His very Apostles doubted him: “On account of My sweats and of the insults offered Me, My apostles used to murmur oftener than the Scriptures relate.” At times they asked themselves, “With whom are we?”

Calling her “My sister,” he said this humiliation served in the place of “martyrdom,” and he urged her to desire it, for “I, the Lord of all things, abased Myself below My creatures; hence My servants shall think themselves the vilest, and shall desire abasement.” He also told her to “prepare for sickness,” for as “I had no rest in this life, no more ought you.” When Margaret began to complain that she was like wheat under the flail in her afflictions, he replied that if she served him “faithfully,” no affliction would “pierce” her. But when she asked several times to be comforted with the assurance that she was saved, he refused: “You shall not have a full assurance, until you are enjoying the glory of My Kingdom.” Without it she would labor “with more zeal” for salvation. The “full confidence” she wanted was not to be had in “this life.”

THE DEVIL

Besides all these divine visitations, Margaret received other visits from beyond, as when departed souls came, by divine permission, to ask for her help —in particular, two murdered shoemakers who were in “great torments” in purgatory for having pretended “benevolence by deceitful words of regard.” The devil also paid her visits in various forms —a serpent, a four-footed beast, a human being, or an angel of light. He would flatter her with her growing fame, enumerate her past sins, threaten hell, or announce that her joy was an illusion. He even came to her cell once leaping about, singing obscene songs, and asking her to join him. When she wept and “recommended her whole heart to our Lord,” he hurled against her a volley of insults and imprecations. After such intrusions, our Lord would arrive to comfort her, telling her to “fear nothing,” for she was his “little flower” —“I have planted you, My daughter, in the garden of My love.” When she urged him not to lower himself for “so vile a creature” as herself, who was “nothing but darkness under the heavens,” he assured her she would be “a light in the world” and a “bait” to catch “fishes that swim in the waters of the world.”

CORRUPT CHRISTIANS

In these revelations, our Lord complained much to Margaret about corrupt Christians. He declared that “Since the Redemption, the world has never been so much in want of My compassion as at present; men never cease to heap sin upon sin. I do not wish to lose those souls redeemed at so high a price.” Indeed, he said that vice was now so widespread that if tears were possible in heaven, he and his saints

would weep over “the state of so many Christians,” just as he did over Jerusalem. He was especially grieved over bad bishops: “Where is Herod, who derides me? In every wicked prelate.” And over active homosexuals: “Who are they that, after other torments, offer Me gall, myrrh, and vinegar, at the very moment when My soul is about to leave My Body? They who revel in the pangs of those nameless vices against nature, which I have extirpated by My birth.” Another time, too, he groaned over homosexuality as “the nameless vice, which was chastised by My Nativity.” To this he joined a lament over the use of contraception by married Christians: “I groan over those who make criminal use of marriage, and who ought to be called adulterers rather than married people.” He also grieved over unjust “merchants,” “corrupt judges,” and “evil counselors,” as well as over an “infinite number of usurers, whose plunder shall be severely punished.”

In another vision Margaret saw homosexuals among the sinners in purgatory suffering a pain “most nearly approaching” to damnation: these were “men stained with the nameless vice, but they ended their life in sincere repentance, and with the firm intention of renouncing their sins.” Yet they did not suffer as much as bad priests who had repented: “Besides this hell-like pain, there is in purgatory a worse one, that of “souls stamped with My character, and this is the most cruel of all.”

Our Lord mourned that he had “few soldiers” fighting vigorously for the honor of his “Name,” but he had many who, created in “My own image,” preferred everlasting torments to the glory promised them. Although he had carried the “chains of their sins” like a slave, they were running voluntarily into “eternal perdition.” When Margaret pleaded for mercy for them, he assured her that he constantly pursued them “in the accents of my mercy, to save them from perishing, and to you do I complain of them, for I have redeemed them by My Precious Blood.” Yet though he sent his angels to call them to penance, the angels could not stay continually, due to “the stench of their sins.” He urged Margaret to “weep over My mercy, which cries out night and day, and which is more despised than the dunghill.”

Calling her “daughter of the Holy Ghost,” he declared that “never since the period of the Redemption” were so many going down to the “pains of hell as now.” He asked her three times, “Do you love Me?” The third time she replied that she believed no one had ever loved him as he deserved. Our Lord answered ruefully: “you speak the truth.”

Margaret asked why he told her these things. Our Savior answered, “it is long since there has been a woman to whom I have revealed such mighty things; nor is there a person alive today so interiorly afflicted as you are.” Ever since her conversion she had been “careful” to heal his “wounds.” He

called on her to make reparation: “Love Me, for those who love Me now are few in number; serve your Creator, for there are few who wish to serve Me; praise Me, for small is the number of those who seriously think of praising Me.” Christians are piling sin upon sin, he mourned, and “the nauseous odor of their vices” has even “ascended to My Father.”

IRREVERENT COMMUNIONS

Our Lord complained bitterly to Margaret about the “irreverence” of those who “touch Me every day without loving Me or knowing Me.” He compared these communicants, who are “not ashamed to touch Me with soiled hands,” to Judas his betrayer. In fact, there were now many such betrayers among Christians: “My daughter, there are today many like Judas; I allow them to treat with Me, and receive Me in this sacrament.” Of such persons he declared that if “sorrow could find entrance to Me their God, I would cry out and burst into tears at the sight of their horrible vices, when they communicate. They crucify Me again by receiving Me unworthily; and give Me a drink more bitter than that given Me by the Jew.”

He returned again to the offensiveness and danger of bad communions: “I am grievously offended in communion by persons of the world, and by their lives. Woe to the souls that sin unceasingly, and dare to receive Me without correcting their faults; there shall be a strict account for them at a future day.” A sobering thought for our times.

Even so, our Lord invited Margaret to receive him every day, explaining his invitation thus: “you are My creature, and I am your Creator; you are My daughter, and I am your Father. You are the elect, and I am your Beloved chosen from amid all. I am your Lord; you are, I shall not say My servant, but My companion. In Me you are become white in innocence, and ruddy in love and charity. Fear not to receive Me every day; for you have humbly and devoutly prepared repose for Me in your soul.” Another time, he urged her to daily Communion by saying, “In your soul I find a seat of perfume and repose.”

When she received the Eucharist, Margaret’s face was bathed in tears and afterwards wore an “angelic smile.” This was her post-communion prayer: “O God, my soul is now greater than the world, since Thou art therein, Thou whom the heavens and the earth cannot contain.” She once asked our Lord if she might take communion after Mass to “hide from the looks and praises of men the inebriation of her spirit,” but was refused. One time, being weak, she asked to stay in her cell, but our Lord said, “Continue to hear Mass in the Church of your ever-blessed Father Saint Francis; there you can adore Me with humility and meditate on Me between the hands of My priests.” He explained that in communion lay “the great source” of her “salvation and comfort” and that

he gave her “soul” a “new light after every communion.”

Once when her humility made her abstain from communion, Christ reproached her: “your heart is purified in such a manner that, not only do I allow you, but I even command you to receive me often.” She feared her soul was not yet “freed from the stain of its sins,” but he said “no grave fault remained to be atoned for,” though she was to guard “against every imperfection.” Another time he rebuked her for not receiving on Fridays as a penance: “Is not this the day on which I united Myself most closely to mankind by charity? Stretched on the wood of the Cross, I embraced, with immense love, entire humanity, as a father embraces his only son.”

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

Calling Margaret “My daughter, My sister, My companion,” our Lord began to warn her that her greatest trial was coming and that it would “proceed directly from Me; for there is no greater trial than the sensible privation of My presence in a soul.” Again, he warned, “My daughter, I must withdraw from you My presence.” During this ordeal, she was to recall the sufferings of his Mother, during “the time that she lived in the world without Me, and deprived of My presence.” He explained the manner of his absence: “I shall be, and I shall not be, with you. Clothed in my grace, you shall think yourself stripped thereof, and while I dwell within you I shall do so in such a manner that you will not know Me.” Yet in this nightfall she was to trust, for “when you think I have abandoned you, I am with you to guard you from temptation.” Though her afflictions would “multiply,” she would “serve” him by this suffering.

Soon Margaret began to bewail the “absence” of her Lord and to grow fearful. He explained, “I steal from you to increase the value of your crown, and to make you understand more clearly what you are of yourself without me.” He also said that he had “established her in fear to prepare for the fulfilment of things predicted in relation to her” and that she would henceforth “lead her life and end it in fear.” This was related to the “glory” meant for her, for our Lord addressed her now as “daughter of tribulation, glory, and greatness.” Later in this dark night he called her “Daughter of perfect faith” and summoned her to “praise Me and love Me, and serve your Creator who has given you such faith.” Evidently she had received a huge increment of faith, unbeknownst to her. At Pentecost he told her plainly that she had just been given the “greatest grace,” though “unperceived” by her.

Besides all these revelations, our Lord also taught Margaret to regard Saint Joseph as a model of purity. He told her he would be pleased if every day she gave special praise to “the ever-blessed and virginal Saint Joseph, My most generous foster-father,” offering him homage with this thought: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” He also recom-

mended the “Ave,” urging her constantly to praise his Mother, the immaculate Virgin

So well did Margaret grow in holiness under divine tutelage that after she died her face was “illuminated with angelic light,” and a “marvelous perfume” and “interior delight” was experienced by those assisting her. Afterwards, there were other miracles.

She was buried in a church above the city of Cortona called at the time St. Basil, but later rebuilt with more magnificence and dedicated to her name: “There her body remains enshrined to this day, incorrupt, in a silver shrine over the high altar.”⁵⁵ Honored as a *beata* from the time of her death, the “little flower of the Friars Minor” was canonized on 16 May 1728.

With regard to her place of immortal glory in heaven — our Lord had revealed it once to Margaret on the feast day of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. He showed her that she would have a “seat” in the midst of the Seraphim, among “the virgins burning with charity.” Amazed, Margaret asked him how this could be, since she was not a virgin. Our Lord replied, “your contrition and your sorrow will restore you to your virginal purity.” She then asked if Magdalen was there. Our Lord informed her that “After the Virgin Mary and Catherine the Martyr, there is none above Magdalen in the choir of virgins.” Thus it was revealed to Margaret that God does not view purity as the world does. Here was opened for her and for others after her something beyond thought or hope — a great shining trajectory leading from sexual sin back to “virginal purity,” a road going from the carnal to the incorruptible.

Margaret of Cortona —saint for our times —pray for us. ✠

ENDNOTES

1. *Life and Revelations of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, translated with Mgr Luquet's Introduction to his French Version, by F.M'Donogh Mahony (London: Burns and Oates; Dublin: M. H. Gill & Sons, 1883), xi-xii. The attestation attached to the book, dated 15 February 1308, was in the hand of her confessor Father Giunta. He wrote that he had compiled her biography “by order of Father John of Castigliona, anti-heretical inquisitor.” It had been revised by others, including Father Ubaldo of Colle, “one of her confessors.” The French version appeared in 1858.
2. This guess at the identity of her lover is found in the 1910 *Catholic Encyclopedia* article on her, based on the original printed edition of her *Life and Revelations* in Latin and Italian, published by da Pelago in 1793, along with twelve “dissertations” on her life and times. In 1897 a new edition of da Pelago was published in Siena by Crivelli, but without those “dissertations.”
3. Her own mother had died when she was seven, and her father had remarried two years later, to a woman who is said never to have shown her affection.
4. As a result she instituted a congregation of tertiary sisters known as “le poverelle” to care for the sick-poor.
5. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910).

An Address: On Making Friends with St. Thomas

by James V. Schall, S. J.
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An Address Given at Thomas Aquinas College
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“Anyway, Walker Percy early in his way in the world came down with TB and had to be confined for a period during which he and St. Thomas became friends....”

—Flannery O’Connor, August 24, 1957.²¹

“The good of the universe is the reason why God wills each particular good in the universe.”

—Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, I, 86, 3.

“As compared with many other saints, and many other philosophers, he (St. Thomas) was avid in his acceptance of Things; in his hunger and thirst for Things. It was his special spiritual thesis that there really are things; and not only the Thing; that the many existed as well as the One.”

—G. K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, 1933³²

PART I

The morning on which I began thinking of what to say during this lecture, I received an e-mail from, of all places, Romania, from someone I never heard of. Let me read the letter to you. The letter began: “I hope this letter will find you ‘in peace and in good.’” The writer tells me the phrase, “peace and good,” is an expression from St. Francis of Assisi. The writer next gives me his name. He is twenty-nine years old. Why is he writing to Schall from Romania? The reason is this:

“I am studying for my doctoral thesis—*Political Humanism of Thomas Aquinas*—and I searched in (the) network for bibliographies. In this way I found your (Aquinas) articles. Why (write on) Thomas Aquinas? Because I was looking for something to help my people, my country. Last, but not the least, I studied theology and I am Roman Catholic. Now, in the library of our university is nothing about Thomas Aquinas....”

During the Marxist era, we know, many libraries took

a big hit when it came to keeping and acquiring important texts, particularly Christian ones. The young man wondered what I would advise him to do. I suppose the most immediate answer to such a query would either be 1) to search out a library in which the works of Aquinas are found, or 2) to change your topic of study.

But I could not help but sensing here a certain poignancy on hearing of a library someplace in this world lacking any work of Aquinas. As much has been written about Aquinas as about almost any other writer in history. Moreover, Aquinas himself, without needing any secondary sources, left us enough to read of his own writings such that it would take most of our lives just to assimilate them. Likewise, I was also touched that a young man in Romania would instinctively look, even while not knowing much of him, to Thomas Aquinas as a source to help his people and his country. I think all of us have a kind of third sense, even if, as is the case of this young man, we do not know his works directly, that Aquinas has something of more than ordinary importance to tell us. The first and greatest service that we can do for our country, any country, is to tell the truth. Aquinas said this same thing about the best service we could render to our friends. No one will assist us more in this endeavor, including the very effort to state what truth is once we find it, than Thomas Aquinas.

The Seventh of March, 1274 is the anniversary of the death of Thomas Aquinas at Fossanova, a place south of Rome that I once visited. Josef Pieper, as you know, among many others, has often reflected on the fact that Aquinas died relatively young, at forty-nine, leaving not a few of his works uncompleted. Had he died at ninety-nine, I suspect, the same thing would have happened. He would have still left many works unfinished. “Has anyone,” we ask ourselves, “ever really completed everything he set out to do in this world?”

Yet, as Christians, we might wonder, on the contrary, whether anyone, at his death, has *not* completed what he was sent into this world to do? “The good of the universe is the reason why God wills each particular good in the universe,” as I cited in the beginning from St. Thomas. A passage like that, I suppose, is both upsetting—as we recall the definition of evil as the lack of a good that ought to be there—and consoling, as it means that any evil that in fact happens in the universe falls under the same law. It

is permitted for the good of the universe. Out of it, good will come. Or as John Paul II put it, “the limit imposed on evil, of which man is both perpetrator and victim, is ultimately Divine Mercy.”⁴³ And it is Aquinas who tells us that the universe is initially created not in justice but in mercy (I, 21, 4). God does will the universe and each particular good in it. He chooses to give rational creatures wills, without which one essential good in the universe could not exist. This is the good without which there would not be much sense in having a universe in the first place: namely, free response

This same point is why, I think, Chesterton could say of Aquinas that he was an “avid” acceptor of things. He hungered and thirsted for them. The things that we encounter in the world are real and not, as such, in competition with the One who is most Real. Rather the many things for which we are avid and thirst also point to what they are not, by letting us know what they are, by letting us know *what is*. The mystery of evil includes the fact that it can only “exist” or be present in what is otherwise good, in what remains in it that is worthy of being. The recognition that the things that are not God, the finite things for which we are avid and desirous, are definitely not God, is itself, at the same time, both a cause of joy and of longing.

PART II

In a *Peanuts* sketch from December, 1954, Charlie Brown is seen sitting on the floor soberly examining what looks like a toy horn. Brightly, Lucy stands slightly bending over him, to ask, “Charlie Brown, what do you think the odds are that you and I will be married some day?” Quickly, Charlie snaps back, “I’d say about one hundred million to one!” Lucy turns her back on him to walk away, but adds, “Schroeder figured only about ten million to one...” Lucy, we recall, posed, over his piano, the same future marital question to Schroeder. She received about the same results. Still sitting on the floor calculating the difference in these odds, Charlie says lamely, “He did?” Then, as Lucy turns around to face him again, Charlie angrily leaps to his feet. He thrusts his fist in the air while yelling defiantly, “THAT TRAITOR!”

What I want to speak about with you, in some way, relates to this amusing scene in which Lucy van Pelt and Charlie Brown discuss their relationship, now and in the future. As we know in retrospect, unlike ourselves, Lucy and Charlie never grew up to check the final odds. We outsiders suspect that they deserve each other. Now Schroeder and Charlie are also friends. Lucy is proposing perhaps the most intimate and lasting kind of friendship. This brings me to the topic of my remarks.

For almost thirty years now, I have had the pleasure, each semester, of having a class of some ninety or so students. I do not myself much believe in what I call the “evolution” of student intelligence theory. That is, I think that most of the students I had in my first class some time ago were as bright and perceptive as those in the most recent classes, and vice versa. I tend to think that the vast mechanisms by which we statistically compare student intelligences one with another over generations are largely irrelevant. It is rather like comparing the IQs of Michael the Archangel and Lucifer. The difference is not in their relatively equal IQ score, whatever it is called, but in what is done with one’s intelligence, bright or dull. The intelligent and the holy are not interchangeable, but neither are they necessarily opposed to each other. Remembering what Augustine said about pride, we recall that, each in his own way, the intelligent can be unholy and the ignorant blessed.

The more I read Aristotle and Plato, the more I am convinced that for most students what they learn or do not learn, particularly about the highest things, is a moral question, not an IQ level question. Rather often we choose not to know things, especially philosophical things, because we instinctively see that, if taken seriously, they will lead us to change our lives, which we are reluctant to do. We want our minds and our actions to correspond. But we do not want to change. So we escape to another philosophical system that will let us do what we want. Our minds end up corresponding with what we do and want to do.

But it is more than a moral issue too. Let me explain what I mean. Briefly, twenty year olds are twenty year olds. In the Platonic sense of being “potential philosophers,” they have first to be moved to learn the truth by some inner wonder or fascination that arises from outside of themselves. Something strikes them, causes them to ask about what they saw or encountered. When something moves us, we want to tell someone about it. Indeed, it almost seems as if we *must* tell someone else about it for it to be complete. Plato writes beautifully on this experience. The universe of our “telling others about it,” be it in oral or written form, is almost more wondrous than the universe *that is*. Certainly the two belong together. Indeed, one of the main functions of life is to see that they do, that our minds correspond to *what is*, as Aquinas put it.

Aquinas also wrote, in the *Compendium of Theology*, that “the end which the intellectual creature reaches by his own activity is the complete actualization of the intellect in relation to all intelligible things lying within its capacity; in this the intellect becomes most like to God” (I, 103). We wonder about the end of the intellectual creature. We

actualize our capacity by knowing what is to be known, the things before us. In reflecting on knowing the *what is* that is before us, we are said to be most like God. “How so?” we wonder.

This query brings me back to my experience with students over the years. We read each semester the *Ethics* of Aristotle. This famous work has four tractates—one on happiness, one on virtue, one on pleasure, and one on friendship. If we look at the book, we notice that there is one book on justice but two on friendship. Friendship itself is not described as a virtue. A proper pleasure is indicated for each of our given normal activities, even a pleasure of intellect, perhaps especially a pleasure of intellect. The neglect of this intellectual pleasure, Aristotle tells us, is quite dangerous. We would not, at first, expect such peril. Not to experience intellectual pleasure sets us off in the wrong direction for understanding the truth about pleasure. Every pleasure is given to enhance the activity in which it properly exists and for which we act. Intellectual delight seems to be the most solitary thing about us, and also the most social. We wonder why?

If a class is permitted to choose a topic on which to write a paper, a class that has read, among other books, the *Ethics*, it is always striking and also, in my view, satisfying, to see the number of students who choose to write on the topic of friendship. As I have written a good deal on this topic of friendship myself, I am rather pleased to see this interest. And we should not be surprised by it. No other topic gets us to the heart of things more quickly or more profoundly than that of friendship. For twenty year olds—and probably from then on for the rest of their lives—this famous topic of friendship, so well discussed in two books by Aristotle, is a revelation and a consolation. When we are twenty, we usually begin to realize, if we are at all perceptive, that the question, “what is friendship?” is or is going to be the most important question in our lives. Who are or will be our real friends? At this age, we need someone of the caliber of Aristotle even to begin to sort out for us an understanding that does justice to our experience of relationships with others.

When Aristotle does spell this topic out for them, students recognize the difference among friendships of utility, pleasure, and the highest things. Invariably, what they want—and often think and hope that what they already have—is a friendship based on the highest things. We see in Aristotle that these forms of friendship are not distinguished as bad to good, but as varying kinds of goods that we will have in our lives. Aristotle will suggest, in the case of marriage, to return to Lucy’s question to Charlie

Brown, that all three kinds of friendship can exist in marriage. Whether they do or not is itself part of the adventure or tragedy of actual living. A true friendship cannot be commanded or guaranteed, nor would we want it to be. A command or guarantee would take the adventure out of our hands. I think that some of this issue was in Benedict XVI’s mind when, in *Deus Caritas Est*, he took such pains to show that, even if love is “commanded” in scripture, it remains free and remains love.

PART III

As we read on in Aristotle, we learn that we cannot expect to have more than a few good friends in our lives. At first, we are very perplexed by this observation. Indeed, in Aristotle’s view, we are fortunate to have even one good friend in our lifetime. By implication, this restriction means that the world, at its best, is not one in which everyone is the intimate friend of everyone else, but one in which, because of a common good, there can only be a multiplicity of real, exclusive friends scattered everywhere in society. Many different adventures go on, not just one large one, as Plato sometimes seemed to indicate. Happiness is not an abstraction. Yet, however true this position of Aristotle is, it seems inadequate. Even Aristotle said that every one is friendly with strangers. How do we stand to those who are not our friends, but who might be?

Let me return to Aquinas’s remark in the *Compendium of Theology* about the activation of our intellect in which and through which our happiness ultimately seems to pass, indeed in which it is concentrated. We see that it is in friendship that virtue is most properly and fully expressed, made active. What is it that is to be communicated in the highest friendships? Precisely the truth of things, the political import of which is something Aristotle also soberly spoke of in his tractates on tyranny. Friends, I think, have to live in the same world, the one *that is*, and know that they do. They have to understand ultimate and divine things in the same way. Friendship, Aristotle thus tells us, is a mutuality. It needs a life together, a frequency of presence and conversation. Philosophy itself, it is said, exists in conversation. Likewise, it is said that Plato’s dialogues come as close to conversation as any written form can. But the act of friendship, as it were, what makes virtue become not potency but act, is conversation in all its meanings.

PART IV

So we are Christians and we observe two dilemmas that arise in our souls because of our fascination with Aristotle on this topic. We presume that Aristotle is right. He talks from experience which we begin to see is true in our

own lives. Aquinas's commentary on this topic of friendship is itself a marvelous illumination of what Aristotle meant. Yet, Aristotle told us that we could not be friends with God. His First Mover did not seem to concern itself with what was not himself.

Aristotle likewise told us that we could only be friends with a few, that friends of everybody are friends of nobody. Thus, God is lonely, but we cannot have too many friends lest we be lonely also. The bridge between soul and soul, even in the highest things, seems to pass through friendship. And it is a narrow bridge. The highest things seem to be more narrowly circumscribed than we might have expected.

Samuel Johnson had noted this latter problem in a famous conversation in 1778, with the handsome Quaker lady, Mrs. Knowles.⁵ The emphatic Christian admonition to be friends with everyone seemed to go against Aristotle's common sense observation that we can only have a few friends. Behind these concerns is the worry that God has no friends at all. Likewise, Aristotle tells us that, even if our friend could be a king or a god, we would not like him to be someone else other than who he is. We want our friends to be human beings, not to exist in some other order of reality. Already here we have intimations of what it is to be a person, of an "itself" that abides. If we do not want God to be other than God, we also do not want our neighbor to be someone else. We only want him to be a good version of what he already is. We think what he comes to be is, largely, up to him, to his freedom.

Over no topic is Christianity more likely to be rejected, as Robert Sokolowski has remarked, than over the doctrine of the Incarnation.⁶⁴ Men, especially philosophers, find it almost impossible to accept this notion of an Incarnate God. Jews and Muslims have the same difficulty. At first sight, we might think that the existence of God itself is a more difficult teaching to comprehend, but in fact this doctrine is much less controversial than that of the Incarnation. The reason seems to be that a "god" is easier to ignore than a "God-Man." Almost all of the great heresies revolve around the Incarnation and its implications, including those of the Eucharist. Von Balthasar even said it was with the Trinity and Incarnation that "the true battle between religions begins, (that is) only after the coming of Christ. Humanity will prefer to renounce all philosophical questions--in Marxism, or positivism of all stripes--rather than accept a philosophy which finds its final response only in the revelation of God."⁷⁵

Yet, it is precisely this Incarnate God that is able to address, almost literally, almost in Aristotelian terms, the question of whether men can be friends with God. From

that point of view, the Last Supper discourse in John's Gospel bears out the Aristotelian formula. We are told of the things the Father has told Christ. He in turn no longer addresses us as servants but as friends. But this communication still does not address the question of whether God Himself is lonely in his inner life. And, of course, the doctrine of the Trinity is itself the affirmation, not just that God does not need to create in order to have friends, but that He need not create at all. This teaching is really the wonder of wonders in the universe. It is something we come up against when we begin to reflect on our friendships. These friendships are the delicate relationships that serve both to upset us and to drive us on to the nearest thing we naturally know to the divine life.

Aquinas, of course, is the first to see that we understand God best through friendship. And in friendship, he sees that it consists in the communication of the highest things. In a famous passage in the *Summa*, we read:

"Benevolence ... requires a certain mutual loving, because friend is friend to friend. Such mutual benevolence, however, is founded on some communication. Since then some communication of man with God exists according to which He communicates his beatitude to us, on this communication, it is necessary that some friendship be founded. The love, however, that is founded on this communication is a certain friendship with God."⁸⁶

Charity then means the possibility of friendship of God and man because the *what is* or the *I am* of God has been communicated to us by Christ. That is, it is a part of Christ's friendship with us that we are told of the inner life of God through the Incarnation of a person known in history to have been born during the reign of Caesar Augustus and to have died under the governorship of Pontius Pilate.

PART V

In a recent lecture to the Italian bishops, talking to them about priests, Benedict XVI broached this very topic. He recalled the words of John about calling us friends. "The Lord puts himself in our hands; he transmits to us the deepest, personal mystery; he wants to share in his power of salvation." This power means that we have to will what He wills. The pope adds, "the horizon of friendship to which Jesus introduces us is the whole of humanity..." This is no small order, not merely numerically, but intellectually. Just what can it mean that we are to be friends with precisely "the whole of humanity?"

This is the heart of Samuel Johnson's question about a possible contradiction between the love of friendship, with its necessary particularities as described by Aristotle, and

the universal love called “*caritas*,” which is friendship with God and with all those we are commanded to love. Benedict shows his appreciation of the problem:

Our own solicitude ... must be universal. We should certainly first take care of those who, like us, believe and live with the Church—it is very important, even in this dimension of universality, that we first see to those faithful who live their ‘being Church’ every day with humility and love ..., and yet we must not tire of going out to invite to the banquet that God has prepared for those who are not yet acquainted with him or have perhaps preferred not to know him.⁷ ✠

Evidently, it is possible in Benedict’s mind to preserve both aspects of friendship, the love of everyone and the intimacies and life-time bond of the communication of the highest things with our known friend or friends.

Let me conclude with a brief story. Several years ago, I was at a conference with John Agresto, the one-time president of St. John’s College in Santa Fe. In the course of conversation, I mentioned that it was striking to me how many students from Thomas Aquinas College were in Washington, working in some political or social arena. Agresto immediately exclaimed, “that’s it! That is the difference between students at St. John’s and those of Thomas Aquinas. The ones from St. John’s tend to end up as Greek contemplatives, but those from Thomas Aquinas, probably because of the Christian emphasis to love the neighbor, often enter an active life or at least consider it as something they should do.”

What I conclude from this instance and from my reflections on friendship is that the complete understanding of friendship does require, without destroying either, both the understanding of who is my neighbor and who

is my friend. The effect of revelation, as I understand it, is not to deny the truths of Aristotle’s own insight, but understanding and appreciating them fully, is also to be aware of the need of everyone else to properly understand what God is in his inner life and in the Incarnation. So attempts to downplay the wonders of either would make us, to cite Charlie Brown’s word, “traitors” to both reason and revelation.

The next time we find ourselves in a library in Romania, or, like Walker Percy, down with TB, seek to “become friends with St. Thomas.” Be “avid” for the acceptance of things. “The good of the universe is the reason why God wills each particular good in the universe.” As Chesterton said, “the many exist as well as the One.” We are no longer called servants but friends.

ENDNOTES

1. Flannery O’Connor, “Letter to ‘A,’” *The Letters of Flannery O’Connor: The Habit of Being* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 238.
2. G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Doubleday Image, [1933] 1956), 135–36.
3. John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 55; *Boswell’s Life of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), II, 219.
4. Robert Sokolowski, *Christian Faith & Human Understanding* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 69–84.
5. Hans Urs von Baltasar, “A Resumé of My Thought,” *Communio* 15 (Winter, 1988). www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/print2005/hub_resume_print.html
6. “*Requiritur quaedam mutua amatio, quia amicus est amico amicus. Talis autem mutua benevolentia fundatur super aliquam communicationem. —Cum ergo sit aliqua communicatio hominis ad Deum secundum quod nobis suam beatitudinem communicat, super hanc communicationem oportet aliquam amicitiam fundari.... Amor autem super hanc communicationem fundatus est caritas. Unde manifestum est quod caritas amicitia quaedam est hominis ad Deum*” (II-II, 23, 1).”
7. Benedict XVI, Address to Italian Bishops Conference, May 18, 2006, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English, May 24, 2006, 6.

BOOK REVIEWS

A Realist Philosophy of Science: Explanation and Understanding.

Peter T. Manicas, Cambridge University Press, 2006. pp. ix+225.

Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty,
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Writing from a realist perspective, Manicas addresses the problem of explanation in the social sciences. He defends the thesis that the fundamental goal of both natu-

ral and social sciences is not prediction and control, or even the explanation of events, but rather the understanding of the processes that jointly produce the contingent outcomes of experience. Scientific knowledge, he maintains, consists primarily in a knowledge of the internal structures of persisting things and materials and secondarily in a knowledge of the statistics of events, or of the behavior of such things and materials. Scientific understanding occurs when causal analysis enables us to explain how the patterns

discerned amidst the flux of events are produced by the persisting natures and constitutions of things.

Chapter one is a compelling critique of David Hume and the positivist view that reduces science to description and prediction. If the goal of science is to understand the processes of nature, we must identify the causal mechanisms that are at work in the world. Once these are understood, all sorts of phenomena are rendered intelligible. Manicas makes a distinction between “scientific explana-

tion” and “understanding.” The two are not the same although we sometimes use the words interchangeably. Understanding is achieved when explanation includes a well-confirmed theory about the generative mechanism responsible for the phenomena under investigation. Phenomena that are unintelligible in terms of themselves beg to be explained causally. A successful theoretical explanation consists of a representation of the structure of the enduring system in which the events under consideration occur. This is accomplished when the mechanism responsible for its generation is identified.

Manicas draw heavily on Rom Harré’s *Principles of Scientific Thinking* (1970), a work in which Harré develops an account of explanation in the natural sciences, which Manicas analogously employs as he describes what he calls the “ontological status” of the social sciences. Understanding in the social sciences, Manicas argues, is achieved when, as in the physical sciences, we can exhibit a causal mechanism responsible for the phenomenon in question. He does not deny that there are important differences between the scientific study of nature and the scientific study of society. “In our world, most events—birth, growth, rain, fires, earthquakes, depressions, revolutions—are products of a complex nexus of causes of many kinds that are conjunctively at work. It is for this reason that “the natural sciences, instead of seeking to explain concrete events, more modestly, seek to understand the mechanisms and processes of nature.” He offers as an example, “We understand why planets move in ellipses, why materials burn, why salt dissolves in water (when it does) when we have a physical theory that provides a causal mechanism.” This understanding is accomplished by providing principles detailing the structure of molecules, the atomic structure of salt and water, principles of their action, and so on. Thus equipped one can understand the causal mechanisms at work that explain oxidation and dissolution, that is, combustion and solubility. Causal mechanisms are often inferred. No one has seen a photon, but photons are among

the important nonobservable particles posited in physical theory that facilitate an understanding of a wide range of phenomena. Enrico Fermi, years before the actual discovery of the neutrino, successfully incorporated that inferred particle in his theory of beta decay.

Manicas will say that although everything is caused, there is a radical contingency in both natural and human history. As with the natural sciences, the task of the social sciences is to understand how social mechanisms structure but do not determine outcomes. Generative social mechanisms in the social sciences are always historically situated. In fact, the generative mechanisms of social processes are the actions of human persons. Social science seeks to explain concrete events and episodes, for example, the collapse of a regime, an economic depression, a dramatic rise in divorces, why working-class kids get working-class jobs, and why, when religious institutions are weakened, there is a loss of normative control. In these cases, explanation takes the form of a narrative that identifies the critical social mechanisms at work and links them sequentially to the contingent but causally pertinent acts of persons. Understanding presupposes good description, both quantitative and qualitative. History, of course, is a special case. In history there are neither laws nor sets of conditions from which one makes determinative calculations. To explain some actual outcomes, one needs to go back in time and identify sequentially the pertinent causes as they combine to produce outcomes. This requires a narrative that links critical actions and events with ongoing social processes grasped in terms of social mechanisms. Manicas reminds us that in history there are neither laws nor sets of conditions from which one can make deterministic calculations.

It is easy to be enthusiastic about *A Realist Philosophy of Science*. The book is not only a comprehensive treatment of “explanation” in the social sciences but has the merit of being well written, factual, and informative. Manicas is the voice of wisdom and sanity in a field where positivistic assumptions regarding the nature of science often go unchallenged.

The Difficult Good: A Thomistic Approach to Moral Conflict and Human Happiness, Daniel McInerny. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006. pp. xii + 212. Cloth \$60.00.

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

Courage is usually defined as the pursuit of the difficult good, but this book is not simply about the virtue of courage. Its focus is the difficulty of reconciling competing goods in the pursuit of happiness. McInerny recognizes, with Nietzsche and, one may add, with Husserl and Heidegger, that with the eclipse of Christianity the old guideposts are no longer there. Where then is one to find a moral compass? Nietzsche leads the call to return to the Greeks, but the Greeks he has in mind are those of the archaic world, not the Greeks of the philosophical age. McInerny will turn to Aristotle and to Aquinas. But before that he surveys contemporary literature on the subject of virtue and the ends of life. There are sensitive treatments of Martha Nussbaum, Bernard Williams, and Joseph Raz, among others, although from the vantage point of Aristotle and Aquinas, McInerny finds all of them incomplete.

The Difficult Good is not an abstract treatise. It is replete with real-life issues—one may say dilemmas—drawn from common experience as well as classic literature. It opens with a passage from the *Paradiso*, Canto 33, wherein Dante “finally beholds the Love that moves the sun and the other stars; his quest for that which wholly satisfies human desires achieves its end.” Admittedly, Dante’s teleological understanding of the human good and his understanding of human happiness do not hold sway today. Nor do those of Aquinas. For Aquinas, the human good is by definition a *bonum arduum*, a difficult good, writes McInerny, “beset by obstacles both inside and outside us, obstacles which make a drama out of our desire for happiness by creating conflicts: conflicts between ourselves and others, conflicts between ourselves and physical nature, conflicts between the better and

worse angels of our spiritual nature, and conflicts between our most sincere opinions about what is best for us.” McNerny goes on to address the issue of the incommensurability between two or more values as formulated by Martha Nussbaum, who defends the view that incommensurable values possess no inherent ordering among themselves. Political commitment, family life, philosophical endeavors, aesthetic enjoyments possess no relation to one another, other than being constituent parts of one’s happiness. “Because of the priority of the particular,” writes Nussbaum, “we can give no general account of deliberative priorities, and also no general account of the techniques and procedures of good deliberation, that would suffice to discriminate good from defective choice in advance of a confrontation with the matter of the case.” McNerny argues to the contrary, “In pursuing my happiness, I will have to set my values in some sort of tolerable arrangement.” Recognizing that in the pursuit of happiness, conflicts, including moral conflicts, will arise, McNerny sketches a Thomistic account of conflict, rejecting the notion of irresolvable conflict. Deliberation is about acts insofar as they are ordered to some end. Without such a final purpose, human action itself becomes unintelligible: there would be no reason for any action at all.

Alas, even the well thought-out life, pursued in the light of a well-defined goal or goals can be frustrated. The death of a loved one, illness, ignorance, and scarcity can confound even the virtuous agent. In this context, McNerny asks how much sadness can even a virtuous person endure and still be happy. Indeed, with Dante, he asks, can one be happy in this life? While Aristotle and Aquinas have much to say about sadness at the loss of bodily goods and external goods due to ill fortune, they both recognize an intellectual or spiritual component that contributes to a full life, a life of virtue, that in itself may be equated with a happy life.

In furthering the present discussion, McNerny draws on uncommon erudition to illustrate the human condition and what it means to be with and without a time-transcending moral compass in the

pursuit of the difficult good. One could not find a better introduction to Aristotle and Aquinas on the subject.

Catholicism and Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II’s Declaration on Religious Liberty, Edited by Kenneth L. Grasso and Robert P. Hunt. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. Paperback, \$26.95.

*Reviewed by L. Joseph Hebert,
St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa.*

In his address to the Roman Curia of December 22, 2005, His Holiness Benedict XVI attributes the difficulties the Church has encountered in implementing the Second Vatican Council to a “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture,” a tendency to regard the Council as a new beginning for the Church, one “that eliminates an old constitution and creates a new one.” In truth, the pope counters, “the essential constitution of the Church comes from the Lord and was given to us,” leaving even an ecumenical council with a more modest if daunting task: that of conceiving and implementing reform or “renewal in the continuity of the one subject—Church which the Lord has given to us.” Whatever “new words” the Church uses to address the needs of our time must be rooted in the understanding of a truth the Holy See has the authority to guard and explain but not to change. True reform may alter and even correct “the Church’s decisions on contingent matters,” but never “the principles that express the permanent aspect” of the faith.

Contributing toward such an interpretation of the Council’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty* (the Declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*, or DH) is the chief purpose of this important volume of essays. The ten authors included here write from different perspectives, including two who relate DH to Protestant ecclesiology. All of them are concerned not only with the argument and implications of the document, but also with the question of how it harmonizes with prior Church teach-

ings on related issues. All of them see the *Declaration* as representing a development of doctrine—a bringing forth from tradition of new things in harmony with the old—and not a break with the essence of past statements. In particular, the authors emphasize that the grounds of religious liberty here declared are not those of modern Enlightenment liberalism, with its indifference to religious truth, privatization of faith, and supposed neutrality as between religion and irreligion. Though in DH the Council was, as Pope Benedict puts it, “recognizing and making its own an essential principle of the modern State,” it did so not by surrendering to modernism but by holding fast to “the deepest patrimony of the Church.”

Although the text of the Declaration itself insists on this hermeneutic of continuity, the document has frequently been employed as “a showcase example of doctrinal reversal” in the words of Avery Cardinal Dulles, who gives the book’s most thorough account of DH as a development of doctrine. Dulles notes that the Church has always proclaimed our human dignity as rational creatures made in God’s image, understood faith to be a free act of the individual will, and taught that Church and state are separate entities with distinct ends. The problem is that the Church had long assumed, and in the modern era many popes had specifically affirmed, that the state was duty-bound to acknowledge and support the true religion. She had also condemned the notions that religious duty is to be subordinated to individual reason or conscience and that “public peace” justifies the state’s neglect of its religious duties.

By sifting carefully through these teachings in context, Dulles argues that DH develops a notion of religious liberty that is not found in these declarations of old, but is compatible with their logic. He notes that the popes prior to DH had been edging in this direction by arguing, for instance, that while conscience is not free as regards the truth, consciences may be free as regards the state (Pius XI); that the state must sometimes tolerate error, even when it could in practice be repressed (Pius XII); and that human

dignity demands that men be given the freedom to act on their own responsibility (John XXIII). DH goes further by proclaiming explicitly that religious liberty is a right in the civil sphere—the right not to be coerced by the state into or out of religious acts. As Dulles and several other authors emphasize, however, DH reiterates the essential features of relevant prior Church teachings. It insists that Catholicism is the true religion, which as such is binding on all consciences; that the freedom of the Church herself is absolute and comes directly from divine mandate, not merely from the civil liberty proclaimed here; that both men and societies are bound to acknowledge the true religion; that the state may give special recognition to the Catholic Church and must actively favor religion as a human good. Again, what is new in DH is the declaration that human beings as such have a right vis-à-vis the state not to be coerced in religion, except for reasons of “just public order.”

This last phrase indicates the second major task of the book: clarifying the grounds and specifying the implications of the *Declaration's* concept of religious liberty. As the editors point out, DH in its brevity left the precise nature of religious liberty to be detailed in subsequent analysis. The *Declaration* offers several reasons for religious liberty, ranging from human dignity and the duty to seek and embrace truth to the rights of conscience and the limits of state power. It also concedes that the liberty it proclaims is to be observed “within due limits.” These limits can be clarified only by specifying more precisely why such liberty exists. In addressing this question, most of the volume's authors consider the postconciliar contributions of two theological giants who celebrated and sought more fully to explain the Church's teaching on religious liberty: John Courtney Murray and John Paul II. One of the book's great merits is the thoroughness with which these two men's writings on the subject are analyzed, compared, and applied to the question of how best to interpret DH. Though much in their respective teachings is harmonious, their diverging sense of the decisive grounds of religious liberty

helps us to see the virtues and difficulties inherent in the *Declaration's* strongest arguments.

John Crosby and David Crawford make the case for John Paul II's theological-anthropologically centered approach, and it also looms large in the chapter by Robert George and William Saunders. This account reconciles truth and freedom in the notion of the human person. Truth makes us free, but only when we freely perceive and embrace it as such. The conditions for the achievement of true moral good require that men be left free to choose the truth, or to err. Thus the duty of authorities (both Church and state) to promote truth intrinsically requires the toleration of error, though not for its own sake. One does not have to deny the duty towards truth—as does the modern state—in order to justify toleration.

This argument is indeed powerful. It convinces us that the limitation of public authority can further its just ends rather than constituting an abandonment of them. It also reinforces a profound sense that human dignity persists in those who err and continues to demand our respect. It thus gives us positive as well as negative reasons to avoid coercion in religious matters. Yet the argument from human freedom demands supplementation for three reasons. First, coercion does not always negate freedom. Good citizens freely refrain from committing murder, though murder is punished by coercion. Second, coercion may ultimately inspire a free choice of the good. St. Augustine relates that former Donatists were later glad to have been coerced from error (Epist. 93), and in the process of maturing all of us come to appreciate authoritative restraints we once saw as arbitrary. Finally, coercion must sometimes be employed in the defense of the community even when it is unlikely to induce the one coerced to embrace the good being defended. The state ought to prohibit abortion even though one cannot force a doctor or mother to respect human life, and the same might be said about those who would in effect rob others of eternal life (see St. Thomas Aquinas, S.T., II-II-10). As Grasso (citing Murray) points out, the

right to search for truth does not entail the right to profess error, and states can justify—and have justified—limits on religious expression in the name of objective religious truth being part of the common good the state must uphold.

To understand more fully DH's teaching that political coercion is generally to be avoided in religious matters we must turn to Murray and his focus on the limits of the state, elucidated by the editors and several contributors to this volume. The core problem is to distinguish the civil and moral orders without entirely divorcing the two. The state must be free to use coercion in defense of “just public order” even when those who threaten it claim religious motives. To identify public order with the moral order is (in principle) to authorize the state to enforce Church doctrine against dissenters. To separate public order entirely from moral order, on the other hand, is to cut the coercive power free of moral limits, allowing it to enforce a regime that may significantly conflict with moral truth, driving religion into the realm of private feelings rather than objective reality. In either case the state seems poised to erode the rights of the Church and the liberty of religion as such.

According to Grasso, Murray saw this problem but was not quite able to overcome it. Grasso proposes a clarification whereby the limits on the authority of the state are in the order of action and not knowledge. Without denying the truth of religion and of the objective moral order it makes known, the state will acknowledge that its task is to enforce only that part of the common good called public order—a part rooted in but not identical to the whole moral order. Though knowledge of moral order implies a duty to act in its behalf, it does not preclude distinctions regarding whose duty (and hence right) it is to act on a given truth, and by what means. In fact, Grasso presents a theory according to which the enforcement of the common good is parceled out to various social groups, including the Church, the state, the family, and others. Thus the state may leave the care of souls mainly to the Church without being obliged to profess

indifference to the virtue and salvation of souls.

As many of these essayists note, the Church began to favor such notions of limited government in the face of 20th century totalitarianism. Prior to DH, the Church taught that state promotion of true religion was the ideal, and that religious liberty was to be recognized as a prudential concession to unfortunate conditions of religious pluralism. Does DH reject this “thesis-hypothesis” doctrine, or does it merely focus on the present-day “hypothesis” while leaving the “thesis” prudently in the background? All but one of these authors (Thomas Heilke) conclude that the shift in DH is doctrinal and not pragmatic, as Murray insisted. Certainly one must accept the Declaration’s claim to bring forth something new, and bear in mind Pope Benedict’s description of the religious liberty it proclaims as “an intrinsic consequence of the truth that cannot be externally imposed.” One must also acknowledge, however, that the new principle of liberty the Church has declared does not relieve us of the need for prudence. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “The right to religious liberty can of itself be neither unlimited nor limited only by a ‘public order’ conceived in a positivist or naturalist manner [Cf. Pius VI, *Quod aliquantum* (1791) 10; Pius IX, *Quanta cura* 3]. The ‘due limits’ which are inherent in it must be determined for each social situation by political prudence, according to the requirements of the common good, and ratified by the civil authority in accordance with ‘legal principles which are in conformity with the objective moral order’ [DH 7 § 3] (#2109).

If the civil authority must “ratify” the due limits of religious liberty, whose “political prudence” is ultimately to determine those limits “for each social situation”? The answer implied here and in the very form of DH seems clear: the Church declares the nature and scope of the religious liberty we enjoy vis-à-vis the state. In doing so, she consults permanent truths and the exigencies of the age, both of which the essays in this volume help us to think about more profoundly.

Defending Probabilism: The Moral Theology of Juan Caramuel, Julia Fleming, Georgetown University Press, 2007, xxii + 201 pages, \$65.25 (US)

Reviewed by Leonard Kennedy, C.S.B.

John Caramuel (1601 —1682) was born in Madrid. He joined the Cistercian Community and studied theology in Salamanca and then obtained his doctorate in theology at Louvain University. He published treatises on theology, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and philosophy, as well as politics and spirituality. He spent a few years in Bohemia and Moravia and converted thousands of dissenters to the Catholic faith. In 1657 he was appointed the bishop of a small town in northern Italy, and, in 1673, was transferred to another small town there. As a bishop he lived a frugal life, and gave generously to the poor.

The theological position known as probabilism was first taught just before Caramuel was born, and became very popular, but one of Caramuel’s works was put on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1664, and several of its probable reasonings were condemned (without the names of authors) in 1665/66 and 1679, and after that probabilism died a slow death. The writers whom we call probabilists did not refer to their teaching as probabilism; but the word “probable” is in the chief statement of what they believe. Caramuel was not the initiator of probabilism, but his name is the one most associated with it, perhaps because he dealt with it for the last forty years of his life, because he wrote more than one widely-read book on the subject, and because he continued writing about probabilism after most of its leading defenders had died.

Because probabilism became so popular in the seventeenth century, the archives in European libraries contain many Latin works on the subject, mostly unread in modern times. The books being reviewed here are some of the writings of only Juan Caramuel. Julia Fleming reports that the works of Caramuel on probabilism are difficult to work with because he was not “a slow and cautious theologian.

He simply published what he thought at the moment and counted on his friends to correct him if they thought he was wrong He is thus a difficult source to consult about probabilism: evolving and loquacious, tendentious, and sometimes opaque.”

The basic meaning of probabilism is that acting on probable opinions concerning moral matters suffices for avoiding sin. That is, if there are two probable moral opinions about the same matter, a person who follows either one of them does not sin even if he chooses the less probable or the less safe of the two. The rating of the strength of probabilities is to be affected by their intrinsic probability plus their extrinsic probability (for example, what the experts say about them).

Caramuel’s purpose in teaching probabilism was to make it possible for people to avoid sin if they were to follow a less probable moral teaching. He ran into lots of problems but kept refining his teaching so that a person was less and less likely to take this easy way out. For example, the less probable opinion had to have at least one good argument for it.

Caramuel thought that, if people were not helped by probabilism to avoid sin, most people would sin and turn against the Church and lose their souls. He said that the denial of probabilism would mean the destruction of the Church. He used the words of Jesus (“My yoke is easy, my burden light”) as an argument for his position. He taught that the Church would be a happier Church if probabilism were to be generally accepted, because it would be easier to avoid sin.

An example of what his teaching faced was this: A religious could refuse to obey his superior even if it appeared to the religious that it was the less well-defended course of action for him. To avoid such an unacceptable application of probabilism, the probabilists said that their general doctrine could not be followed in this case because a religious has a vow of obedience and he is not allowed to break that. It seems quite clear that Caramuel sincerely wanted to save souls and kept trying to limit the applications of the probabilist principle so that the worst

consequences of it could be ruled out. But it was not possible to convince non-probabilist theologians by exempting from sin a person who was allowed to hire an inferior medical doctor for his very sick friend if a superior one could be hired for the same price and similar conditions.

As a result, probabilism, though strong in the early seventeenth century, almost disappeared at the end of that century.

Union with God: Letters of Spiritual Direction by Blessed Columba Marmion, selected and annotated by Dom Raymond Thibaut, Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus Press, 2006). Paper, 233pp.

Reviewed by Marie I. George, Professor of Philosophy, St. John's University, NY

Blessed Columba Marmion delivers a deep but simple message in letters written to the wide variety of people to whom he gave spiritual direction: children, single and married adults, religious of both sexes. While some of the missives are addressed to persons who are holier than the average Christian, even they are of help to ordinary Christians, inciting them to aspire to greater holiness. The letters have been sagaciously arranged around the central theme of union with God, and each is prefaced by a few lines of helpful commentary by Dom Raymond Thibaut. Two of the seven chapters touch on matters concerning the religious life, and so are of lesser interest to lay persons; still the book contains an ample amount of material of relevance to a general audience. The letter format makes the book reader friendly, especially for those of us who have limited time for spiritual reading. Blessed Marmion at times sounds like Teresa of Avila, at times like Theresa of Lisieux, and he makes use of a number of spiritual authors, including John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales, and he makes frequent references to Scripture.

What is remarkable about Blessed Marmion is that he always goes to the heart of the matter with a warmth that inspires one to listen attentively to his counsel. Consider a few examples: "Ex-

amine thoroughly the intention with which you act. The love with which you act is a thousand times more important than the material exactitude of your actions" (18). "I have a great longing to make of you a little saint, I see that Our Lord desires it. What He asks is that you do ALL FOR LOVE, quite simply. And don't be astonished if you are not always as perfect as you might wish" (52). "Your thoughts about Jesus are too narrow. He isn't a bit like what you imagine. His Heart is as large as the ocean, a real human heart. He wept real salt tears when Lazarus died. 'See how much He loved him.' He does not expect you to be a specter or ghost. No, He wants you to be a thorough woman wanting love and giving it, and when you leave those you love, He wants you to feel it deeply" (125).

It comes as no surprise that this book was one of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta's favorites, and that Blessed Claude Marmion was a favorite author of John Paul II. *Union with God* is indeed a treasure for anyone who is desirous of getting closer to God. Zaccheus Press is to be thanked for the aesthetically pleasing edition they have made available to us

The Genius of John Paul II: The Great Pope's Moral Wisdom, Richard A. Spinello, Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2007, xvii-237 pp. Hardcover, \$22.95.

Reviewed by Rev. Edmund W. Majewski, S.J., Department of Theology, St. Peter's College

Although there are a number of good works dealing with Pope John Paul II's theology of the human person and his moral theology, some of these are written for readers who are not familiar with phenomenology. *The Genius of John Paul II* is a scholarly work, but it avoids excursions into matters which interest only philosophers. It is suitable as a text for a university undergraduate course in moral theology. This book would also be useful in any introduction to the thought of John Paul II. In that case, the excellent overview of Avery

Dulles in *The Splendor of Faith* could serve as a second text. The book is very clearly written and each chapter ends with a very concise summary. Richard Spinello writes with an exceptional precision and clarity.

The Genius of John Paul II is a synthesis of the vast moral teaching of Pope John Paul II; this volume deals with his early writings as a professor as well as the documents of his long pontificate. The first two chapters place his theology into an historical and philosophical context and demonstrate the role his theology plays in contemporary controversies among Catholic moral theologians. The first chapter deals with the relationship of faith and reason and the role each plays in the pope's theology. The author also examines John Paul's theological methodology, especially his use of Scripture where the question, "What should I do?", arises. Regarding the distinctiveness of the pope's approach, the author notes, "in contrast to classical moral theology which often veered toward voluntarism, John Paul II puts far more emphasis on Christian fidelity and discipleship. . . . For John Paul II, 'moral reflection begins and ends in the person of Christ'" (22-23). Although the pope bases his moral theology primarily on Revelation and the tradition, he also makes generous use of philosophical reasoning to examine such questions as the meaning of the good and of human freedom. The author also deals with the objections of dissenters who claim that the Church's infallibility does not apply to moral teachings and demonstrates that Vatican II does not support their objections.

The second chapter discusses the various visions of moral theology which exist among Catholic moral theologians since the Second Vatican Council. It is the contention of the author that the Pope anticipated and responded to the Council's call for the renewal of moral theology with greater fidelity and creativity than his critics who often fail to grasp what he is doing. It is clear that John Paul II has tackled the issue of moral relativism which is so pervasive in contemporary society and in academia. The author points

out the defects of proportionalism and consequentialism as proposed by Richard McCormick and Charles Curran. He also explains how the modern ideal of a false idea of individual autonomy results in new problems in the area of bioethics.

The following three chapters focus on the nature of the human person, concepts of human freedom, the moral good, and moral law and finally on the human person as a moral agent. Here the reader encounters the unique personalism of the pope's thinking which balances objectivity and subjectivity. In the third chapter Spinello asks "What is a human person?" He contrasts classical forms of dualism with John Paul's theology of the human body which see the person in terms of an embodied spirit. Most of his critics fail to understand his profound thinking on the human body and criticize him on the basis of a rigid dualism which the late pope never held. The author demonstrates how John Paul's anthropology progresses beyond that of St. Thomas in his new emphasis on the person as a moral agent and in terms of self-consciousness and self-determination. "John Paul, following Aquinas, attributes the moral dignity of human beings, who are made in God's image, to our capacity to be *dominus sui* or master of oneself." (72) From this notion of responsible and creative freedom flows the possibility of giving the self to another person which is at the heart of his ethics. John Paul also stresses the social nature of the human person much more than Aquinas. Spinello notes the importance of the pope's profound analysis of Genesis in which the person overcomes his initial solitude by becoming a self-gift for the other person. Each human person is given a mission to become the type of person he freely chooses to become in light of natural and divine law and this project reaches completion only upon a person's death.

The fourth chapter examines freedom, the good, and the moral law which are concepts at the core of the pope's ethics. The pope's ethics depends upon a "metaphysics of the good" and the author clearly examines the various types of goods. John Paul is insistent that the good must be

objective and absolute and man himself either individually or collectively does not determine the good without God. The discussion then advances to a consideration of freedom which is always freedom for the good. John Paul rightly emphasizes the role of the natural law, the Decalogue and the following of Christ in determining the obligations of the moral law. Spinello stresses the role of discipleship for Christian morality: "Those who 'walk by the Spirit' (Gal, 5:16) go beyond the minimal demands of the moral law and aspire to live the moral life to the fullest through heroic virtue, charity, and self-giving." (103) Clearly, morality is related to sanctity. Spinello also discusses how John Paul makes Kant's categorical imperative the key to "the personalist norm" which requires that a person must always be treated as an end and not as a means to another end. He then tackles the notion of intrinsically evil acts and demonstrates the validity and consistency of the Magisterium's position. He also defends John Paul's understanding of human rights including the rights of the family which have come under assault in many societies.

The fifth chapter focuses on the moral person in relation to freedom and conscience. The author brings out clearly the defects of the fundamental option theory which makes it almost impossible for a moral agent to reject God in any individual human act. The pope's clarification of responsible freedom before God is an important contribution to the authentic renewal of moral theology precisely because the fundamental option theory has made it difficult for many to understand how any individual sin can disrupt a person's relationship with God. Some theologians question whether it is possible for any particular sin to be a mortal sin. Spinello insists, "Only specific choices create our identity, not some opaque inner commitment of full self-disposal. These specific choices are self-determining and sometimes embody commitments that shape our character and future choices. Choices last both as dispositions to act in the same way in similar situations and as an evolution of the existential self (136). Spinello then turns to John Paul's understanding

of conscience and refutes a false interpretation of Newman's theory often used by contemporary theologians to imply that an erroneous conscience can be infallible and enable individuals to construct their own moral system without regard for the Magisterium.

The author next discusses the significance of ethics for modern life and focuses on some concrete contemporary issues. He basically applies the vision of John Paul II to various contemporary issues, some of which have arisen more recently. He briefly discusses issues in bioethics such as genetic engineering, human dignity in the workplace, embryonic stem cell research and euthanasia. He sees dangers in the use of technology to create human cyborgs or manipulate human nature. Although he argues that some use of technology to repair the damage of human organs may be morally justified, he opposes attempts to use technology to provide certain individuals with abnormal and freakish powers. If the human being is an embodied spirit, then there are certain limitations and powers that flow from human nature which may not be ignored. We see a need for the author to be more specific and clear with regard to establishing basic moral principles for determining whether certain innovations might be morally permitted.

Finally, this volume has a concluding chapter that clearly points out the differences between John Paul's vision of morality and those of his critics and answers the objections of the revisionists. He concentrates on the critique of Charles Curran because most of his positions are shared by other critics. He directly deals with some of Curran's strongest criticisms. Does John Paul's moral theology suffer from "physicalism"? Does it lack an appreciation of historical consciousness and historical development? Does it actually distort the meaning of morality as found in Scripture? Does it place excessive emphasis on sexual morality and neglect social ethics? This is a key chapter because Spinello carefully argues that the dissenters' critique of the pope's methodology and basic principles fails to grasp John Paul's actual system as well as the

overall Catholic Tradition which is quite consistent and coherent. *The Genius of John Paul II* is an indispensable volume for anyone who wants to grasp the context and significance of this great theologian's vast corpus of moral teaching or read his many articles and encyclicals.

Can a Catholic Be A Democrat? How the Party I Loved Became the Enemy of My Religion, David Carlin, Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2006. 219 pp. \$14.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Christopher H. Owen
Northeastern State University*

In this intriguing and often perceptive book, David Carlin draws on his personal experience as a politician and on his professional training as an academic to ask whether it is possible to reconcile membership in the Catholic Church with membership in the Democratic Party. Longing for an answer to this question, which touches vitally on the relationship between religion and politics in contemporary America, his readers will discover a wealth of detail and analysis. Carlin's narrative shows clearly and convincingly how and why the Democratic Party came to support the legalization of abortion. On the other hand, *Can a Catholic Be a Democrat?* relies a bit too often on the sound-bite stereotypes which are the trademark of the practicing politician. Moreover, in a bizarre conclusion, Carlin answers his book's titular question in the affirmative even after documenting in damning detail the deep, decades-long hostility that Democrats have shown toward the Church.

As a pro-life, Irish-American Catholic, Carlin became a major player in Rhode Island politics in the 1980s, serving as majority leader of the state senate for three years, before losing to a pro-choice Republican incumbent in a run for Congress in 1992. Thereafter Carlin focused on his academic career, working as a professor of philosophy at Rhode Island Community College for some twenty years. His best-known previous publication is *The Decline*

and Fall of the Catholic Church in America (2003), in which he astutely described the "perfect storm" which struck American Catholicism in the 1960s. The simultaneous eruption of drastic cultural, political, economic, and theological changes, he explained, badly weakened the Church in the United States in these years. Carlin's personal background and research interests position him superbly to address the question of Catholic-Democratic compatibility.

As a life-long Democrat and political insider, Carlin details the deep historical ties which bound working-class Catholics in his state to the Democratic Party. He traces such ties to the New Deal era during which Democrats demonstrated more concern for the plight of the poor than did the Republicans. From his father, Carlin learned "the single most important lesson [he] ever learned in politics," namely that "the Democrats are the party of the poor people, the Republicans are the party of the rich." By his own reckoning, Carlin so deeply imbibed this belief that it caused him to remain loyal to the party, even when he came to realize that the Democrats had largely ceased to serve the poor (xiii).

On a certain level, one can concur with the author that in the 1930s and 1940s the Democrats comprised the "ideal party" (5) for working-class Catholics. Consistent with Catholic social teaching, New Deal programs did provide services and programs for the poor while not endorsing socialism per se. Moreover, with the ascension of Harry Truman to the presidency, the party became staunchly anti-Communist, as the Church had always been. Carlin recognizes, however, that bosses controlled this party through well-oiled political machines. The petty corruption which went along with such control was a fact of life in urban politics, accepted if not cherished. According to Carlin, this system of political bosses, dependent on unions and working class voters, lasted through 1968, when such bosses as Richard Daley of Chicago controlled the convention and nominated Hubert Humphrey. By 1972 the reign of the bosses had ended. Progressive activists

took over the party, nominating George McGovern. Often liberal and wealthy, such activists no longer prioritized working class concerns, but instead focused on civil rights issues and "moral liberalism."

In describing this political transformation, Carlin is at his best. He maintains that two key concepts, the Personal Liberty Principle (PLP) and the Tolerance Principle (TP) lay at the heart of this new liberalism. According to the PLP, each person should feel free to do anything he wants so long as his action does not do obvious and immediate harm to another person who did not consent to such harm. The TP was a corollary to this principle, consisting of the notion that all variety of other persons' behavior should be tolerated so long as such actions did not violate the PLP (31). Framed in the language of civil rights, these concepts would allow Democratic liberals to regard themselves as morally upright while enjoying without restraint the new-found wealth and leisure that had not been available to their working-class forbears.

Carlin then shows how these principles ran headlong into traditional Christian moral values. Feminist activists framed their demands for abortion in terms of the PLP and TP, arguing that children could interfere with the personal liberty of women, and brushing aside the unborn as non-persons with few rights. Extramarital sex, both in its heterosexual and homosexual forms, seemed permissible under the PLP and the TP, and could no longer be condemned. Easy divorce and euthanasia also made sense according to these precepts. Ultimately, the champions of "moral liberalism" became dominant in the Democratic Party. In the early 1970s, the party was probably more pro-life and as supportive of traditional values as was the Republican Party. After the McGovern triumph and with *Roe v. Wade*, this stance changed rapidly. Pro-life Democrats like Carlin, who felt the support for abortion was an aberration which would fade, learned otherwise and were essentially written out of the national party.

The adoption of such attitudes, according to Carlin, meant "waging

metaphysical war against the old-time Christian religion” (63). As rebels against social restraints and moral absolutes, the new Democratic secularists were “hostile toward religion in general and toward Christianity in particular” (152). Thus the culture war exploded. As conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants mobilized to resist assaults on their values, they embraced the only political vehicle open to them—the Republican Party. This process produced a “Manichean” political system, in which each party increasingly despised the other as evil. Democrats often saw the religious right as composed of theocrats who wanted to subvert constitutional freedoms. Meanwhile, large number of middle-class Americans forcefully defended Christian tradition in self-defense against the “disdain” of the new secularist elite which dominated the Democratic Party, and they slowly drifted toward the Republicans (71, 77).

Viewing “liberal Christianity” as a “fellow traveler” with secularism, the author does not spare the rod when discussing it and its linkages to politics. Attempting to reconcile moral relativism and the PLP with Christian religion leaves such belief systems with no essential core. Liberal Christianity, moreover, is “parasitical” on Christian orthodoxy on which it relies for new recruits. Without the existence of traditional churches, liberal Christianity would itself soon collapse. In fact, says Carlin, liberal Christianity constitutes “a halfway house between traditional Christianity and outright infidelity” (78). Even its supporters, if honest, will admit that their views are largely at odds with two thousand years of Christian tradition. Furthermore, Carlin warns that Democratic support for such liberal Christianity amounts to a smoke screen to disguise a secularist agenda “irreconcilable” with Catholicism and other forms of Christian orthodoxy (81-84).

Carlin sees no easy way to bridge this gulf which has opened between the Democrat Party and the Catholic Church. He discusses Cardinal Bernardin’s “seamless garment of life” theory sympathetically but also recognizes that the theory has had little practical impact on politics. The author expresses his opinion that politi-

cal discussion based on natural law arguments could help moderate the poisonous political atmosphere of the culture war. Reasonable argumentation and appeals to political expediency, he hopes, might also persuade some Democrats to abandon their support for the unlimited abortion license of *Roe v. Wade*.

Amidst this rich analysis, unfortunately, many problems plague Carlin’s book. Structurally, *Can a Catholic be a Democrat?* is somewhat confusing. It includes five separate appendices. The material in them is often of high quality. It ranges from discussion of the cultural implications of Deism and Judaism to an analysis of Mario Cuomo’s rationalizations for legalized abortion in his 1984 speech at Notre Dame University. Most of this information, however, would have been more accessible and more pertinent if integrated into the main narrative. The book contains the occasional footnote but could benefit significantly from more thorough documentation and from a bibliography and index.

A more serious flaw is the simplistic manner with which Carlin sometimes treats politics and political history. The ties of Irish-Americans, and the Catholic working class generally, to the Democratic Party, for example, long pre-dated the New Deal. Such linkages reached back into the antebellum period, almost a century earlier, and for much of this period, the Democratic Party favored limited government and low taxes, not social programs to uplift the poor. Furthermore, party loyalties were never so completely based on class or income as Carlin maintains, although they may have become more so in the 1930s. Republicans, for example, would always find votes from small towns, from poor rural regions, and from German Catholic neighborhoods, whose inhabitants did not see their party as belonging to “the rich.” Meanwhile, the wealthy elite in whole sections of the country, particularly the South, remained staunchly loyal to the Democratic Party.

Carlin knows these facts, but he clings to his father’s political prejudices and asserts that he is still “repelled at the Republican Party” as the tool of the rich.

He says that he could only join the GOP if enough “little people” ended up in the party and changed its pro-business ethos. (146-47). Yet the Republicans could not actually have won so many recent national elections without support from such “little people.” Carlin’s answer to this uncomfortable fact mimics the Marxist notion of “false consciousness.” He asserts that such rank and file voters have been deluded by big business to vote against their own economic interests, accepting a “taboo” against applying proper “social-class analysis” to politics (73). This explanation is condescending and smacks of the intellectual elitism which Carlin himself often denounces.

After noting the hypocrisy of Democrats for condemning conservative religious activism in politics, while condoning similar activity by religious liberals, Carlin surrenders too much to the secularist political agenda. Carlin appears to accept the views of political philosopher John Rawls that believers are not allowed to “impose” their specific views on society at large, if such views are based on revelation rather than reason (132). Pro-life activists “must” base their case on reason (i.e. natural law) not on biblical injunctions. Here the author overreaches, asking believers to check their doctrinal particularities at the door when engaging in political activity. With little warrant in the Constitution or in Catholic moral tradition, Carlin uses mandatory language about excluding revelation from politics. True, it would be fruitless and unwise for Catholics to seek a constitutional amendment banning meat consumption on Fridays. On the other hand, to say that Catholics “in modern America” have “no right” even to make such an attempt (132-33), as Carlin does, goes beyond the American constitutional order and means acceptance of secularist presuppositions which most of the rest of his book condemns.

Most astonishingly, after exposing and dismembering the secularist Democratic agenda, Carlin states, “I remain a Democrat” (143). Thereby, the author remains in a party which he has called a “de facto anti-Christian party” (67), the “enemy” of his religion, and which he himself has

advised traditional Christians to cease supporting if they do not want “their religion diminished” (83–84). Carlin also calls Democrats, “the party of abortion” and defends the comparison of widespread legalized abortion to the Holocaust as legitimate, if one accepts the Catholic view that life begins at conception (124). Logically, then, one must conclude that Carlin himself does not take the holocaust-abortion comparison seriously, or that he values social programs more than stopping a holocaust. His claim to work for change within the party also rings hollow. According to such logic, a pro-life German Catholic politician in Hitler’s Germany should have remained within the Nazi Party, hoping to ameliorate the worst excesses of the Holocaust, because public works projects like the Autobahn provided jobs for the poor.

Despite this extremely puzzling conclusion, readers can gain considerable insight about the religious dimension of American politics in the late twentieth century from *Can a Catholic be a Democrat?*. Given its strange and troubling conclusion, it is difficult to recommend this book, but it does detail in excellent fashion how the Democratic Party changed its stripes.

A Student’s Guide to Liberal Learning, James V. Schall, S.J., ISI Books. Wilmington, DE 2000. 52p. (Paper) \$8.00.

Reviewed by Robert F. Gotcher, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Systematic Studies, Sacred Heart School of Theology

In the wake of the recent FCS convention, we are all (painfully) aware that many young people in the 21st century will not experience a university life that closely corresponds to the idea of Cardinal Newman, Christopher Dawson or any other theorist in the Catholic tradition of liberal education, even at a nominally Catholic college or university. There are two ways universities and colleges are failing our young people. First, they are failing to impart, and failing to teach students to discover, true knowl-

edge, especially when the subject matter is reality as a unified whole. The main reason for this is that many of the most influential faculty members have ceased to believe in truth as an achievable goal or good—Benedict XVI’s “dictatorship of relativism.” This leaves the university, Catholic or not, as a place where the focus is on the attainment of information that will lead to an increase of power, and the teaching of a sophistic rhetoric that will persuade others to allow you to exercise that power.

The second area where the modern university has let its students down is the rejection of wisdom as a proper goal of university education. Knowledge as such has become the only activity of the University, without any attention to the personal context of the cultivation of knowledge, or the practical significance of knowledge for living a good life. University students need wisdom as well as knowledge precisely at the age they are at, and the university, where the student spends most of his time, needs to provide for the formation of the whole person, not just the intellect. And this is precisely because the purpose of the university is knowledge. We are not Cartesians who believe that the intellect can function and develop properly independently of the bodily, social and spiritual well-being of the person.

In *A Student’s Guide to Liberal Learning*, James V. Schall, S.J. gives some attention to both deficiencies of the contemporary university education and offers the discontented university student a three-pronged remedy. This book is one in the Preston A. Wells *Guides to the Major Disciplines* put out by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Among the titles are *Philosophy*, by FCS member Ralph McInerny, and *American Political Thought*, by George W. Carey.

Schall’s book can best be described as a 12-step program for higher education. First, we have to be aware of and acknowledge the problem in higher education and we have to admit we can’t do anything about it on our own. We are powerless before the relativistic forces of professional intellectuals. Then we have to know that a solution exists, help is avail-

able. Then we need to seek it.

The help the Schall proposes is threefold. “We need some self-discipline, our own personal library where we keep what we read, and real good guides” (p. 49). In order to remain intellectually sane in the poisonous atmosphere of many universities, one must take an antidote—which is a guided reading of the good books in the tradition of classical western liberal arts, whether ancient (Plato) or modern (Flannery O’Connor).

1. Self-discipline. The emphasis on reading makes the focus of the book on the intellectual life. Schall highlights, however, the role that moral disorder plays in losing sight the truth. “There is an intimate connection between our moral life and our intellectual life” (p. 30). Although, as Newman held, the teaching of knowledge is the purpose of the university, that does not mean that the university is absolved from helping the student train his will so he can achieve his intellectual goals. Those for whom the formation of the intellect is the primary concern cannot neglect the moral virtues without sacrificing the intellectual ones as well. Although, Schall does not directly address the proper way to attend to the formation of the will, he does state that moral virtues are as important for the formation of the intellect as intellectual virtues. The focus is on the human mind which cannot function properly outside of a healthy will, body, and affections. “If we do not have our lives in order under the rule of right reason, we will simply not see the first principles of reasoning and of living” (p. 11).

Intellectual virtues themselves are important as well. He, for instance, encourages, without naming them, the classical intellectual disciplines of the mind, the trivium of the liberal arts. The liberal arts aren’t just knowledge, but arts, distinct from the useful and fine, but arts none-the-less, directed at understanding and communicating the truth. That is why such books as Adler’s *How to Read a Book*, Sertillanges’s *The Intellectual Life*, and Schumacher’s *A Guide to the Perplexed* are as important as the great texts themselves, such as Augustine’s *Confessions*. Reading

even great books without a mind trained in something like the trivium is less likely to gain true knowledge that can be communicated and put into action. We will be left with good, vague feelings about a text, but no clear understanding of how the ideas in the book relate to the whole.

2. Good books. One of the best features of this book is the lists. Not only do we find “Schall’s Unlikely List of Books to Keep Sane By” as Appendix I, but throughout the text there are short lists, serious ones, such as, “”Five Books on Thomas Aquinas,” “Five Classic Texts on Philosophy,” “Six Classic Texts never to be left unread,” “Seven Books About Universities,” and quirky and whimsical ones, such as “Three of the More than One-Hundred P.G. Wodehouse Novels,” “Four Books Once Found at a Used Book Sale.” Names of other good books not on any of the lists are sprinkled throughout the book. They are listed in the bibliography of the online version.

But, even good books aren’t all equally valuable. Being the good guide he is, Schall does not leave us without an indication of what is the most essential reading. The two most important books are the Bible and Shakespeare. The seven intellectual heroes for Schall are: God (the Bible), Shakespeare, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine and Aquinas. Honorable mention may be given to Eric Voegelin.

3. The need for guidance (authority). Schall is proposing initiation into a wisdom tradition, not just an intellectual “great conversation.” This implies a prior judgment on the value of given books: an authority. It is not enough, as in some of the Great Books programs, to be introduced into the Great Conversation about what is true or whether the truth is knowable. For young readers such an encounter can lead to confusion and cynicism. Great books don’t answer the question about what is true (p. 23), unless we already know how to discern the truth. What is really needed is a prior judgment about those works that in fact articulate some aspect of the knowable and known truth and center our intellectual formation on them. This is done quite readily in particular disciplines, such as physics or economics. Why not

in knowledge as such or knowledge as a whole? Schall has positioned himself as a master, a guide. He is pointing to the texts of intellectual sanity. This does not absolve us of our irreplaceable need to make our own judgment about the truth of the good books our guides suggest. With Fr. Luigi Giussani in *The Risk of Education*, Schall makes it clear that ideas need to be tested by the reader against their own experience (p. 41).

The goal of a liberal education as conceived by Schall is not just knowledge, but sanity—a mind that corresponds to the real so the person can act accordingly to the truth and make decisions about the organization of his personal life and society that are in accord with the nature of the parts, the whole and their relationship to each other. “Just because someone is smart does not mean he is wise” (p. 8.) The goal of the university is the cultivation of the intellect. But that intellect needs most of all to be able to address the meaning of the whole and our place in it, and how our relation to the whole affects our action. Although we can “know” a truth, it isn’t actually true for us until we can and do act upon it. Our actions reveal what we believe (p. 21). Schall himself speaks on page one of “knowledge for its own sake.” He follows quickly, however, on page two with an assertion that we need not only “to know what is,” but also “to know what we ought to do” (p. 2).

In the tradition of Christopher Dawson and Bruce Kimball’s distinction between orators and philosophers, Schall is clearly advocating the rhetorical (wisdom) tradition somewhat accommodated to the philosophical (critical) approach), as can be seen by his recommendation of Cicero as well as Plato. The classic liberal tradition is precisely that, a wisdom tradition to be handed on. Because modern university culture has been deeply influenced by a philosophy of liberal education that believes that the critical faculty is the most important faculty of the human intellect, rather than the ability to receive and understand the accumulated wisdom of the ages, we have to cultivate the latter on our own.

Critiques: Although many imagina-

tive authors, such as Shakespeare, Tolkien and Wodehouse, are included in the lists, the book could give or point to more formal guidance about the formation of the imagination, another propaedeutic, as John Senior often stated, for a genuine liberal education. For instance, Schall mentions the importance of movies and music in the lives of students on p. 17, but not much guidance is given. These two cultural realities do as much to form the young intellect and imagination as any number of books, and books are not always a very persuasive antidote to the emotionally strong ideas formed (often unwittingly) by constant exposure to them. And we simply cannot hope that they will unplug themselves from the omnipresent media. Somehow we have to give attention to a genuinely liberal education that includes attention to the arts that dominate the life of young people. Finally, there are two propaedeutics for beginning this education. The first is a deep desire for genuine learning. The second is a confidence that such an education is possible—that the intellect can achieve its goal—truth. Can this book give the desire and give the confidence? For those who already experience the unease and wonder if there is a way out, this book could be a truly liberating introduction into a genuine intellectual life, rather than the pseudo-intellectual life of the contemporary university, even many Catholic ones. Still, many students don’t know. Will putting this book into their hands elicit this unease? How can the reader know he can trust Schall, especially if he has been convinced by his education that every personal opinion is simply political and that there is no way to determine what is authoritative? I think the presumption is that this book will be put into the hands of a student who already experiences unease by someone the student already to a certain extent trust. I think we would all do well to be that someone.

A fuller version of the book can be found at: <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/schallj/WS17BJVS.htm>

BOOKS RECEIVED

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

If there are books you know of that should be reviewed, let Dr. Brian Benestad know at benestadj1@scranton.edu

Thomas Merton: A Book of Hours, ed. Kathleen Deignan, Sorin Press: Notre Dame, IN (2007), cloth, 223 pp.

Interior Castle: Teresa of Avila, Dennis Billy, C.S.S.R., Christian Classics, Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame, IN, (2007), Paper, 314pp.

Trade, Development, and Social Justice, Raj Bhala, Carolina Academic Press: Durham, NC, (2003), Cloth, 541 pp.

Transforming Catholicism: Liturgical Change in the Vatican II Church, David R. Maines & Michael J. McCallion, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.:Latham, MD, (2007), Paper, 152 pp.

United States Welfare Policy: A Catholic Response, Thomas J. Massaro, SJ, Georgetown University Press: Washington, D.C. (2007) Paper, 257.

Was Frankenstein Really Uncle Sam? Vol I: Notes on the State of the Declaration of Independence, Richard J. Rolwing, Xlibris Corp., (2007), 339pp.

The Year and Our Children: Catholic Family Celebrations for Every Season, Mary Reed Newland, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2007), Paper, 328 pp.

Happiness: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy, Eds. Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitrano, Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, (2008), Paper, 272 pp.

Jesus, The Apostles, and the Early Church, Pope Benedict XVI, Ignatius Press: San Francisco (2007), Cloth, 163 pp.

One Man One Woman: A Catholic's Guide to Defending Marriage, Dale O'Leary, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2007), 308 pp.

Responsibility, ed. Barbara Darling-Smith, Lexington Books: Lanham, MD, (2007), Paper, 214pp.

Faith, Reason, and Compassion: A Philosophy of the Christian Faith, James Gilman, Lexington Books: Lanham, MD, (2006), Paper, 168pp.

Absolute Revelation and Universal Religion, Joseph Pandiappallil, European University Studies, Vol./Bd.811, Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, (2005) Paper, 433 pp.

Christians in China, A.D. 600 to 2000, Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, (2007), Paper. 605pp.

DVD. Apostolic Fathers: Handing on the Faith, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, Filmed on Location with Stephen Ray, October 2007.

DVD. Lost Gospels or False Gospels? Ignatius Press: San Francisco. 56 minutes. October 2007.

Chance or Purpose: Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith, Christoph Cardinal Schonborn, ed. Hubert Philip Weber, Trans Henry Taylor, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, (2007), Cloth. 181 pp.



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Archbishop Chaput and Pope Benedict XVI on Catholics in Political Life

On October 26, 2007 Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver spoke at the School of Law of St. John's University. He said, "It's time for all of us who claim to be 'Catholic' to recover our Catholic identity as disciples of Jesus Christ and missionaries of his Church. In the long run, we serve our country best by remembering that we're citizens of heaven first. We're better Americans by being more truly Catholic —and the reason why, is that unless we live our Catholic faith authentically, with our whole heart and our whole strength, we have nothing worthwhile to bring to the public debates that will determine the course of our nation." One doesn't often hear this position publicly mentioned by Catholics in the United States, but it is a fundamental tenet of Catholic social doctrine.

In his trip to Brazil in May of 2007 Benedict XVI takes up the question of the relation of the Catholic faith as a whole to the work for justice and says, "Wherever God and his will are unknown, wherever faith in Jesus Christ and in his sacramental presence is lacking, the essential element for the solution of pressing social, political problems is also missing" ("Meeting and Celebration of Vespers with the Bishops of Brazil," May 11, 2007). Catholics, he adds, must have a thorough knowledge of their faith, as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its abbreviated *Compendium*. They must also receive an "[e]ducation in Christian personal and social virtues" as well as an education in social responsibility. One example of this kind of education is the formation of "a genuine spirit of truthfulness and honesty among the political and commercial classes." In

short, the work for justice requires that the mind and the heart of Catholics must be educated and formed to know and practice the whole Catholic faith.

Anticipating a likely objection to his emphasis, he asks how can one justify "the priority of faith in Christ and of 'life' in him" when there are so many pressing political, economic and social problems in Latin America? He answers that both Marxism and capitalism promised that just structures, an indispensable condition for promoting justice in society, could be established and maintained without "individual morality," i.e., without individuals formed by the virtues. Benedict XVI implies that people now see that neither political and economic system lived up to its promises. In fact, he argues, just structures depend on a moral consensus in the body politic and lives lived by citizens in accord with the virtues. Benedict XVI further holds that the necessary moral consensus cannot develop where God is not acknowledged. So, a great effort is constantly needed to maintain belief in God. "In other words, the presence of God, friendship with the Incarnate Son of God, the light of his word: these are always fundamental conditions for the presence of justice and love in our societies" ("Address at the Inaugural Session of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean," 13 May 2007). All this, of course, is the teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas as well as that of the social encyclicals from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Benedict XVI. ✠

J. Brian Benestad
 Editor, *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars*

We are grateful to Jim Hitchcock for letting us know of the deaths of the following members:

Rev. Robert Brungs
 Sister Joan Gormley
 Rev. Kevin Horrigan
 Rev John Kobler.

May their souls rest in peace.

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