

# FELLOWSHIP OF CATHOLIC SCHOLARS QUARTERLY

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER..... by Dr. Bernard Dobranski

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

by Bernard Dobranski  
Dean and Professor of Law,  
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Released from prison last June, Jack Kevorkian — the infamous “Dr. Death,” although he was stripped of his license to practice his pathology specialty— is currently on the lecture circuit. He recently addressed large audiences of faculty and students at both Wayne State University, in Detroit, and the University of Florida, in Gainesville. On both occasions he stated, “The Ninth Amendment permits you to do whatever you want, as long as you don’t hurt anyone else,” and concluded his comments by insisting that his desire has always been “to end suffering.”

No doubt the dear “doctor’s” views are based on those imagined rights which activist jurists always seem to find in the so called “penumbras” of our nation’s founding document. The essential falsehood of his words certainly suggests a pessimism which has always pervaded the public statements of this very odd man who has long seemed less intent on ending suffering than he is preoccupied with death.

It is noteworthy that in both venues he received unanimous applause — which shows, of course, that Jack Kevorkian is not alone in his outlook. Indeed, pessimism finds a certain logical terminus in a book by Professor David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*, published in 2006 by Oxford University Press. Benatar’s premise is that human beings are toxic to the environment; thus the human species must be eliminated. A particularly chilling example of this environmental radicalism is the recent story of a 27-year-old woman who has had herself sterilized to protect the planet because, as she says:

Every person who is born uses more food, more water, more land, more fossil fuels, more trees and produces more rubbish, more pollution, more greenhouse gases, and adds to the problem of over population.

Perhaps this assault on human dignity is merely the contraceptive mentality come full-circle. Where

Kevorkian claims he wants to end suffering, Benatar wants to end humanity, those pesky creatures which divine revelation tells us are made in “the image and likeness of God.” It is, in any event, a complete denial of God’s plan for man’s eternal life.

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI promulgated his second encyclical *Spe Salvi* (Saved in Hope). In sharp contradistinction to Kevorkian and Benatar, His Holiness reaffirms human life, encourages the use of man’s freedom for creating good, emphasizes the importance of community over individualism, and instructs us in the value of suffering.

The Pope shows that the laws of God and man are — and should be — inextricably linked. His assertions are premised on the belief that God is a loving God who seeks man’s good and eternal happiness. The encyclical affirms that life, no matter how difficult and painful, is worth living, because man is not the pawn of nature or fate. The Pope writes:

... God governs the stars, that is the universe, it is not the laws of matter and evolution that have the final say — but reason, will, love — a person.

Benedict presents an inspiring example of hope in a Vietnamese martyr, Paul Le-Bao-Tinah (1857). The Pope quotes from a letter that Tinah wrote while in prison:

The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief ... In this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart.

The hope expressed by Tinah is the rationale for one to embrace life, even when it involves great physical or emotional pain. Benedict says that such hope gives us the courage “to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly hopeless situations.” I wonder how many of those who attended Dr. Kevorkian’s lectures or read Professor Benatar’s book have heard of *Spe Salvi*, or how many of them would attend a discussion of the encyclical if it were offered?

Human beings want hope. We need it for a reason to live, to go on in the face of suffering, to procreate. Unfortunately, few are delivering a hopeful message

to our world today. (Perhaps the only people who do speak in hopeful terms are politicians, and their understanding of hope is often limited to material concerns and promises of socially engineered utopian outcomes.)

As Catholic scholars, we have a moral responsibility to present the truth that physical suffering and the frustrations of injustice are actually opportunities for us to trust in God, to grow in virtue, and to gain heaven. This is eschatological hope. It is a reality rarely expressed today. But without it, all human beings invariably turn pessimistic. For after all, the greatest medical advances cannot prevent our eventual death, and as history testifies, our noblest projects will always fall short of limitless human expectations.

St. Paul says in Romans 10:15, “The footsteps of those who bring good news is a welcome sound.” Let these footsteps be ours. What have you done to inculcate *Spe Salvi* into the courses you teach? How have you injected hope into your conversations with students, colleagues and family members?

Benedict’s message is timely. It can literally make the difference between man’s existence and extinction, life and death, heaven and hell. The Pope tells us that the Christian principle of charity is the true means by which we can assist those who are suffering and oppressed. He sees compassion (“com-*passion*” — suffering with) as an expression of having accepted personal suffering and a willingness to take up the sufferings of others. This communitarian aspect of suffering, he says, is a manifestation of hope that not only enriches human life here and now, but portends the heavenly community of saints.

The Pope’s message of hope stands in stark contrast to Kevorkian’s and Benatar’s messages of hopelessness. For Kevorkian death is preferable, sooner rather than later, if life becomes painful or inconvenient. For Benatar it is better that man cease to exist altogether because he is evil. But for Benedict life is a good and hope-filled prelude to “a moment of eternal bliss” (heaven) where all suffering and injustice will come to an end. To attain it he says, “One must live in openness to truth, to love, to God.” ✠

# Is God Attainable by Humanity at this Point of History? Can Aquinas Still Address Our Time?

By Fr. Joseph M. de Torre  
 University of Asia and the Pacific  
 College of Arts and Sciences

## I. INTRODUCTION

Professor Enrique Martínez, teaching Philosophy and Education at Abat Oliba University in Barcelona, has just published a book titled *Ser y Educar: Fundamentos de Pedagogía Tomista* (“To Be and To Educate: Principles of Thomist Pedagogy”). He is a member of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas and Secretary-general of the Thomas Aquinas International Society. The centrality of God in relation to the question of education is presented in his book as a result of years of study, teaching and research on this subject of burning currency, as will be highlighted in this paper.

Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), in his capacity as Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was sent as a special envoy by the late John Paul II in June 2004 to address the participants at the ceremonies to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the D-Day Landing at Normandy. Practically all heads of state were present, motivated by the desire for world peace. The theme of the address of the future Pope Benedict XVI was also the centrality of God for man. Without this point of reference, man is totally disoriented and in a perpetual crisis of identity. The human spirit is naturally oriented to infinity.

On April 1, 2005, just the day before John Paul II’s holy death, Cardinal Ratzinger traveled to Subiaco, where St. Benedict founded his Monastic Order that was to shape Europe from the 6th century onward with a God-centered humanism. The future Pope was to receive the St. Benedict Award for the promotion of Life and the Family in Europe, conferred by the Subiaco Foundation for Life and the Family. The then Dean of the College of Cardinals delivered an address on the present crisis of culture and identity, especially in the Old World.

After citing two signs of this crisis, namely, the threat of terrorism and the possibility to manipulate the

origin of human life, Cardinal Ratzinger as reported by ZENIT, pointed out that “Europe has developed a culture that, in a way previously unknown to humanity, excludes God from the public consciousness, either by denying him altogether or by judging that his existence cannot be demonstrated, is uncertain and, therefore, somewhat irrelevant to public life.” He went on to say that “the rejection of reference to God is not an expression of tolerance which wishes to protect non-theist religions and the dignity of atheists and agnostics, but rather an expression of the desire to see God banished definitely from humanity’s public life, and driven into the subjective realm of residual cultures of the past.” For the Cardinal, the starting point of this view is “relativism,” which has become “a dogmatism that believes it is in possession of the definitive knowledge of reason, and with the right to regard all the rest as a stage of humanity, which has basically been surpassed, and which can be suitably relativized.”

In the final part of his address, Cardinal Ratzinger explained that “we need roots to survive and we must not lose them from sight if we do not want human dignity to disappear.” He added, “only creative reason which has been manifested in the crucified God as love, can really show us the way. We need men who will keep their sight on God, learning there what ‘true humanity’ is, as only through men touched by God, can God again be close to men.”

Only a friendly, radical and thorough review of the history of mankind can help us to understand this crisis and enable us to discuss the questions presented by this paper. The relevance of St. Thomas can only be perceived in the context of history, as we shall see.

In one of his classics, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), Etienne Gilson, the great historian of philosophy showed the centrality of God in all philosophers.

The late Pope John Paul II in his 1998 Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, launched a thorough revival of philosophy in a time of skepticism, perplexity and despair of human reason to really grasp reality by a loving cultivation of the original project of a philosophy (love of wisdom) in search of meaning for human existence. This project, the Pope explains, was born

around 2000 B.C. both in the West and in the East. Through a dramatic and exciting development, it has reached our time and the crisis of confidence in human reason, and weariness after so many failures, so many experiments—scientific, political, economic, social and so forth—many of them conspiring to destroy human individuals and institutions, or falling into a mood of cynical despair, so poignantly described by Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus* or the philosophy of the "absurd." After so many debunked utopias, what is left for humanity?

As John Paul II emphasized in his long analyses of World War II and the foundation of the United Nations (in his Messages of 1995 and his Addresses to the UN) in order to understand the present globalized planet it is absolutely necessary to know its history. We have to know the history of the human race, or otherwise we are condemned to repeat it (in Santayana's famous phrase) and doomed to a chaotic "progress" with catastrophic consequences. The pope did not hesitate to call the ignorance of history a sin.

In *Fides et Ratio*, in defense of human reason and the confident pursuit of a "good life" or felicity, he alludes to the Socratic revolution of the 5th century, B. C. to overthrow the Sophistic educational establishment of a man-centered radical relativism rejecting truth and worshipping individualistic happiness. Are not our times strikingly similar to those of the early Greeks? The Socratic revolution was a resolute challenge to the relativist idol personified by Protagoras' "Man is the measure of everything."

In light of the initiative of late John Paul II regarding the essential link of *Faith and Reason*, and the significance of Christian Philosophy in its historical perspective for our time, the author has found it useful to present a paper reproducing relevant passages of his book *Christian Philosophy*. This work, published in 1980, shows its obvious links with *Fides et Ratio* and the present global crisis. This earlier work describes the historical approach to this question.

## II. EXCERPTS FROM THE FOREWORD TO CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

**T**he Christian faith, that is, the faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ and in the Church founded by him is not an achievement of human philosophy, but a gift from God granted to those who become like little children before him: (cf. Mt 18:1-5, Mk 10: 14-15); see also Lk 10:12;

Mt 11:25; 1 Pet 5:5; Jn 4:6).

It is a gift from God, not something coming from human power, and when man receives it, it makes him blessed, that is, it enhances and fulfills him, it transforms his entire life: (cf. Mt 16:16-17; Jn 6:47).

This transformation, however, does not happen without man's cooperation, for though man does not have the power to transform himself into a son of God, he does have the capacity, if he cooperates, to be transformed by God's grace into a son of God, so as to share in the divine nature, as St. Peter says (cf. 2 Pet 1:4).

This human cooperation consists in the opening of the human intelligence to the light of divine revelation, the submission of the human will to God's commandments, and the surrendering of the human heart to the divine love. Man seeks God in his heart, but nothing can be loved unless it is known, so that the believer needs to turn his whole mind towards divine revelation, with childlike humility and a trusting heart: (cf. Mt 5:8)

When in the first centuries of Christianity the Gnostics were placing human knowledge (GNOSIS) above religious faith (PISTIS), and therefore human philosophy above divine revelation, some Christians reacted by repudiating philosophy and holding on to the faith alone (*credo quia absurdum*), with the anti-rational attitude which has spawned many heresies through the centuries, such as the fideism and traditionalism condemned by the Church in the 19th century, and is conspicuous both in Islamic theology and in Lutheran Protestantism, with their negative vision of human reason and its powers.

Other Christians, however, such as St. Justin, St. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria took their stand on a Christian gnosis based on faith and divine revelation, as opposed to the pagan gnosis based on the darkness of the human mind without faith. This Christian gnosis would be the wisdom of human reason enlightened and uplifted by faith.

For a believer, the first thing is his faith that "pearl of great price", that "treasure hidden in the field" for which he must be ready to sell everything he has (cf. Mt 13:44-46), and about which he cannot have the slightest doubt since it comes from God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, as the First Vatican Council stated in 1870. And in this sense we ought to follow St. Paul's indication: "See to it that no one deceives you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). But in trying to understand and live what he has accepted by faith, the

believer has no choice but to use his intelligence. This faith seeking understanding, as St. Augustine and St. Anselm described it, is called theology.

Reason does not cease to be reason by being enlightened by faith, and thus the early Christians, both in defending the reasonableness of the faith against pagan attacks, and in trying to penetrate into its mysteries and apply it to their daily lives, created a philosophy, that is, a body of concepts and insights—treasury of wisdom—generated by the theological effort to understand the faith and make it a way of life; their living as Christians stimulated their thinking as Christians, and this thinking brought new light into their lives.

What happened to the early Christians is bound to happen to every sincere Christian of any time and place: he needs to have a philosophy, a way of thinking and living, a Christian philosophy, to act as a link between his faith and his life, and as a vehicle of communication with all other men of any culture, religion or background, with whom he can establish a dialogue that can lead those men to his faith, as St. Thomas Aquinas showed in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in which he makes a philosophical exposition of the “preambles to the Christian faith” and defends the faith against errors. That is how the Christian faith answers, from a higher plane, the most far-reaching questions of human reason and even carries it beyond itself.

If the believer lacks this philosophy, in other words, if he is not well instructed in his faith by an intellectual grasp of it joined to a sincere and living piety, his reason very soon goes on its own, leaving the faith in the domain of feelings or meaningless traditions or customs. Thus religion is split from life, and the Christian no longer thinks or makes decisions in the light of Christian principles.

In a comparatively simple setting, such as a peaceful rural community, this absence of Christian philosophy may not do much harm if the setting is Christian, because in that case there is always a remnant of wisdom. But we must admit that our century world is anything but simple. The Christian finds himself now in a highly sophisticated but shallow environment, because of the universal spread of education. Half-baked ideas proliferate and multiply at a bewildering rate, due to the growing efficiency of the mass media, and the whole tempo of life is in constant acceleration. This situation, rather than instant remedies and shortcuts, requires a much more careful philosophical and theological training in the Christian doctrine. With piety alone, without doctrine, there is a great risk of being unable

to cope with the pressure of confused doctrines. Of course, it is clear that with philosophy alone the risk is even greater. The Christian must unify his life with the blend of piety and doctrine on the basis of a deep and childlike humility, whose chief expression should be the desire to learn:

“If you abide in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn 8:31-32)

On August 4, 1879, Pope Leo XIII issued the *Encyclical Aeterni Patris* with the sub-title: “On the Restoration in Catholic Schools of Christian Philosophy According to the Mind of the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas”. Towards the close of his long pontificate, in 1903, this same Pontiff declared that he regarded that Encyclical as his most important, since it laid the foundation for all his subsequent teaching on man, society, marriage, labor and the State. In this Encyclical, Leo XIII, points out that reason is the guide of man, and he goes on to say:

“We do not, indeed, attribute to human philosophy such force and authority as to judge it sufficient for the utter shutting out and uprooting of all errors. When the Christian religion was first established by the wondrous light of faith shed abroad, ‘not in the persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Cor 2:4), but in showing of the Spirit and power’, the whole world was restored to its primeval dignity. So also now, chiefly from the almighty power and help of God, we may hope that the darkness of error will be taken away from the minds of men, and that they will repent. But we must not despise or undervalue those natural helps which are given to man by the kindness and wisdom of God, Who strongly and sweetly orders all things; and it stands to reason that *a right use of philosophy is the greatest of these helps*. For God did not give the light of reason in vain to the soul of man, nor does the super-added light of Faith quench, or even lessen, the strength of understanding. Its effect is far from this. It perfects the understanding, gives it new strength, and makes it fit for greater works. The very nature of the providence of God Himself, therefore, makes it needful for us to seek a safeguard in human knowledge when we strive to bring back the people to Faith and salvation.” (Italics added)

Both extremes must be avoided: a fideism or traditionalism that spurns reason, and a rationalism that puts reason above faith. And since St. Thomas Aquinas is the Christian teacher who has best done justice to both faith (theology) and reason (philosophy), the Church has consistently regarded him as her universal doctor down to the recent Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which took the unprecedented step, for an ecumenical coun-

cil of the Church, of mentioning him by name in this respect in two of its official documents: the *Decree on Priestly Formation* (*Optatum totius*, no. 16) and the *Declaration on Christian Education* (*Gravissimum educationis*, no. 10). And in 1974, on the occasion of the 7th centenary of St. Thomas' death, Pope Paul VI officially ratified the Church's stand on this.

The present book (*Christian Philosophy*) aims to give an exposition of the "Christian philosophy" so much needed by the Christian who wishes to let his faith guide and enrich his own life, and spread its light and warmth in this turbulent world.

The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the late Etienne Gilson a true disciple of St. Thomas Aquinas, for all his works in general, but in particular his enlightening elucidation of the meaning of "Christian philosophy" in *The Philosopher and Theology*.

May the present book be a fitting centennial commemoration of the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* by providing a glimpse of that Christian wisdom that "our era needs," in the words of the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 15), "more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future world stands in peril unless wiser men are forthcoming."

### III. FROM CHAPTER 4 OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY: DEVELOPMENT OF PHILOSOPHY IN CHRISTIANITY

#### A. *Beginning of Theology in Christianity*

**O**ur topic is the growth and development of philosophy within Christianity, the historical elaboration of this philosophy: how it grew under the protection of the faith from the beginning of Christianity.

Theology developed in the first centuries of Christianity to reject errors and heresies specifically, and to make the dogmas more precise. Heresies arise generally out of human pride, but lack of clear definitions can give an occasion for them. Take for example the divinity of Christ, St. Peter made that confession of faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mt 16:16), but from the very beginning this was misunderstood by some who thought that "Son of God" meant that Jesus was an extraordinary creature whom God had anointed and chosen, but he was not God. They could not put together the divinity

of Christ and His humanity, because the dogma to a certain extent had not been defined about the two natures, divine and human, subsisting in one Person who is divine: it was thus defined only at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Before that definition, the Church knew that Christ was both God and Man, but it was not clearly formulated. This is what stimulated the growth of theology.

Theology used the philosophy already existing, the classical philosophy, but correcting it in the light of faith. Having purified it from its errors, it was fully acceptable in everything else. Nevertheless, practically in every truth of philosophy, divine revelation had a very original contribution to make, always casting new light. For example, what was the idea of this classical philosophy about God? Great thinkers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had indeed reached a very lofty conception of God; but the revelation God made of Himself far surpasses the most sublime conceptions of those philosophers. The same thing applies to creation, man, freedom, immortality, sin, and moral law, and all other natural truths concerning God and man: divine revelation always goes well beyond what mere human philosophy can discover. Of this, the early Christians were quite conscious. They did realize that divine revelation was indeed from God, not from themselves.

At the same time, however, those early Christians had to communicate with their contemporaries and with their philosophy, so as to attract them to the truth revealed by God. There were even some philosophical concepts current at that time which divine revelation took up and perfected with a new and original meaning. Take, for example, the concept of "word" (*logos* in Greek; *verbum* in Latin) used at the beginning of St. John's Gospel. What did philosophers mean by this concept? A mind or thought behind the world, making and ordering all things: this world has to be made by someone, and this requires a design, a pattern, and hence a mind. It was a rather nebulous idea, not always understood in the same sense, because for some, this "word" was immanent to the world, like a world-soul, while for others it was outside this world. But Christianity told them: This thing you are groping for is the Word of God, the Thought of God Himself that has actually become a Man.

Thus, the early Christians brought the best achievements of pagan philosophy to their perfection, without feeling that they had to learn from it since they had received divine Wisdom itself in Christ. However, in order to communicate this divine Wisdom they had

to use language and concepts familiar to their hearers. And this apostolic need gave rise to the elaboration of “Christian philosophy”, which was Christian on two counts: (i) in its origin: the apostolic need to communicate; and (ii) in its purpose: to explain Christian revelation with enough precision to avoid errors.

But it is not specifically Christian in its content, since it overlaps with the human or natural philosophy already there, even though it perfects it and enhances it sometimes beyond recognition. It is therefore real philosophy, understandable by every man of any culture or time. The adjective “Christian” is extrinsic to it, just as when we talk of Greek philosophy or German philosophy: philosophy as such has no qualifications, just as mathematics or chemistry.

Christian philosophy is therefore a body of natural truths which are strictly philosophical, but would not have come into being without Christianity. Christian theology, on the other hand is the elaboration of divine revelation by reason and faith, using philosophy therefore. For instance, the concept of person is philosophical, but theology uses this concept in order to believe more deeply in the mystery of the Trinity and in the mystery of Christ. The Bible speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, although it never states explicitly that there are three Persons in one God. This is how the Church explains it theologically: using concepts which are philosophical (“person” and “nature”). The concepts of person and nature are philosophical, and hence understandable by any man; but the depth of meaning that Christian philosophy puts into them is due to the Christian revelation, which has prompted Christians to deepen these concepts so as to explain the faith better. However, once truths such as the Blessed Trinity are defined by the Church as of faith, they are no longer mere theological elaborations but revealed truths guaranteed by the infallibility of the Church, as was explained earlier.

### *B. The original synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas*

The process of formation of this Christian philosophy lasted for several centuries of historical fluctuations. Persecutions, migrations, invasions and wars had an influence on this process, but an unprecedented synthesis of Christian philosophy and theology was achieved by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. It is the Church herself that has declared this ever since and almost every pope and every ecumenical council has done so. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) is acknowl-

edged as the universal teacher of the Church (Doctor communis), because he achieved the highest synthesis of faith and reason, and thus was able to explain the faith best.

But what happened up to this time? How had Christian dogma developed through the teaching authority of the Church, i.e. through the popes and the ecumenical councils? In fact, it is noteworthy that St. Thomas died on his way to one of those ecumenical councils: the Second of Lyons. What happened up to then? Let us take a look at some of the landmarks.

The first three centuries are those of persecutions and martyrs, and thereby astonishing expansion of the faith to all the regions around the Mediterranean. At the beginning of the 4th century, the emperor Constantine put an end to the persecutions, and shortly afterwards, in the year 325, facilitated the summoning of the first ecumenical council at Nicaea, near the imperial capital of Constantinople (the really first general council had taken place at Jerusalem at the time of the Apostles: cf. Acts 15). This council tackled a heresy which was threatening to split the Church into two: Arianism, called after Arius, a bishop who maintained that Jesus was only a man, although so perfect that God had made him his Son, and thus he had become our leader or model, but he was not to be identified with God.

The Council of Nicaea defined, against Arius, that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, but “of one substance with the Father” (consubstantialis Patri). Thus was the divinity of Christ first defined by the Church. In the first three centuries there had been heresies, but the Church never had the chance of meeting in council because of the persecutions. There was, therefore, a great deal of groping for concepts and schools of thought, and even some good Christians fell into errors for lack of clear definitions of doctrine (the difference between “error” and “heresy” is that the latter is incurred when the person who has fallen into error refuses to correct it).

After the Council of Nicaea and the Arian crisis, which took a long time to solve, there was a great flourishing of the Fathers of the Church up to the end of the 6th century in both the Greek and the Latin areas of the Roman Empire, coinciding with the first six ecumenical councils (the second was that of Constantinople in 381, which brought the Arian crisis to an end). These Fathers were men of outstanding holiness and solid doctrine, because there was already a good basis of definitions of doctrine.

There were outstanding Fathers among both the Greeks and the Latins, and they developed two different traditions in theology with the common ground of the faith. The Greeks were more inclined to dogmatic theology and the Latins to moral theology, but each complemented each other well. Among the Greeks we can mention St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. John Chrysostom, and among the Latins St. Ambrose, St. Hillary, St. Jerome and the greatest of them all: St. Augustine. The last of the Fathers is usually considered to be St. John of Damascus, who lived in the 8th century. Those who played their role since then are called Doctors of the Church. It is also generally accepted that St. Augustine was the greatest of the Fathers. He died in the year 430, which means that between him and St. Thomas Aquinas more centuries elapsed (eight) than between St. Thomas and ourselves (seven).

A very important thing happened between St. Augustine and St. Thomas: the barbarian invasions of Europe. They started at the beginning of the 5th century, and lasted, in successive waves, up to the 9th century. When St. Augustine died, as bishop of Hippo in North Africa, his episcopal city was being besieged by one of those barbarian invaders: the Vandals. Since their main purpose was plundering, every fresh invasion meant another devastation of culture and civilization, and the subsequent laborious effort of reconstruction. The Church converted and civilized them one after another.

The 7th century saw the rise of Islam and the subsequent Moslem invasions which were hostile to Christianity, unlike the barbarian invasions. After a defensive period, the Christian world replied with the Crusades, from the 11th to the 13th century: an effort to recover the Holy Land from the Moslems, once Christendom had been consolidated in Europe. The Crusades were largely a failure for the Christians, although many positive things were achieved. This is one of the reasons which moved the Christians to look West instead of East, and pushed them to discover a new continent; but the 13th century was perhaps the climax of what we may call the Christian centuries, and it is the century of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the previous century, under the leadership of an outstanding holy Doctor of the Church, St. Anselm of Canterbury, a new educational and cultural movement began which we could call the scientific inauguration of theology: Scholasticism. The Scholastics or the Schoolmen, heirs to the monastic and cathe-

dral schools which had preserved European culture throughout the barbarian invasions, developed a very refined technique of study and teaching of theology in a systematic way. This was helped also by the fact that peacetime had given better chances for education to develop. Throughout the 13th century, the Church founded numerous universities all over Europe, beginning with that of Paris.

St. Thomas taught in several universities, especially in Paris, but also in Cologne and Naples. He achieved a great synthesis of all the knowledge of his time, taking advantage of the Latin translations of all the works of Aristotle which had just found their way into Europe via the intermingling of Christian and Moslem cultures in Spain. It was there that Christians translated from the Greek by Syrians converted to Islam in the 7th century. St. Thomas was anxious to cull this culture (Greek, Jewish, Arabic) for the benefit of theology, following the principle that reason is at the service of faith, philosophy at the service of theology. This St. Thomas did as no one else had done before: to gather the very best of human wisdom in the service of the faith, thus enhancing it and purifying it from all errors in the light of the faith. The final result was a perfect harmony of reason and faith, the natural order and the supernatural order, philosophy and revelation and the teaching authority of the Church.

### *C. Continuity of Christian Philosophy*

Even before St. Thomas there was already a trend to separate faith (revelation) from reason (philosophy), especially under the influence of Arab philosophers. After his death, this tendency was intensified with the nominalist and voluntarist philosophies of the 14th and 15th centuries. The crisis came in the 16th with the Protestant Revolt: Luther said that human nature has been totally corrupted by original sin, and therefore human reason is incapable of reaching the truth and has to rely on blind faith. This apparent exaltation of faith leads in fact to its downfall since, as we have said, philosophy is the handmaid of theology: theology needs philosophy as a helper. The Protestant rejection of philosophy and reason and human nature removes the ground wherein the faith is supposed to take root and blossom forth.

This tendency obtains a philosophical formulation, although now with reason rejecting faith, with René Descartes. This philosopher, who lived in the first half of the 17th century, formulated a philosophy

of pure reason without faith. While Luther had said “only faith” Descartes said “only reason”, but in both cases there is a separation of faith from reason to the detriment of both. Faith without reason eventually develops into fideism: a heresy also condemned by the Church in the 19th century. On the other hand, Descartes provides the starting point for another heresy also condemned by the Church in the 19th century: rationalism, or rejection of everything “supernatural” (i.e. above human nature or human reason).

From the 16th century onwards, Western thought has consequently developed largely along those lines, with many immanentistic philosophies (see ch. 21, j, and 47, b) giving rise to heresies when applied to the Christian faith. All modern heresies have been occasioned by those philosophies spawned by the separation of faith and reason. This illustrates that reason needs faith all the time. Reason easily goes astray when it rejects the guidance of the faith, but, on the other hand, faith comes to enlighten reason, not just irrational or sub-rational feelings.

Now, parallel to those philosophies and those heresies, there has been a development of Christian philosophy. The teaching authority of the Church has pointed out that its peak was reached with St. Thomas, but this does not mean that this philosophy is a closed system. It is intrinsically open, because it looks at reality, not at the human consciousness of reality. And since reality is immense, this philosophy is always open to further insights, as long as it remains faithful to its principles: its congenital and methodical realism. In fact, not a few aspects of philosophy have been developed after St. Thomas following his mind, for example, in political philosophy, which has developed in the 19th century especially through the celebrated encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII. He and subsequent Popes have been able to develop a Christian philosophy on man and the State, human rights, social justice and so forth, in the light of revelation, going well beyond St. Thomas, although following his principles. This is due to the new situations to which they have been exposed, such as the modern totalitarian State and the accelerated growth in communications.

One thing, however, happened in the process: that some of the basic insights of St. Thomas, especially in metaphysics, which is the most nuclear part of philosophy, got lost. A good number of so-called Thomists have not been totally and completely faithful to the master. That is why Pope Leo XIII, in the encyclical

*Aeterni Patris* (1879), which deals precisely with the philosophy of St. Thomas, also advocated a complete restoration of the study of St. Thomas in his original sources, rather than in the commentaries and writings on him. The idea was to recover the real St. Thomas as a way of counteracting the many errors due to having neglected him. It was then Leo XIII who, in 1879, started this new period in the history of the Church: the restoration of St. Thomas Aquinas. The proliferation of doctrinal errors in the 20th century indicates that this restoration is still only in the process of being achieved, and has encountered enormous opposition, not only outside but inside the Catholic world. In the course of our discussion we shall have many occasions to verify the reasons for this opposition, and to cast some light on the problem.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Thus ends Chapter 4 of my *Christian Philosophy* (1980). Can we now try to answer the two questions presented in the title of this paper? This is the author’s confident hope.

As a synthesis of the various points of the inseparable links between faith and reason, it is pertinent to recall the memorable opening lines of the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 14:8; 1 Jn 3:2).” The entire encyclical develops this point at length.

This paper tried to show the historical development of Christian philosophy through the ages and the relevance of Aquinas for our time as a challenge to a world engulfed in relativism. This ever-recurring mindset is the very negation of logic or reason, since it absolutizes its own relativism by negating God as absolute Truth. All the above is only a sketch to develop a whole course on Christian philosophy for educators on the humanities, with a thorough historical approach of John Paul II, as expressed in all his works, particularly in his last book, *Memory and Identity*. ✠

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# Monks and Demons: *Devils in Early Christian Biographies*

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**C**rucial to the self-understanding of the early monastic Fathers was the idea of the fallen angels, how the devils were to be understood and actively opposed. The patristic conception of the demons is especially manifested in the early Christian biographies which have as their subjects the great pioneers of early monasticism, for in these works are chronicled many tales of satanic attack, which range from instances of near-incredible physical and psychological abuse to the subtle and crafty temptations of the every day.

It is my thesis that in these narratives of demonic aggression and the subsequent response, victory, and advice of the monastic heroes, one may find a coherent and practical demonology. This demonology serves three practical purposes: it gives an account of how it is that the fallen angels tend to prey upon the souls of monks, it provides an aid in distinguishing the works of evil spirits, and it tells what means may be used to defeat these evil forces. By analyzing this understanding of Satan and how to deal with him as presented by the early ascetics and their biographers, we will not only come to a deeper knowledge of the desert Fathers, but we will also gain invaluable information of how to better fight in our own personal war with evil.

Before we begin our analysis, it is important to state that this essay does not aim at determining the “historical” accuracy of these early accounts of demonic aggression. For example, whether Antony was in fact physically assaulted by evil spirits, whether the attack was a hallucination brought on by stress, whether the narrative of the attack attempts to describe Antony’s psychological state, or whether the story was simply a fabrication on the part of Athanasius, all these are questions which will not be dealt with here. The goal of this paper is simply to analyze and summarize the early monastic understanding of the demons as presented in the actual texts themselves.

## I. THE WAR IN THE DESERT

**W**hy is demonic activity so prevalent in the lives of the early monastics? The accounts of these saintly men and women provide a substantial amount of narrative dedicated to various attacks by the evil one on those who fled the world for a life of solitude and prayer. What is it then that causes the demons to so relentlessly torment these recluses?

The answer lies in the ascetic’s status as a spiritual soldier, engaged in a fierce struggle with the forces of evil. These forces are not merely internal to the individual, (i.e., psychological, physical, and emotional phenomena), but rather real supernatural agents striving to gain control of the human soul. In the words of Bouyer:

The question is one of warfare against spiritual enemies, or, still better, of warfare between two spirits in which the stake is ourselves, but in which we cannot remain passive: the warfare waged within us by the Spirit of God against the spirit of evil.<sup>1</sup>

The intense spiritual training which the true ascetic undergoes by means of prayer, fasting, and penance is not only for the sake of self-control, but is the weaponry used against Satan and his minions. Although the devils “do not fight against us at all as long as we are doing our own will,”<sup>2</sup> once a lifestyle of prayer and self-denial is adopted, the evil spirits react violently. The monk’s ardent striving for sanctification makes the battle against the evil one more explicit. This marks a critical distinction between the ascetic and the ordinary Christian:

“The latter (the layman) also struggles against the devil, but the devil does not usually fight against him openly. The ascetic, the monk, on the contrary, forces the devil to unmask himself. Thereby he carries the struggle to a depth within himself which the layman knows nothing of, and which it is doubtless better that he should not know, for it would fill him with a vertigo against which he would have no effective remedy.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the combat between ascetic and demon is carried to such an extreme that it becomes transparent to the human contestant. However, it should also be noted that this battle with the devils is not only

the monastic life. This is clear especially in the example of the desert Fathers, who consciously imitated Christ's example in going out to the desert to pray, fast, and struggle with the devil. "It is in order to imitate Jesus in this focal episode in his life that the monk buries himself in the desert."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Papathanassiou gives a brief but summary account of how both the Old Testament and the gospels characterize the desert as a special habitat for demons.<sup>5</sup> "For the desert was a vast trackless waste, and there were many demons in every part of it."<sup>6</sup> The monastics, taking this characterization seriously, understood their own vocation as a liberation of locations which had been annexed by the forces of darkness. This not only involves the desert, but all those places where the forces of evil maintain a strong presence, (e.g., Macarius defeats the devils by going to the pagan temples and graveyards<sup>7</sup>).

As might be reasonably expected, the demons are unwilling to yield up those territories which they have secured. We see this illustrated by one episode in the Life of Antony, where the devils complain to the saint, "Why have you moved into our home? What have you got to do with the desert? Leave other people's property alone."<sup>8</sup> The invasion of the evil spirits' territory brings about a struggle for possession, not only of the soul of the saint, but even of the area involved.

This then is the framework in which the ascetics find themselves constantly suffering from the malicious onslaughts of the demons. Using the early biographies of the monastics as the primary source, we will now attempt a brief outline of the ways in which the devils attempt to spiritually weaken the resolve and sanctity of the monks. We can classify the demonic attacks in three ways: Temptation, Intimidation, and Deception.

Firstly temptation: the demons seek to seduce with the worldly goods from which the monks have chosen to abstain. Probably the primary of these temptations, especially for the male monastics,<sup>9</sup> is the temptation of sexuality. Although we read that Satan especially uses this form of attack on the young,<sup>10</sup> very few biographies of the early ascetics do not include some reference to an attack against virginity by the devil. Indeed, celibacy generally seems to be the first form of aggression against the monk, as is shown in the cases of Antony,<sup>11</sup> Hilarion,<sup>12</sup> and Benedict.<sup>13</sup>

These temptations of lust may take subtle forms, such as impure thoughts or dreams, yet there are also passages where the demons transform themselves to bring about desire.<sup>14</sup> "Satan himself performs his most successful transformation: he appears to the ascetic with the clothes, or

better without the clothes of a glamorous, easy girl, so as to induce the man to sin."<sup>15</sup> Regardless of how it may occur, the temptation to sexual indulgence is one of the enemy's most common devices, and is also one of the most difficult to overcome.

The demons also tempt the monks to other natural goods, which, while not evil in themselves, are to be avoided by the ascetic as much as possible. This is why, when Antony was tempted by riches, he fled "as if he were escaping from a fire."<sup>16</sup> The monastic abstinence from food, drink, sleep, social interaction, etc. . . all become the target of the enemy's special assault, for these are the defining weapons of the ascetic.

Yet this is not to say that the demons do not tempt the monks to ordinary human vices, to things which are in themselves evil. The early monastic narratives are constantly warning against the vices of envy, gossip, pride, and so on. Of these demonic preference seems to be given to pride, for the demons often visit the monks to tell them what holy men they are, and how well they are carrying out their vocation.<sup>17</sup> Once instilled, this vice wreaks havoc on all other efforts at austerity. The story is told of an elderly monk who, after many years of self-denial and prayer, yielded to a temptation of pride and presumption. As soon as this happened, his mind was filled with intense sexual images, he could no longer focus on his prayer, and he began to long for a return to secular life. Only through great effort and much remorse was he able to resume his previous lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> If the ascetic gives into one vice, the demons will extend it to the destruction of those other virtues for which he has worked so hard. The monk must be on his constant guard against each and every temptation offered, for his very being and identity are at stake.

Should temptations fail against the steadfast monastic, the demons resort to a different approach: intimidation, seeking to frighten and harass the poor soldier into surrender. In the early biographies, these attacks may take the form of psychological aggression, yet frequently the demons result to physical abuse in order to dissuade the monk from his resolve.

The examples of the first kind of harassment are often extremely bizarre, manifesting the hellish creativity which the devils employ in their mental tortures. Jerome relates how at one point Hilarion was tormented by strange sounds intended to frighten him.

One night he started to hear babies crying, sheep bleating, cattle lowing, women weeping, as well as lions roaring and the din of an army, in short, many different terrifying sounds. . . He realized that the demons were

mocking him and so he fell down on his knees and made the sign of the cross on his forehead.<sup>19</sup>

Other cases include the demons taking the shapes of dangerous animals and strange monsters,<sup>20</sup> quoting Scripture “with a foul mouth,”<sup>21</sup> and reciting to the monks their past sins<sup>22</sup> or even the past sins of their neighbor.<sup>23</sup> In an interesting passage, Antony describes how the demons try to awe the monks by pretending to predict future events.<sup>24</sup> The message behind these stories of psychological warfare is clear: the devils will do all in their power to mentally distress or frighten the monk to the point of retreat. No matter how base, infantile, or apparently random this form of abuse may be, it is certainly a challenge even for the most resolute of ascetics.

Nor is the evil one content simply to harm the minds of the holy warriors; he is often given the license to do physical violence to them as well. Athanasius relates that at one point the devils tortured Antony to such an extent that the next day he was found on the ground, half-dead, unable to move or speak.<sup>25</sup> One monk who desired to accompany Abba Helle found himself being strangled in his sleep.<sup>26</sup> Even Simeon Stylites atop his famous pillar was at one point stricken by the devil with a painful tumor.<sup>27</sup>

As with Job, these physical abuses appear to be the last of Satan’s explicit assaults, (although we will shortly see the dangers of his more subtle forms of deception). Once the devil has failed at temptation and psychological torment, his last mode of open aggression is on the physical level. Our Lord promised Antony to be his constant help in the future only after Antony had undergone extreme physical agony at the hands of the demons.<sup>28</sup> Another example is attributed to John of Lycopolis, who tells the story of one monk, who, having forsaken his past sinfulness, refused to give in to the demons who urged him to return to his former life. Enraged at his holy resolve, the devils tortured him terribly for three nights, on the third night bringing him to the point of “his last breath.” The holy penitent, however, withstood this onslaught without yielding, and the devils were forced to flee, screaming, “You have won; you have won; you have won.”<sup>29</sup> Once the monastic has successfully endured this phase of the struggle, he is blessed with a certain protection from further attacks of a similar kind.

The last form of attack which is recounted in the early Christian biographies is perhaps the most difficult to guard against, as it is also the most difficult to discern. Here we are dealing with demonic deception, where the evil spirits subtly work to influence a wrong course of action by misleading the monk into the belief that he is

actually making the right decision. The ascetic perceives the choice the demon is offering to be really a good thing in itself, and so it becomes much more difficult to see that such a decision may be inappropriate for the specific place and time.

We see an example of this in Jerome’s *Life of Malchus*, where Malchus, who has already entered a monastery, decides to return to his native place to comfort his widowed mother and to use his family estate to both aid the poor and found a monastery. Obviously, such intentions in themselves are extremely worthy, and in fact holy. Nonetheless, it becomes clear as the story continues that Malchus is in fact being deceived into forsaking his true calling as a monk for the sake of lesser goods:

My abbot began to protest that it was the temptation of the devil and that under the pretext of a virtuous intention were concealed the secret attacks of the old enemy... “Many monks,” he said, “are deceived in this way...”<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately for Malchus, he disregards the advice of his abbot, leaves the monastery, and meets with disaster. Throughout the remainder of the biography, Malchus often states his regret for the decision to abandon the monastery. The point is that the demon does not limit himself to temptations where the object is obviously counter to the will of God for the ascetic. Consequently, the monk must be on his guard even against those inclinations which appear to be completely in accord with the call to holiness.

St. Antony makes this clear when he states that the demons will at times exhort the monastic to further prayer, fasting, or abstinence from sleep.<sup>31</sup> Here the poor monk finds himself in a real quandary, for his enemy appears to be encouraging him in the activities that define his very vocation as an ascetic! Of course, the monk might reason that he is being tempted to push himself beyond his limit, so that if he actually does pray or fast more, he will do himself spiritual damage in the long run. On the other hand, what if the devil knows that the monk will do the opposite of what he is told by an evil spirit? If such were the case, then the demon could simply say, “fast more,” and by using this sort of hellish reverse psychology, he could trick the confused victim into praying and fasting too little!

Of course, all of this presumes that the monk is in fact aware that it is the devil who is responsible for making these exhortations. Unfortunately, such is often not the case. For example, if the monk feels an inclination towards further fasting, how is he to know whether this urge comes from a demon, or whether it is some

form of angelic communication? Obviously one's response should differ depending on the origin of the impulse in question. Malchus presumably would have rejected immediately his desire to leave the monastery had he explicitly recognized it as a satanic temptation instead of a virtuous resolve.

## II. THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

**T**he first practical consideration, then, is how to distinguish demonic snares from heavenly instruction, and both from purely natural inclinations. The enemy must first be recognized in order to be most effectively fought. "That is why it is necessary to ask the Lord to grant the ability to distinguish between spirits so that we may see through their tricks and their efforts and raise the single banner of the Lord's cross in confronting the unequal battle."<sup>32</sup> In spiritual matters,

"It is important to recognize the nature of the source of such promptings that we may not be misguided. The source is either God, as we have seen, or the devil, or our own nature... The power to discriminate among these various sources is called discernment of spirits."<sup>33</sup>

Now, the most evident case of the need to distinguish between evil and good spirits is in the event of an apparition. Although an angel would clearly have no reason to deceive by pretending to be a demon, the evil spirits would certainly have much to gain if they could successfully pose as a messenger of God, or even as Our Lord Himself.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, there are a number of such cases referred to in the early monastic biographies, especially by Athanasius.<sup>35</sup> How is the monk to tell the difference between a demonic impersonation or a heavenly agent?

The first criterion for determining the origin of an apparition as stated by the monastic fathers involves a judgment of the resulting spiritual effects. The figure of Antony gives as an example the phenomenon of fear, which is a common experience of those who are visited by supernatural beings. But there is a striking difference between the fear caused by the approach of an angel as opposed to fear that accompanies a demon. In the case of the former, "Their kindness is so great that if anyone, due to human weakness, was terrified by their startling brightness, they would immediately dispel all fear from his heart."<sup>36</sup> Hence the initial fear resulting from beholding a being of such greatness would quickly pass, and a calm peace would quickly take its place, as was the case with Our Lady at the coming of Gabriel. (Lk 1:26-30).

On the contrary, "if the fear remains, it is the enemy

who has appeared, since he does not know how to comfort...."<sup>37</sup> Hence the devil's capacity for trickery is not without its limits, for his inability to effect a true peace is bound to give him away. Although he may transfigure himself such as to be initially indistinguishable from a benevolent agent, if the monk applies the "good trees bear good fruit" principle, he will remain undeceived by the demon's impersonation. This same principle may then be extended to all other forms of holy and unholy effects, so that when the apparition brings with it a sense of "righteousness, purity, chastity, contentment, and of every righteous deed and glorious virtue," one may be confident that the stranger is of heaven. A demon, by contrast, is characterized as "wrathful and bitter and foolish, and his works are evil, and ruin the servants of God. When, then, he ascends into your heart, know him by his works."<sup>38</sup>

Further, when a heavenly being is present, the human person is caught up in an intense ecstasy, such that "one's consciousness is wholly absorbed."<sup>39</sup> This sense of rapture is notably lacking in a demonic deception. If the visionary finds himself actively doubting or questioning the nature of the vision during the experience, this is a good indication that the spirit is not to be trusted.<sup>40</sup>

*The Life of Antony* gives us another method for discernment in the case of apparitions. Here Antony states:

When a vision appears to you, demand boldly of it who it is and where it comes from; if it is a holy apparition, the angel's comfort will immediately turn your fear into joy. But if it is really a temptation offered by the devil, it will vanish when the faithful soul interrogates him, because to ask who he is and where he is from offers the best guarantee of safety.<sup>41</sup>

This is a somewhat more direct approach, as it does not require the inference from the effects of an apparition to its character. No doubt it demands a great deal of courage to even speak to an unearthly visitor, let alone to command that it identify itself, yet the monastic's vocation as a spiritual warrior demands such fortitude. In the face of Christian boldness of this nature, the devil has no recourse except to flee, while the messenger of God will reward the faithful person with peace.

What of less explicit demonic temptations, where the deceiver does not take angelic form? Clearly, if the monk feels inclined to forsake his vocation, either through sexuality, greed, or some other worldly desire, he can be certain that such an inclination does not have its origin in Heaven. But what of the case where the ascetic is under the impression that he must fast more, pray more, or do some other action, which, under normal circumstances, would be praiseworthy?

First of all, in such cases it is wise to resort to the counsel of a fellow monk, in order to receive some form of third-party advice. This is especially true respecting the elder monks, or the abbots of the community, as can be seen from the following story:

A brother asked Abba Poemen, "Why should I not be free to do without manifesting my thoughts to the old men?" The old man replied, "Abba John the Dwarf said, 'The enemy rejoices over nothing so much as over those who do not manifest their thoughts.'"<sup>42</sup>

If the confused monk brings his dilemma to another, especially an elder with wisdom and experience, then this latter will be able to aid in determining whether or not an evil spirit is present. Such was the case with Malchus' superior, who accurately perceived the desire to leave the monastery, not as the will of the God, but rather a temptation of the enemy.

There is, however, a general principle to be used in cases of obscurity regarding the source of certain inclinations, namely, the principle of balance. To Poemen the Shepherd is attributed the statement, "Everything that goes to excess comes from the demons."<sup>43</sup> Every Christian must recognize the mean between too much and too little, and for the ascetic this must apply to how much one can fast from food, drink, or sleep. This is not to deny that at certain times there may be a legitimate call to extreme penance, (e.g., in the case of St. Symeon Stylites, who endured astonishing self-denials), yet the mark of a true monk is his ability to recognize when further fasting from food, sleep, etc., would be a sin against prudence. In the words of Syncletica:

There is an asceticism which is determined by the enemy... So how are we to distinguish between the divine and royal asceticism and the demonic tyranny? Clearly through the quality of balance... In truth lack of proportion always corrupts... We must direct our souls with discernment.<sup>44</sup>

Lastly, with regard to the discernment of spirits, it is helpful to distinguish between the influence of demons and those temptations which come from the basic drives of our human nature. For example, in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Abba Anthony states that there is a natural human impulse towards certain sense gratification, which can be aggravated by certain conditions, (e.g., too much wine, tempting surroundings, etc...). However, this is to be differentiated from more violent forms of this temptation which come from the demons.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to make this point, for although both devils and the inclinations should be fought against when they pull the monk towards the lesser good, yet different

tactics should be used in each case. Take the hypothetical case of an individual who constantly feels a strong temptation to break his fast. If he is too quick to jump to the conclusion that he is under demonic attack, he may fail to reflect that his position as chief cook for the monastery may be responsible for the arousal of his appetites. On the other hand, war with the demons demands the employment of different weapons than do the passions, (e.g., the various invocations against the devils).

We see then, the practical relevance of discerning the various forces which influence the monk in his daily struggle towards sanctity. Once the ascetic is certain he is the victim of demonic aggression, he is then able to take steps to actively confront these attacks.

### III. OVERCOMING DEMONIC INFLUENCE

**T**he next question regards how the monk is able to successfully wage his own counter-offensive against the devil. Obviously, it is necessary to respond actively, "not ignoring the attacks and wiles of the devil... We must arm ourselves in every way against the demons."<sup>46</sup> Now, the primary weapons by which the monk arms himself against evil spirits have already been to some degree examined, namely, the practices which define the ascetic way of life. It is written concerning St. Isidore the Priest that when he was asked why the demons were so afraid of him, he responded, "Because I have practiced asceticism since the day I became a monk."<sup>47</sup>

Now the call to asceticism involves both prayer and penance, and it is important to see how each plays a role in the defeat of Satan. Firstly, the call to penance and self-denial is of key importance in the early stories of monastic victory over evil. Let us look first at the testimony of Athanasius:

And Antony, knowing from what the Bible says that the wiles of the devil are numerous, maintained his commitment firm by means of skilful effort... Consequently Antony subdued his body more and more, for fear that he who had been the winner in some contests should be the loser in others.<sup>48</sup>

The logic behind this tactic may at first seem unclear; why should the ascetic go to work on his own body, when the devil is the real opponent? The answer becomes evident when one considers that the demon prefers to tempt the victim through the latter's physical properties. Thus we see in another passage:

The devil tried to titillate his sense by means of natural carnal desires, but Antony defended his whole body by faith, by praying at night, and by fasting.<sup>49</sup>

If a man is accustomed to giving his body what it asks for, then when the devil arouses inordinate physical desires for sleep, food, sex, etc., restraint will be extremely difficult due to the force of habit. On the other hand, the ascetic who has gained self-mastery over his own natural inclinations has in effect set up a blockade to the enemy's attack through the medium of the body. Thus, in the words attributed to Pityrion, "...whoever wishes to drive out the demons must first master the passions."<sup>50</sup>

There is also a sense whereby bodily penance serves not only as a fortification against temptation, but even as a distraction from temptation. When "the tempter" came to weaken Benedict with overwhelming sexual desire, he responded by hurling himself into thornbushes. "These wounds to his skin allowed him to remove the mental wound from his body by turning the pleasure to pain."<sup>51</sup> In a similar way, when one is severely fasting, the flesh's plea for the joys of sex is drowned out by the more desperate yearnings for food or sleep. Such was Hilarion's defense against sexual temptation from the devil, and he threatens his body with severe penance, saying, "I will make you weak with hunger and thirst... Through heat and cold I will strive to ensure that you think of food rather than of sexual gratification."<sup>52</sup>

Nor is self-control an effective weapon only on the physical level. For example, anger<sup>53</sup> and self-satisfaction<sup>54</sup> must be alertly tempered, or else the evil spirits will be able to make use of the monk's indulgence in these areas. Further, social pleasures, especially the love of idle conversation,<sup>55</sup> must be carefully guarded against, for even here the evil one is able to make headway. It is said that Isidore the Priest was "afraid" to leave even his cell, lest he be met with some unforeseen snare of Satan through the society of the other monks.<sup>56</sup>

So much then for the aspect of sacrifice and self-control. Now let us examine the other facet of asceticism, the vocation to prayer. Given the fact that the monk is doing battle with a supernatural power, there follows the necessity of invoking supernatural aid. Antony points out that despite the "brave fight" of the monastics, the demons would surely have been victorious, had their power not been removed by divine command.<sup>57</sup> This explains why early Christian monastic biographies are replete with accounts of the saints praying for God's intervention in the struggle against the evil spirits.

Often, in situations of demonic illusion, it is prayer that shows the deception for what it is.<sup>58</sup> In the case of

St. Benedict, a single prayer was all that was required to remove the devil's impediment to construction on a monastery.<sup>59</sup> We also see in the *Life of Antony* a certain emphasis on the name of Jesus Christ, which sends the spirits fleeing.<sup>60</sup> However, regarding the demons, prayer arguably comes into play most prominently in the cases of the exorcism of others. To cite just a few examples, Antony,<sup>61</sup> Hilarion,<sup>62</sup> Benedict<sup>63</sup> and Simeon Stylites<sup>64</sup> are all recounted as having relieved others of demonic harassment by means of their prayers.

It should be emphasized that both prayer and penance are required for the victory over the demons. In all of the examples cited, the prayers used against Satan are effective only by virtue of the saintly lifestyle of the ascetic, which has been gained by much self-sacrifice. Although the monk cannot rely on his own efforts alone to defeat evil, this does not imply that he may simply invoke God's aid without actively doing all he can to cooperate. Rather, it is the human effort combined with the divine grace which overpowers the assaults of the enemy.

Now as we have seen, the demons attempt to sabotage these weapons of prayer and penance any way they can, either by trying to persuade the monk to fast and pray less, or by coaxing them to do more. Fortunately, we have in the *Life of Antony* an appropriate response to these appeals of the devils, namely, disregard. Just as Our Lord ordered the demons to be silent even when they proclaimed the truth about His nature (Luke 4:41), so too the Christian should ignore demonic urgings, for even if the advice appears to be prudential, the believer knows that it is given with the intent of malice.

The Lord also wanted us to follow Christ's example and to refuse assent to the demons in any way, even if they persuade us of something that might be beneficial... we must overcome the devil by not believing in him. If they force us to pray, if they persuade us to fast, we should do this not at their suggestion but because it is part of our way of life.<sup>65</sup>

Thus the monk must be certain that his actions are in no way determined by the influence of the demons' suggestions. If we reject a temptation of Satan, it should not be because he has said it, but because we know it is not the right thing to do. In the same way, if our actions happen to correspond to the promptings of demons, it is important that their motivation be utterly independent from such prompting.

Lastly, it is critical to note that even with these strategic weapons of prayer and penance, much courage is needed for the monk to finally conquer the hellish opponents. Indeed, the holiest monastics must undergo severe

trial and suffering at the hands of their enemies before victory is granted them. This is why the early Christian biographies emphasize the perseverance of the heroes recounted, perseverance which enables them to withstand the onslaughts of the foe until the latter has been wearied by the ascetics' supernatural fortitude. Indeed, even the thoughts suggested by the demons require patience to make them go away.<sup>66</sup> In the words of Syncletia:

If you have begun to act well, do not turn back through constraint of the enemy, for through your endurance, the enemy is destroyed. Those who put out to sea at first sail with a favorable wind... but later the winds become adverse... But when in a little while there is calm and the tempest dies down, then the ship sails again. So it is with us, when we are driven by the spirits who are against us; we hold to the cross as our sail and so we can set a safe course.<sup>67</sup>

We see then that peace is promised to the true monastic who remains loyal to his vocation of asceticism and who invokes God's help against the demons. Although he may be tried and tested severely, the monk can take solace in the knowledge that, as in the case of Job, demonic license never exceeds the bounds of divine permission, and that victory is assured for the soul who remains faithful.

These are various characterizations of demonic aggression, as chronicled by the biographers of the early monastics, as well as the corresponding advice given regarding the discernment of evil spirits and how to defeat them. As should be obvious, some application of these same principles to daily life should be of great use to any Christian, whatever his state in life. Certainly we do not find ourselves in a literal desert teeming with the appearances of devils, still we find ourselves in a cultural climate markedly hostile to the life of sanctity. Temptations towards indulgence, worldliness and failing to satisfy the obligations of our respective vocations face us on a daily basis. In light of these struggles, the stories of the early monks ought to afford us inspiration and instruction. Prayer, self-denial, seeking the counsel of others, reflection on the various urges and inclinations we experience, an awareness of the supernatural forces which affect us, and an unshakeable determination to imitate Our Lord cannot but aid us in our own spiritual fight as Christian soldiers. ✠

#### ENDNOTES

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8. Athanasius, "Life of Antony," in Early Christian Lives, trans., ed. Carolinne White, (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 17-18.
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16. Athanasius, "Antony," 17.
17. Ibid. 30.
18. Lives, 59-61.
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27. Antonius, "The Life and Daily Mode of Living of Blessed Simeon the Stylite," in The Lives of Simeon Stylites, trans. Robert Doran (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 94.
28. Athanasius, "Antony," 16.
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30. Jerome, "Life of Malchus," in Early Christian Lives, trans. Carolinne White (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 122.
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32. Ibid, 23.
33. Pascal P. Parente, The Ascetical Life, (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1944), 163.
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35. Athanasius, "Antony," 30-36. Cf. Joseph T. Lienhard, "Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 519-22.
36. Athanasius, Antony, 31.
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43. Sayings, 156.
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45. 5. Cf. John the Dwarf, on the distinction between the demons and our own inclinations, 148.
46. Attributed to Syncretica, Sayings, 196.
47. Sayings, 82.
48. Athanasius, "Antony," 13.
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50. Lives, 99.
51. Gregory the Great, "Benedict," 168.
52. Jerome, "Hilarion," 91.
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58. To take just three examples, Lives, 108, ; Athanasius, "Antony," 33; Gregory, "Benedict," 179.
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60. 33, 40, 41, 48.
61. Athanasius, "Antony," 48.
62. Jerome, "Hilarion," 97.
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## Unamuno's Farewell to Fiction: *The Holy Apostasy of San Manuel Bueno*

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### 1) A FAREWELL TO FICTION

The novel *San Manuel Bueno, Martyr* can quite correctly be called Miguel de Unamuno's farewell to fiction. Written in the fall of 1930, after a six year exile spent primarily in France by way of the Canary Islands, it was first published in 1931. Two years later in 1933 it made its appearance in book form along with three other stories by Unamuno, who died shortly thereafter in 1936 just after the rise to power of the Franco regime. By no means a literary masterpiece, *San Manuel Bueno* is still arguably the jewel in the crown of Unamuno's efforts to give fictional flesh to his philosophical views regarding the human condition. Unamuno himself has suggested that the novel should be understood as the third and final installment of a trilogy of works which began with *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1913) and *The Agony of Christianity* (1925).

In *San Manuel Bueno, Martyr* Unamuno tells the story of an unbelieving parish priest named Manuel Bueno whose personal cross is that he privately

disavows the immortality of the soul. Unamuno thus deals fictionally with the issue of whether religious faith is itself a fiction. Manuel's story is narrated post-humously by Angela Carballino, a long time disciple who lives in a small lakeside village named Valverde de Lucerna. Her recollections in essence constitute a biographical memoir of Manuel's tenure as parish priest, but also double as her own autobiographical confession. At one point in the story Angela's religiously skeptical brother Lazarus returns home from America, where he had intended to found a Marxist-style agrarian syndicate, only to be spiritually seduced by the charismatic piety of the saintly Manuel. These three characters proceed to maintain a conspiracy of silence in regard to Don Manuel's crisis of faith for the purported purpose of protecting the peasant parishioners from religious doubt and its dreadful consequences. It is this commitment to secrecy concerning his own dark night of the soul that, according to Unamuno, elevates the life of Manuel to a level of martyrdom or holy apostasy. My aim in this essay is to provide a fair-minded yet still consistently Catholic analysis of this hagiographical interpretation of a holiness that would implement a strategy of deceit for the salvation of souls.

## 2) THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

The Roman Catholic Church casts a critical eye upon many of the views espoused by Unamuno. Consider, for instance, his concept of tragedy. In his signature philosophical work dealing with the tragic sense of life, and many other works as well including *San Manuel Bueno*, Unamuno interprets tragedy as sorrow without hope of ever being overcome, and as evil without hope of redemption. Man, he thinks, is not to be defined as an Aristotelian *zoon politikon* or a Cartesian *res cogitans*, or even, God forbid, in traditional Thomistic terms. For Unamuno man is a being who thirsts for immortality. According to Unamuno, the only appropriate psychological response to the tragedy that is human existence is to hope against hope for immortality. Thus Unamuno depicts the skeptical Manuel Bueno as seeking to further the illusion of immortality for the simple people who, in their holy ignorance, could not stand to live with the tragedy of truth.

What is the position of the Church concerning tragedy? Consider the almost total absence of tragedy in Roman literature. Despite the widespread Roman practice of emulating the Greeks, tragedy as a dramatic form, with some minor exceptions such as the tragic plays of Seneca, virtually disappeared as a genre during the Roman Empire. One possible explanation for such a lack of tragic literature was the Roman embracement of the philosophy of Stoicism as a quasi-state religion. Greek tragedy focused upon what happens when people do not conform to the dictates of fate; whereas Stoicism, at least from an ethical perspective, taught its adherents to pursue *apatheia* so as to achieve a state of indifference or resignation to the inevitability of fate. Later on, when Stoicism was eventually eclipsed within the empire by Christianity, which professed a commitment to the freedom of the will and the possibility of personal salvation, it is little wonder that the Greek concept of tragedy would continue to number among the casualties of a by-gone era. A theology which enshrined hope and which recognized the justice of a freely chosen perdition, and an ethical philosophy which placed a premium upon acquiescence, were simply not compatible with the Greek conception of the tragic. The Catholic philosophy of life is vehemently anti-tragic, despite the contrary interpretations of vociferous Catholics such as Unamuno, and lapsed Catholics such as Eugene O'Neill. In *San Manuel Bueno* Unamuno is not advising us that we should live according to any objective criterion of truth. What he recommends is that we should latch onto any seeming

truth that might enable us to keep on living.

On January 1, 1957 the *Osservatore Romano* announced that Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life* and *The Agony of Christianity* had been placed upon the Index of banned books. It was claimed that both works were in violation of Canon Law 1309, which dealt with attempts to undermine the foundation of religion. San Manuel Bueno, while not banned, was nevertheless given a dishonorable mention. Moreover, Vatican I had already issued an anathema against any denial that God's existence could be rationally demonstrated. According to the *Osservatore Romano* article the following errors were cited as being contained in Unamuno's philosophical-fictional trilogy.

- 1) Denial of faith in the name of reason
- 2) Denial of the immortality of the soul
- 3) Denial of the Trinity
- 4) Denial of the divinity of Christ
- 5) Denial of Original Sin
- 6) Denial of transubstantiation
- 7) Denial of the eternity of hell

Given such a gap between the religious views of Unamuno and the Catholic Church it should come as little or no surprise that Unamuno had a great deal of trouble in securing a suitable teaching position in late 19th century Catholic Spain upon the completion of his doctorate. With perseverance however he was able to procure the chair in Greek at the University of Salamanca, which provided a platform for his views for the remainder of his teaching career. Some have said that such a position was given to Unamuno with the hope that any unorthodox statements he might make in an ancient language would sail over the heads of his students. It is quite fitting then that the Margaret Rudd biography of Unamuno should be entitled *The Lone Heretic*.

## 3) UNAMUNO'S DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST: SAINT OR SINNER?

Henry David Thoreau once suggested that the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. Unamuno's story provides us with an example of how one country priest sought to prevent such desperation from seeping into and controlling the lives of his beloved parishioners. Since Manuel possessed no religious faith, and hence no hope, he had only charity to rely upon among the theological virtues. The hope of the people, according to Manuel, was predicated upon a false faith, a sort of Platonic noble lie. But the question may be asked as to

whether Manuel actually employs charity for a noble and selfless end, or whether he does so in order to cure himself of his own private hell. We learn from the novel that suicide has long been a siren's song for the men of the Bueno family. This invocation of the theme of inheritance is reminiscent of that in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, a play written by a playwright whom Unamuno highly admired.

Do Manuel's theological doubts, although easily amounting to a crisis of faith, really equate to its complete absence? Soren Kierkegaard, for example, rated passionate doubt above mere catechetical conformity while Gabriel Marcel held that despair could facilitate faith in staking a claim within our souls. Ironically then, the profession of atheism could possibly imply a psychological framework that is much more suitable for spiritual conversion than that of lukewarm belief. The agony about which Unamuno writes, and which is exhibited in the character of Manuel Bueno, bears the marks of classic existential despair. For Unamuno human agony consists of that state of soul which derives from the difficulty of ever truly understanding the relationship which exists between certain pairs of opposing concepts, such as faith and reason or life and death. Philosophically, for Bernard Lonergan, and autobiographically, for Saint Augustine, intellectual conversion is cast as a necessary prelude to both moral and spiritual conversion. Unamuno's characterization of Manuel Bueno however does not seem to fit into this mold, for Manuel appears to have risen to the heights of moral rectitude, at least in certain ways, without retaining any Church doctrines which he can continue to believe, or any God whom he can continue to love. For Flannery O'Connor the paradoxes generated by an incarnational view of life became the grist for creating the kind of humor that could artistically reveal the grotesque and perfidious influence of our fallen natures upon our lives. But for Unamuno the dialectical skirmishes of reason in opposition to itself do not provide the same level or glimmer of hope that always accompanies the lancing probes of O'Connor's satire. On the other hand, Unamuno does not present Manuel's lack of faith as an abyss from which he can never extricate himself in principle, although the latter does die without ever recanting his apostasy. Manuel dies as he had lived, an unbeliever.

As usual, St. Thomas Aquinas can help us to recover a sense of fideistic realism. For Aquinas tells us in the *Summa Theologica* that despair is both a vice and a sin. *Motus desperationis est vitiosus et peccatum* (ST IIa, xx, 1). But as we know from our moral theology the

circumstances surrounding our willful acts can serve to either increase or decrease the blame or approbation merited by the objective moral character of what we do. Fulton Sheehan once wrote a book about the superiority of sacramental confession to the couch of the psychoanalyst. In this regard it is interesting to note that the moment when Manuel's self-assurance in his apostasy begins to falter occurs immediately after his confession to and absolution from Angela. Notwithstanding the heterodox nature of the confession Manuel nevertheless becomes the beneficiary of some therapeutic effects. Ultimately however, although confession is good for the soul only God can heal it.

Unamuno's fictional diary of the country priest emerged in part from the substance of his own real life. The lakeside setting of the story was suggested to Unamuno by the lake of San Martin de Castaneda in Sanabria, which stood at the foot of a monastery. San Manuel meanwhile bears a strong resemblance to Father Francisco de Iturriburria, a Basque priest who attended the seminary in Vittoria before returning home to Bilbao, the birthplace of Unamuno, never to leave again. Like Manuel, Father Francisco lived a life plagued by religious doubts whose anxieties were only alleviated by service to his people. He revealed his doubts to his fellow Basque and friend Unamuno, just as Manuel would later confess his secret misgivings about Christian teaching to Lazarus.

Angela's recounting of the priestly life of Manuel achieves a timeless quality that is suggestive of eternity. Angela's memoir camouflages the passage of time by her use of ambiguous phrasing in describing episodes in the life of Manuel. She employs such phrases as "he used to say," and "he often said," and so on. As a consequence Angela's narrative is characterized by a kind of impressionistic quality that makes time appear to stand still. The lives of the parishioners who live in the diocese of Renada, which can be translated as both "forever re-born" and "doubly nothing," are lives of unvarying continuity. In the epilogue Unamuno even intrudes upon the fictional happenings in order to overtly inform the reader that "nothing happens" in this tale in which he has tried to capture the tragic sense of daily life.

It is easy to see that Unamuno also has our Lord in mind in his characterization of San Manuel, although on the surface such a comparison might seemed strained. Like Jesus, Manuel possesses curative if not miraculous powers. Both Jesus and Manuel succeed in bringing Lazarus back from the dead: Jesus from the grave, and Manuel from the death of an Enlightenment rationalism.

Both can claim disciples who are willing to perpetuate their respective stories. Angela's memoir is reminiscent of a gospel narrative. Even after death the garments of Manuel are divided up in a Christ-like fashion among the villagers.

Unamuno adopts the technique of accentuating the character of Manuel in the surrounding countryside, namely the lake and the mountain which dominate the landscape of the village. Manuel is described by Angela as tall, thin, and erect like a mountain, while his eyes reveal the blue depths of the lake. Priest, landscape, and village are thus artistically portrayed as inflections of one overall and immanentistic entity. This effect is most beautifully evoked during a recitation of the Apostles' Creed in the church when "all those voices fused in a single one forming a mountain whose peak... was Don Manuel." Unamuno, through Angela, then goes on to tell us that the voice of Manuel began to slide, as into a lake, upon reaching the words "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." While not nearly as subtle as Sigrid Undset's linking of character and countryside in *Kristin Lavransdatter*, Unamuno nevertheless succeeds admirably in creating a mood of spiritual harmony among the novel's various manifestations of incarnate reality.

Unamuno's constant invocation of the dream in the novel, which is intended to evoke the memory of Calderon's *Life is a Dream* in the mind of the Spanish reader, is intended to justify allegiance to any ideology or superstition, religious or otherwise, that enhances human hope. I say Spanish reader because I believe that Unamuno was motivated by patriotic motives in writing *San Manuel Bueno*. We can look to Unamuno's early work entitled *On Authentic Tradition* (1895) for an understanding of the possible implications of *San Manuel Bueno* for Spanish society. For while Unamuno's message may have been universal, his thinking was always cast in the mold of his love for Spain and its people. Ever since Cervantes and his story of knight errantry in the pursuit of personal immortality through fame it is safe to say that a great deal of Spanish literature needs to be interpreted with both ethnic and patriotic motives in mind. Fernando Rielo however, a recently deceased Spanish Catholic mystic, poet, philosopher and founder of a Catholic religious order, was one who took exception to Unamuno's reading of *Don Quixote*. In his book entitled *Theory of Don Quixote: Its Hispanic Mysticism* Rielo argued that the main theme of Cervantes' great work had to do with an attempt to reinvigorate the soul of authentic Spanish mysticism.

What could be more quixotic though than a story of a man who, like Manuel Bueno, spends his life tilting at death? With the conversion of Lazarus, and his reabsorption into the bosom of village life, it seems that Unamuno is attempting to make a literary statement about the survival and the identity of the Spanish culture which he so dearly loved. According to Unamuno, Spain had been offered a nationalistic either-or: a choice between either isolationism or the injection of innovation from the outside world. Without the latter Spain could not hope to prosper in the modern world. Without the former, Catholic Spain would not be able to survive as it had since James the Apostle imported Christianity to the Iberian peninsula, as legend has it, almost two thousand years ago. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War and the subsequent Treaty of Paris, in which Spain's position as a colonial power officially came to an end there arose a movement among the intelligentsia of the generation of 1898 to transform Spain into a cultural and intellectual power, the equal of any of its European counterparts. In *San Manuel Bueno* Unamuno seems to opt for a Spain whose cultural survival depends upon keeping the rest of the world at bay. This streak of conservatism is echoed in an article written by Unamuno shortly after the novel entitled "San Pio X" in which he declares himself in agreement with *Pascendi dominis grecis*, the 1910 encyclical in which Pope Pius X rails against the faith challenging threats posed by modernism

Many commentators view *San Manuel Bueno* as a veiled confession on the part of Unamuno in which he gives aesthetic form to his own atheism and longing for immortality. This final and best of his fictional works represents a volte face from his lifelong practice of wielding his pen to stir up strife. In *San Manuel Bueno* Unamuno uncharacteristically preaches unconditional surrender based upon blind faith in an illusory reality. One can only wonder if he was offering an antidote to Freud's recently published *The Future of an Illusion*, which came out in 1927. Unamuno's customary literary and philosophical modus operandi of trying to awaken the sleeping from their dogmatic slumbers, which not only echoes Kant's famous phrase but also provides a vivid Lazarean metaphor, is being tossed aside in favor of the creation of a character like Manuel who devotes his life to safeguarding the dreams of the people charged to his priestly care. One commentator maintains that Manuel thus seems to be the tragic embodiment of a modernism which still yearns for the old securities, previously only thought possible within a supernatural framework.

Manuel informs Angela that he believes only in the heaven that we can see. Cielo, in Spanish, means both heaven and sky. He attests to having learned the secret of life, not in books, but by having been in attendance at countless deathbeds. The essence of death, according to Manuel, is a certain *taedium vitae* that is a thousand times worse than even the pangs which arise from hunger. Manuel's personal remedy for despair is to commit a suicide of the self by avoiding all contact with solitude. Thus Manuel compensates for his own lack of faith and its consequent price in anguish by filling all of his waking hours with good works. This personal dread of solitude and interiority on the part of Manuel stands at odds with the insularity he tries so hard to maintain for the flock of people under his care who live in a veritable Catholic cloister. Thus the theme of solitude, which also lends itself to the title of a play written by Unamuno in 1921, occurs on three different levels in the novel: on the personal level of Manuel, on a parish level, and on a symbolic national level.

#### 4) CONCLUDING REMARKS

What is the state of the soul of Manuel, who remains an apostate to the very end? His problem is twofold: 1) He doubts the truth of Catholic doctrine; and 2) He has implemented a strategy of deceit in order to spiritually, or at least psychologically, protect the members of his flock.. One might maintain that Manuel cannot be held morally responsible for his sincere doubts *per se*. In his confessions to both Angela and Lazarus he manifests a recognition of and a regret for both of these transgressions. On the other hand, Manuel's sometimes seeming certitude about the

falsity of Catholic doctrine, expressed in the form of some utterly outrageous statements, such as the claim that perhaps Christ really did feel abandoned upon the cross, is either downright sinful or demented. Perhaps our most prudent policy is to suspend judgment on this question of the disposition of Manuel's soul, lest we too be judged. Unlike Sartre, for whom hell is other people, Manuel died as he had lived, surrounded by the people whom he had loved with a Christ-like tenderness.

Unamuno invests the character of Manuel with a soteriological perspective that is different from the usual (*sola fides*) versus (faith + good works) distinctions embraced by Lutheranism and Catholicism respectively. For Manuel Christianity is a set of doctrines built upon an unhealthy foundation of false faith and false hopes. It can only profit he thought from its priestly class adopting a policy of *solamente caridad*. As Catholics we cannot endorse Unamuno's well intended but idiosyncratic reweighting of the theological virtues. What I do like about the novel and the character of Manuel is that I think Unamuno was attempting to dramatize the logic of the heart made famous by Pascal in his *Pensees*. *La coeur a ses raisons che la raison ne connais pas*. Recall that the simpleton who attended Manuel throughout the novel, and who symbolizes his simplicity of soul, is called Blasillo, which means little Blaise. In a way the character of Manuel is living out the life of Pascal's famous wager, a life that God, should he exist, could not, or so the argument goes, refuse to reward. At the very least Manuel is both saint and martyr to the extent that he lives up to the high ideal reflected in Unamuno's epic poem about the suffering Christ depicted by Velasquez. Like Jesus, the tormented Manuel was a man who was willing to lay down his life for his friends. ✠



# Modern Interpretations of Religion: *The Legacy of Hume and Kant*

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**T**he failure of the proposed European Constitution to acknowledge the Christian roots of European culture is the outcome of a conflict begun long ago, the inevitable result of the Enlightenment, Anglo-French and German, of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. No one intellectual can be held accountable for Europe's neglect of its past, but the combined discourses of British, French, and German intellectuals changed the way Europe's cultural elites were to view religion and its role in society. The drama is fascinating, and there are many players, but the leading roles have to be assigned to David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and G.W.F. Hegel.

David Hume is usually acknowledged to be the first philosopher, certainly the first in the modern period, to study religion systematically from a philosophical point of view. In his own day, Hume was best known for his six-volume *History of England (1754-1776)*. Although he abandoned philosophy per se when he was relatively young, his impact remains on philosophical discourse to this day. As a result of his empirical analysis of causality, Hume concluded that all arguments for the existence of God fail. But if there is no evidence for the existence of God, then how is one to understand common belief in God and religion? With the destruction of the rational ground of homage, worship and the things pertaining to worship lose their rationale. Belief in God, in the absence of demonstration, becomes just that, *belief*. This form of agnosticism must be understood as a radical break with antiquity. The ancients from Plato to Plotinus and beyond had no trouble reasoning to a self-thinking intellect, a *summum bonum*, a first efficient cause, an ultimate final cause and an immaterial intellect. Design in nature hardly had to be postulated; it was taken for granted. Their treatment of religion usually took place in the context of their discussions of the virtue of justice. Religion was considered an act of piety due a provident, unseen higher intelligence. Recognition of dependence naturally leads to discussions of appropriate ways to acknowledge debt to unseen God. Thus we find Cicero drawing up a set of liturgical prescriptions in legalistic terms, distinguishing

between modes appropriate to rural and to urban areas. The manner of acknowledging dependence was open to human invention. The temples of ancient Greece and Rome inspire even to this day.

Given Hume's limitation of knowledge to sensory experience, and without an acknowledgment of the intellect's ability to move from an observed effect to an unobserved cause, there is no way to demonstrate the existence of God, and, one could add from the vantage point of the 20th century, much of what we today take for granted in theoretical physics. Given Hume's premises, God can no longer be an object of philosophical inquiry, yet religion remains a distinctive social artifact that can be investigated as such. This is what Hume sets about doing in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1799), and in effect he launches, if not a new philosophical discipline, certainly a discussion that is to reverberate in the decades following. Historically aware of the part played by religion in the life of humanity, Hume is led to examine its nature and power empirically. He is willing to admit that at no time in recorded human history have men been without religion. It is not a happy picture. Religion, as he finds it, is characterized by superstition, fanaticism, bigotry and intemperate zeal. Investigation may disclose that true religion is not to be identified with superstition and fanaticism. Yet, even true religion, to the extent that it is based on the idea of the greatness and majesty of the infinite God, seems to encourage attitudes of abasement and practices of asceticism and mortification, ideas Hume that finds foreign to the pagan mentality which he takes as normative in this case. In fact, with its doctrine of eternal reward, religion impairs morality by encouraging people to act for motives other than love of virtue for its own sake. Continuing his empirical approach to the study of religion, Hume is led to conclude that belief in the existence of God is a natural disposition, one may call it a *property* of our nature. There may be no rational justification for belief in the existence of God, but neither is there a rational justification for our belief in the existence of an external world. Yet we give assent to both. Given that religion is a habit of mind due to our nature, its proper study clearly belongs to philosophical anthropology, and this Hume undertakes at length in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural*

*Religion.* In that work, Hume examines the wellsprings in human nature from which the religious attitude and the religious interpretation of our existence arise. Acknowledging that religion is a complex human phenomenon, Hume's next step is to take it apart analytically and then study its component factors. Hume is not interested in any particular body of teaching but in religion as a characteristic human outlook. His analysis reveals that the elementary roots of religious belief are to be found in the "passional drives of fear and hope," coupled with a lively concern to know the causes affecting our human welfare. By definition religion posits a relational bond between God and man. But what is one to do with the God-pole of the religious relationship since, given Hume's methodology, God is not an object of investigation? Is the philosophical examination of religion thus hopelessly frustrated? Not at all. The religious attitude, answers Hume, involves a belief about some matters that fall within the realm of experience and some that do not. Those that do not fall within the scope of experience can be handled the same way as the problem of the external world, that is, by specifying the grounds in experience which lead men to believe in a powerful, minded-being, existing independently of ourselves. Here we find the groundwork for an interpretation that will be completed in the 20th century by Sigmund Freud. Hume finds that although religion is a property of human nature, it is not a primary impulse and therefore irreducible and beyond analysis. If religion were a primary impulse and analytically irreducible, nothing could be done about it. It would be an unreformable tendency of man, without a history and without the possibility of reform. It is because the first religious principles are secondary that they may be easily perverted by various accidents and causes. Although religion can be said to be natural to man this carries no guarantee about its human worth or the soundness of any religious conviction. The human heart is notorious for yielding both good fruit and bad.

Hume finds that although man may come to religion under the pressure of deep-seated fear and hope, sheer recognition of a superior power in the world is not enough to constitute the religious attitude. A three-fold response must occur. Men must relate themselves to the superior power as agents through some practical striving and not remain merely theoretical observers. This relationship must be suffused with a personal quality — the superior power has to be given a personal form. And finally, the development of the religious attitude requires men to feel a tension between affirming a superior power beyond nature and their seeking

to relate themselves practically to it. In short, religious striving must be practical and personally ordered, but it must rest on a definite strain of transcendence.

In spite of his anti-metaphysical epistemology and his rejection of all argument for the existence of God, Hume's interest in religion was not nihilistic. Religious belief, he came to hold, has an intrinsic structure that resists reduction to natural theology, to design speculation, or to moral admonition. He acknowledges the distinctive nature of religious assent. Given that religious belief does not depend on demonstration, can we speak of religious belief as a cognitive act? Hume answers that it can be classified along with other complex ideas involving an imaginative synthesis of many strains of meaning and as a complex idea it can be dissolved into its components. But there is this difference. Here we are dealing with a complex idea that is also a belief. Distinctive of the religious mind is the mind's way of entertaining and interpreting impressions. The mind does not meet a situation impassively—the encounter is active. Man comes to grips with the world through the mediation of his concrete intelligence that moderated by his hopes and fears. Religious belief provides an integration of worldly experience with aspirations for happiness, coupled with a natural propensity to seek divine aid to cope with the world. Religion may be subjected to radical and persistent skeptical treatment, but even after such skeptical treatment, one recognizes that belief in God remains and is not diminished to the extent that one might expect.

To those who expected that upon criticism, religious belief would shrivel up and disappear, Hume maintains that one's assent to God's reality may be deprived of many of its customary supports in argument without being annihilated or reduced to the status of a stubborn social custom. Its persistence may be taken as a sign of its totally noncognitive basis. But that is not all. Even the sophisticated believer inquires about the orderly aspects of the natural world, believing that they represent the powerful presence of a transcendent mind. This believer will not claim that he has demonstrative knowledge of God, but he will recognize some ground within his own questioning nature and within the visible world for believing.

We must conclude that a man formed by Hume's philosophy of nature cannot remain either an untroubled dogmatist or an untroubled skeptic. He is compelled to give a cautious, highly qualified assent to the religious reference of human life. Since the philosopher cannot remain satisfied with the popular forms of

religion, he is obliged to determine the conception of religion that will survive the severest form of criticism and, in addition, be compatible with a secularly grounded morality. In sum a philosophic critique of religion frees one from both popular belief and from skepticism. Religion as endorsed by Hume is thus confined to the act of giving a probable speculative assent to a cosmic mind. Hume draws no practical consequences. For Hume, to know God is to worship Him. All other worship is indeed absurd, superstitious and even impious. It is clear that a philosophically reformed religion is viable for only a few reflective minds. As such it does not become a habitual principle of thought and action, nor does it entail religious observance.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), following the lead of David Hume, similarly produced a comprehensive philosophy of religion, defending the reasonableness of belief in spite of reason's inability to demonstrate the existence of God. His theory of religion is part of his philosophical system and is governed by his conception of the nature, aim, and method of philosophy. For Kant the task of philosophy is largely therapeutic. Its obligation is to criticize and to reform. Confronted with Hume's empiricism, he faced the question of how mathematical and scientific knowledge are possible whereas metaphysics is not. He takes as axiomatic that method precedes all science. It would be rash to undertake any study before its methodology has clearly been worked out and the precepts of that method clearly established. In his three famous Critiques, he addresses three questions: in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the question "What can I know?" in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, "What ought I to do?"; and in the *Critique of Judgment*, "What may I hope?"

Kant's theory of religion arises as he attempts to answer the third question. The theme of hope is central to his critical work. Kant read Hume's *Dialogues* in 1780, and, convinced by Hume that we cannot demonstrate the existence of God, Kant opens the way to a practical foundation for belief in the existence of God. Kant's philosophy of religion has to be seen against the backdrop of the 17th-century pietist movement, a religious revival that originated in Germany as a reaction to the Lutheran theology of the day. The pietist regarded the Christian faith not as a set of doctrinal propositions to which the believer gives assent but as a living relationship with God. They stressed the power of God to transform the believer's life through a conversion or a rebirth experience. Like orthodox Lutheranism, pietism exalted the authority of Scripture above that of natural

reason. It was hostile to the Hellenization of Christianity, including the systematic study of Sacred Scripture, insisting that the Bible is to be read for inspiration and moral edification.

Kant's attitude toward his pietist background was ambivalent. He rejected pietism's anti-intellectualism, but much of his conception of morality and religion can be regarded as a rationally purified version of pietism. Following Hume, Kant engages in sustained criticism of what he calls speculative arguments for the existence of God. These he recognizes as three: the ontological, the cosmological, and the teleological argument. In spite of his negative assessment of their value, he finds that a believing philosopher may engage in radical criticism of speculative demonstration without undermining his religious convictions. One must believe, he maintains, even if one cannot demonstrate. If one cannot say, "It is morally certain that there is a God," one can say, "I am morally certain there is a God." While arguments for the existence of God can never have demonstrative force, they can nevertheless serve an incitive role. Such arguments, says Kant, keep our minds alive to the importance of existential questions about God. To believe is to accept as certain and true, and hence to assent to those realities which are implicit in our moral freedom and obligation but which are not available to intuition or demonstration. For Kant, the act of believing is not a step along the way to speculative knowledge. Belief is a cognitive way of its own. It requires a distinctive disposition of the mind. A modern person alive to the challenge of skepticism in religious matters must adopt a distinctive orientation of mind in order to believe. This entails a deliberate process of reflection and gradual orientation. Kant identifies four steps in reflective preparation. First, we must make sure that the object of the search does not fall within the scope of knowledge and opinion; second, that it contains no contradiction and survives the test of internal consistency; third, that it is coherent with what we do know. Only then can we take the fourth step and make a comparison between the limits of human knowing and the drive to increase our cognitive act so that it may somehow include the divine reality lying beyond the range of objective knowledge as such.

To do justice to Kant's theory of religion would require several lectures if not a volume. Kant was not willing, as was Voltaire, to restrict religion to its philosophically elaborated content. The invisible, Kant maintains, needs to be represented through the visible. A religion of pure moral belief is not enough. Religion must develop

social forms that take account of the practical mediation of the human community in our movement toward God. Religion cannot consist solely in Hume's mystical flight of "the alone to the alone." Of necessity, religion must realize itself in a social manner, even in visible ecclesiastical institutions. A visible church, among other things, is necessary for its tutorial role.

In a lofty passage Kant writes that man is not only responsible for his own conduct but is obliged to aid others in their quest for moral perfection. In fact, he must share his moral maximum with others in a spirit of love and fellowship. In this context, Kant memorably defines love as "the free reception of the will of another person into one's own maxims." Love opens us out responsibly to the interior struggle of other men to achieve a virtuous life. It is a forceful reminder of our moral interdependence. "What may I hope for?" may be reframed as "What may we hope for together?" In this manner God is seen as the Lord of the ethical commonwealth.

To place these discussions in an historical context, by the mid-decades of the 19th century on both sides of the Atlantic, it was recognized that British empiricism and the Enlightenment philosophy originating in France and Germany were posing a threat to the Christian faith. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, the first journal of philosophy to be published in the English language, was established at St. Louis in 1867, among other reasons, to combat the secular philosophies arriving from Europe. The chosen mode of counterattack was that of German idealism, particularly the idealism of Hegel. In its first issue, its editor, William Torrey Harris, gave three reasons for the purpose of the journal. In his judgment, speculative philosophy provides, first, a philosophy of religion much needed when traditional religious teaching and ecclesiastical authority were losing their influence. Secondly, it provides a social philosophy that is compatible with a communal outlook as opposed to a devastating individualism. Thirdly, while taking cognizance of the startling advances in the natural sciences, it provides an alternative to the empiricism that claims to be the proper rationale for scientific inquiry. Speculative philosophy for Harris is the tradition that begins with Plato, a tradition that finds its full expression in the system of Hegel. The foremost representative of the speculative outlook endorsed by Harris was undoubtedly Josiah Royce, whose Gifford lectures, published as *The World and the Individual*, sought not only to counter Hume's skepticism but to provide a rational foundation for the Christian faith. The problem

created by Kant's destruction of metaphysics Royce regarded as fundamental. In 1881, he wrote, "We all live, philosophically speaking, in a Kantian atmosphere." Eschewing the outright voluntarism of Arthur Schopenhauer, Royce sought a metaphysics that would permit him to rationally embrace his Christian heritage. Whereas William James, his contemporary and fellow member of the Harvard University faculty of philosophy, was convinced that every demonstrative approach to God must fail, Royce was convinced that speculative reason gives one access to God. The code words of the day—"evolution," "progress," "illusion," "higher criticism," "communism," "socialism"—he thought evoked a mental outlook that reduces Christianity to metaphor and Christian organizations to welfare dispensaries. At issue for Royce was not simply a philosophical problem. The philosophers, he realized, spoke not only to one another but tutored the architects of the new biblical criticism, the Redaktionsgeschichte movement. David Frederick Strauss, in his *Das Leben Jesu*, under the influence of the Enlightenment, examined the Gospels and the life of Jesus from the standpoint of the higher criticism and concluded that Christ was not God but a supremely good man whose moral imperatives deserved to be followed. This Royce could not accept: there is no philosophically compelling reason, he maintained, to embrace a purely naturalist interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. Royce sought in Hegel a defense of Christianity, but such was not to be.

Although indebted to Kant, Hegel takes issue with Kant and with Hume on a number of crucial issues, specifically on what we can know of God. "The doctrine that we can know nothing of God, that we cannot cognitively apprehend him, has become in our time a universally acknowledged truth, a settled thing, a kind of prejudice," writes Hegel. Challenging this prejudice, he says, "I declare such a point of view . . . to be directly opposed to the whole nature of Christian religion, according to which we should know God cognitively; God's nature and essence, and should esteem this cognition above all else." Hegel affirms that philosophy itself has as its object the true, and the true in its highest form as God. "To know this true not only in its simple form as God, but to know the rational in God's works — as produced by God and endowed with reason — that is philosophy." Religion, Hegel maintains, is a spur to philosophy. Religious faith stirs up the subjective energies in the human existent and impels him on a lifelong quest for the intellectual grounds of his religious interpretation of life and the

practical means of bringing this ideal to realization. Gradually, it dawns on the reflective person, says Hegel, that the relationship between philosophy and religion is not an instrumental one but rather one of organic maturation. The theoretical and practical truths that he once held on faith can eventually be held through philosophically motivated judgment. The act of faith and that of philosophical knowing stand related as the implicit and explicit stages of a single growth of awareness. Religion, Hegel is convinced, is philosophy grasped in the mode of groping presentiment, whereas philosophy is religion brought to its internal fulfillment and conscious articulation. Hegel rejects the view that there is only one natural religion. Hegel posits instead that the naturalness of religion consists in its being an appropriate expression of a segment of man's needs and feelings within a particular temporal period and historical stage of development. To understand religion, one necessarily begins with the modern world, but it is a world that embodies the religious heritage of Greece and ancient world religions, especially Christianity in its biblical presentation. But modernity places a unique stamp upon these human materials by reinterpreting them in the light of decisive steps taken in the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. When religious modernity is understood in this historical sense, there is nothing parochial about requiring that the philosophical approach to religion begin with an assessment of the here-and-now actuality of religious life. Hegel continues. The modern student of religion has to take note of the fateful shift in the scales of knowledge and human interest. History teaches that the more our knowledge of and control of nature increases, the more our claim to possess knowledge of God weakens. Man's interest in the practical has led him away from religion and things that pertain to the temple. "There was a time," writes Hegel, when one had the interest, the drive, to know about God, to fathom His nature, when the spirit had found no rest in this occupation . . . Our time has renounced this need and its toils." One can understand why Royce up to a point found Hegel congenial. With Hegel it remains open for debate whether God is to be viewed as a person or as a process and immortality as universal or personal. Hegel's voluminous writings lent themselves to varied interpretation, and soon there were "left wing" and "right wing" Hegelians. Royce would have been numbered among the right, but clearly the left carried the day. Among Hegel's pupils were Ludwig Feuerbach, David Frederick Strauss, Søren Kierkegaard,

and Karl Marx. All were to author treatises on religion, most challenging traditional interpretations of religion and each in his own way undermining Christian belief. Strauss reduces religion to a freely created myth. In his reduction of Christianity to humanism, Feuerbach comes to the conclusion that the essence of faith is man trusting himself. For Kierkegaard, faith is an irrational leap into the dark. Marx's view that "religion is the opiate of the people" is well known.

To change the scenario, at approximately the same time that the young Josiah Royce entered the intellectual arena, Leo XIII, aware of the secular challenge to the Catholic faith and convinced that philosophy must be fought by philosophy, recommended, not Hegel, but Aquinas. His encyclical, *Aeternae Patris*, by endorsing a fledgling Thomistic movement, gave direction to Catholic philosophy and theology that was to last through most of the 20th century. Worthy of note, Josiah Royce, in paying tribute to Leo XIII for the Thomistic revival, expressed the fear that a resurgent Thomism might give way to the Kantian legions and to the demand that the epistemological issue be settled first. Etienne Gilson, the French philosopher, who was to influence the direction of Thomistic studies in North America, warned repeatedly that if one starts with the mind, that is, with the problem of knowledge, one is likely to remain forever estranged from the domain of being. It is only through a metaphysics of being, a metaphysics that acknowledges that natures exist independently of the mind and that reason can move from the contingent to the necessary, that we can reach the self-existent cause of being. Without the principles of substance and causality, man is not only estranged from a natural knowledge of God but science is reduced to description and prediction. The metaphysical issues that confronted the late 19th-century confront the intellectual world today. As Royce feared, there developed a distinctive stream of transcendental Thomism exemplified in the work of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. On the other front, British empiricism as represented by David Hume finds its foremost expression in North America in the legacy of John Dewey and his disciples. That philosophy, known as pragmatic naturalism, became in the last half of the 20th century the dominant force in American educational circles. As the air we breathe, it is simply taken for granted, the lens through which policy is viewed from school curricula to court appointments. The battle for the soul of America continues.

We must admit that David Hume was right about

one thing. Men remain religious in the absence of evidence for the existence of God, one can say in spite of the secular outlook that prevails in the halls of the academy, in the media, and among our governing elites. Kant's effort to salvage what we may call a fideistic Christianity was not without influence. One can see this especially in Kierkegaard and in Kant's 20th-century disciples such as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich. We see here the great divide between mainstream Protestantism and Catholicism. The Catholic mind is not the fideistic mind of Kant's believer, nor the gnostic mind of Hegel's philosopher. The Catholic mind is at one with the Fathers of the Church who drew upon Hellenistic learning in their efforts to understand and explicate the truths of the Gospels. The inherited Hellenic mind was a confident mind. In the work of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, the West had achieved before the birth of Christ what we may call the rational preamble to the faith, namely, that God is and that we can know something of His nature. The Catholic Church has long claimed that Christ came

in the fullness of time when the human intellect was prepared to receive the truths of the Gospels. Revelation, it consistently teaches, builds upon natural reason, not the other way around, as Hegel would have it.

The study of Hume, Kant, and Hegel and the genesis of contemporary attitudes toward religion is not a mere academic exercise. The seemingly academic battles we have discussed have consequences within the social order. One will find within the work of David Hume and his disciples, that is, within the Anglo/French and German Enlightenment the roots of contemporary European agnosticism, the underlying source of the European Union's failure to acknowledge in its proposed Constitution the Hellenic and Christian sources of Western culture. What is at stake is the acknowledgment that this creature, man, is "made in the image and likeness of god" and "nourished by one divine law." Without openness to the transcendent, man is reduced to a physical being, to a barren, cold, and temporal existence. ✠

## Each One According to its Kind and Vocation

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*"When God created the world He commanded each tree to bear fruit after its kind; and even so He bids Christians ... to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. A different exercise of devotion is required of each—the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden, and the wife; and furthermore such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling, the duties of each individual. I ask you, my child, would it be fitting that a Bishop should seem to lead the solitary life of a Carthusian? And the father of a family were as regardless in making provisions for the future as a Capuchin...?"*

—Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, Chapter 3.

*"The common good is better for each of the particulars which participate in it, insofar as it is communicable to the other particulars, communicability is the very reason for its perfection. The particular attains to the common good considered precisely as common good only insofar as it attains to it as to something*

*communicable to others."*

—Charles de Koninck, "On the Primacy of the Common Good."

*"However, I once heard someone reading from a book (as he said) by Anaxagoras, and asserting that it is Mind that produces order and is the cause of everything. This explanation pleased me. Somehow it seemed right that Mind should be the cause of everything; and I reflected that if this is so, Mind in producing order sets everything in order and arranges each individual thing in the way that is best for it."*

—Socrates, Phaedo, (#397d).

### I.

**A**ristotle, in a famous phrase, said that "man is by nature a political animal." This social aspect of his nature is but a consequence of man's rationality, of his power to know the things that are. Political things, themselves ever variable, were at best to be decided by reason, experience, and persuasion, not by force and compulsion, however

much those methods might sometimes be reasonable in particular circumstances in the form of army, police, and courts. The reasonable use of force is, in fact, reasonable. What opposes any form of irrationality is to be itself based on reason. The reason that deals with these fallen things is remedial or “cured” reason, that is, reason as open to revelation. It is not “reasonable,” in other words, to deny that consequences of the Fall are present among us. These consequences have to be dealt with on a particular basis. It is utopian to think that they can be totally eliminated by our own efforts.

Nor can we claim that what is wrong with the world is somehow at bottom found outside of our own souls, in, say, a rearrangement of property, or family, of polity. This latter view that such a solution can so be found is, in a real sense, the basis of all ideology, which replaces a transcendent destiny of man with an inner-worldly one. We thus stand in the delicate position of insisting both that utopia is dangerous and that we can nevertheless actually do something to affect our lives while we are still in this world. We are neither “idealists” nor “conservatives.” This conclusion is another way of saying that our ideals are real but not finally located in this world. At the same time, our politics are realist but not stagnant or radical. We think that things can be done, but not utopia, which has a dangerous charm to it.

We also know that a mysterious opposition shadows good in our world. More frequently than we like to admit, this opposition bears on the diabolical. We cannot be naïve about what we are up against. We are up against “principalities and powers,” as we are told. We are reluctant to admit that the reaches of evil stretch into the very good itself, upon which they feed. The classic definition of evil is the absence of a good that ought to be there, but is not there because we chose not to put it there. This understanding still holds. When we set out to combat evil, the first thing we always run into is the good in which it dwells. This is what makes it attractive. All evil is pursued in the name of something that is actually good.

However diligently we look, then, we cannot find a technical “cure” to our moral and political disorders without ourselves first choosing to be virtuous and ordered to the highest things, the understanding of which we rightly comprehend by virtue of our own individual and personal reason. Our nature was not “corrupted” by the Fall, but our ability to practice virtue was weakened. The result was that man is not simply in an original state of nature, something that never existed. Rather he is in

what we call a fallen state, a state of which we are all more or less directly conscious.

Chesterton said that this Fall is the one doctrine we need not “prove,” all we have to do is go out into the streets and open our eyes. But we do need to learn to deal with evil, and for this we are not sufficient to ourselves. Probably nothing infuriates intellectuals more than this truth. We need something in the order of grace. It is man in this fallen state who is redeemed by Christ. The comment in *Gaudium et Spes* that John Paul II cited so often is exactly to the point, namely, “Only in the Word made flesh can the mystery of man truly become clear” (#22). The understanding of ourselves includes the understanding of the God-Man. The reason nothing satisfies us is that we are made in our very being so that nothing but God can accomplish this satisfaction.

Much of the subsequent history of mankind can be seen as a brilliant and persistent effort intellectually to avoid and morally to reject this source of knowledge of ourselves made known to us in revelation by the Incarnation. We are ultimately bound together, as Augustine said, in only two cities. In the one city will live only those who accept that their meaning is made known to them in the Incarnation and, so knowing, they follow its guidance in reason and in grace.

In the other city are those who choose themselves as the explanation of things including themselves. But these two cities are not separated in this world. The world, in fact, is created as a place wherein these decisions about our ultimate destiny can be made and carried out by rational and free beings intermingling with each other on the paths of this world. Each of us is created to attain the “common good” of the universe itself, which is its very origin. This good is the reciprocal Trinitarian life of the Godhead into which all men are invited by reason of their creation in Christ.

We do not fully know ourselves until we know that this Trinitarian destiny is the direct and particular end of each rational person, who will not and cannot successfully explain the sorts of unsettlement and longing in him in any other terms. This grounding reflects Augustine’s profound expression that we, each of us, have “restless hearts” that will not rest until they rest in “Thee,” that is, in the life of the Trinity. It is not an exaggeration to say that the very dynamism of the whole universe itself has this Trinitarian life as its primary origin and destiny according to which all things fit together, including the beings, if any, who reject this very purpose.

## II.

Plato, as we know, was famous for many things, not the least of which was his principle of specialization in book two of the *Republic*.

There, Plato pointed out, that if we all tried to do everything ourselves, we would spend our time getting nothing done but barely staying alive. There would be no flourishing of our kind, with its proliferation of things useful and things beautiful. Specialization allows others to do many other things, while we do what we can do. We will all have more if we let others do what we cannot or will not do. We are surprisingly bound together in what we have as well as what we do not have.

This specialization seems to indicate our very natural law. This principle, of course, can lead to the greatest of complexities which, none the less, reveal an order proceeding to abundance. Plato conceived this original complexity to be driven by the same desire that Augustine was further to explain to us. Desire itself is unlimited. If our desires are to be limited, we must go about acquiring the virtues by which, through our reason, we harmonize what we want, what others want, and what we ought to have. But desire also includes the question of “what is most desirable?” a most perplexing but fundamental question.

In the famous passage of St. Francis de Sales, we see a reflection of St. Paul’s position that each of the parts of the body must do what it does in order for the body itself to be what it is, to function as a whole. The matron, the bishop, the artisan, the servant, the father, and the wife, all have different things that need to be done simultaneously, as it were. Each of these is worthy of a “devotion” or a “calling.” If the bishop tries to live like a Capuchin, it will not work. He will neglect what he should be doing.

This analysis seems like simple common sense, and it is. But do the bishop, the priest, the father, the artisan, and the noble lady have anything in common? What is it that constitutes their ultimate satisfaction? Following the *Gaudium et Spes* principle about what reveals man to himself, can it be less than a Person? Or is it that each is left alone to do his own thing, almost as if the world is made up of a huge number of individuals each doing something different and only being bound together by Adam Smith’s “invisible hand?” In Smith’s view, the common good, while real, is an accident, not the result of willing a common good or making decisions that direct desire also to the good.

Is evil, as Augustine also implied, directed to the

good? The sin of the angels was primarily the rejection of a common good in the name of a selfish good. The angels understood their own spiritual good, which was precisely God. But they could not accept that this divine good was not exclusively theirs. It was, they learned, also known and loved by other non-angelic beings far inferior to their own natures and intelligences, the likes of ourselves, in fact. The good of the universe included many goods and could not exist without the lesser goods. The sin of pride is at the root of all sin, especially angelic sin. It is the sin of making one’s good the only good.

Indeed, each particular sin is, at bottom, a repetition of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve. The temptation consists essentially in substituting our own definition of good and evil for that which is implicit in things as found in creation, themselves in their diversity reflective of the divine intelligence and order. Though we are reluctant to admit it, we are ourselves never very far from this temptation. These are almost in exactly the same terms in which it appeared in Adam and Eve. Looked on from another angle, we constantly seek a real good, even in sin. This seeking is what properly establishes what we are when we carry it out. The tremendous energy that exists in each human person and in every collection of his kind is rooted in this ultimate seeking.

## III.

What interests me is the common good and why it is so significant. Some people only want to have “private” goods. Such is the position of much modern individualism and utilitarianism. Yet, I sometimes doubt if there is anything that is really and totally “private,” even our sins. Indeed, it says in St. Luke (12, 3) that what we do in darkness will be shouted on the housetops. The so-called “right to privacy” was first found not in Aristotle, nor Locke, nor in the Constitution, but in the Supreme Court case about Connecticut contraception law. How droll!

What happened as a result of this famous legal “privacy?” Normally, the privacy of a family results in the visibility of new life. The most disturbing visible result of this modern “right” privacy, however, is the on-going and radical decline in population among those people who practice it. The result is the replacement of one’s own children by someone else’s. This result leads one to suspect the very “privacy” of a presumably totally “private” good contains and must contain a relation to a common good. It cannot be simply a “private” good.

How does one explain this?

I might add that Socrates, in a famous passage in the *Apology*, said that in order to remain alive and pursue philosophy, he had to remain a “private” citizen in Athens. But in the end, it was this very pursuit of philosophy, with its questioning, that brought him back before the attention of the citizenry in a public trial. Here the possibility of his philosophizing, his transcendent way of life, was at stake. Socrates actually considered his private way of life to be essential to the real good of his city, of any city, because he called citizens to live an “examined” and virtuous life in the pursuit of what is.

We can call a good “common” in two ways. The first and most important sense is that there are things that we all possess because of what they are, the things of the spirit, things of mind. Truth is the first of these. It is the perfection of our intellects to know what is. But when we know something as true, we do not deprive anyone else of what is true. Indeed, what we have in common is precisely that we know and are in awe of the same truth, the same reality. Truth thus becomes something that binds or bonds our highest unity with one another. I do not become less because you have also come to know the same truth that I do. We both become more. This commonality is why the truth, ultimately, is free and available to those who would choose to know it as true, who make to effort to know why it is so.

The second understanding of a common good is a practical arrangement that makes the existence of particular goods possible. In this sense, the specialization that Plato spoke of enables the multiplicity of men to do myriads of differing things. There is a contorted view of equality that would insist that we all do and possess exactly the same things, that we all have the same talents and conditions. If this sort of equality were so, we would live absolutely boring lives. All of us would be poor because none could tolerate anyone having or knowing more. If we did not have specialization, if all of us had to do everything, our lives would soon be nasty, brutish, and short, as Hobbes said in a famous phrase that was in fact invented precisely on the supposition of no common good.

But specialization cannot exist without some exchange whereby what we need, but do not provide for ourselves, can be supplied by others. The great exchange of the market is a marvelous social invention, worked out over long centuries of struggle to understand what it was and how it functioned. Through it, the abundance and variety of the world’s genius and human energy can be brought forth. Here, common good and particular good

are not opposed but are necessary to each other. The market is a system whereby things of differing character and worth can be exchanged in a relative judgment, usually called money, to estimate what is worth what. All of this estimation is designed to allow the talents and work of each to become offered to others. This needs some settled system and order. It also needs a system of virtue among those who participate in it and a system of authority and law to regulate both the exchange and the violations thereof.

#### IV.

In a letter to the Corinthians by St. Clement of Rome (d. 99 A. D.), he recalls the Pauline passage on the classic idea of a common good: “The great cannot exist without the small, nor the small without the great; they blend together to their mutual advantage. Take the body, for example. The head is nothing without the feet, just as the feet are nothing without the head. The smallest parts of our body are necessary and valuable to the whole. All work together and are mutually subject for the preservation of the whole body.” The passage does not say that “the great and small should be equalized.” It implies that the great cannot be great unless the small be the small. A good part of the Christian understanding of the common good is a defense, in the very name of the common good, of what is less talented, less gifted. One way to put it is that heaven is not populated only or even perhaps primarily by the most talented. It might be more true to say that it is hell that comes closer to this dubious honor of housing the most talented. The humble of mind and body also can claim full membership in the Kingdom of God.

To make this point in another way, let me recall the following passage that someone recently sent to me: “The conditions in which we are born, whether a fairy princess or milkmaid, whether a ‘free’ American or an oppressed Lebanese—on all these conditions grace comes, sufficient grace, if accepted.” Again, we have here the common good at work. Each human person is born with a transcendent end no matter where or when he is born with “sufficient grace” to attain it.. Our closeness to or distance from God is not a question of the time or place in which we were born, even though there is a revelation of God in history at a given time and place. Still, not everyone can be a princess, nor a milkmaid. Our status in eternal life occurs wherever we work out our salvation, which is where we are, wherever it be. Yet, this same place is also where we contribute to the common

good of the familial, social and political bodies in which we live.

Let me make this same point in yet third way. Indeed, this is the central point of this reflection on the common good. To do so, I will recall a conversation took place on Wednesday, April 15, 1778, which would be during our Revolutionary War. Present are Mr. Dilly, a London book seller, Mrs. Knowles, an intelligent and handsome Quaker lady, James Boswell, the Scottish lawyer and biographer, and Samuel Johnson, the great English lexicographer and philosopher. The conversation is about the logic and implications of “equality,” about authority, and about intrinsic contradictions.

The conversation begins with the Quaker lady speaking on a subject with which we have become familiar, perhaps too familiar. “Mrs. Knowles. ‘Still, Doctor (Johnson), I cannot help thinking it a hardship that more indulgence is allowed to men than to women. It gives a superiority to men, to which I do not see how they are entitled.’”

Johnson responds to Mrs. Knowles rather humorously, but to the point. Where there are two people between whom one must make a decision, unless there is unanimity one must be designated to make it if they wish to stay together. Johnson puts the matter this way “It is plain, Madam, one or other must have the superiority. As Shakespeare says, ‘If two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind.’” The conversation becomes amusing when Mr. Dilly intrudes: “I suppose, Sir, Mrs. Knowles would have them to ride in panniers, one on each side.” Johnson. “Then, Sir, the horse would throw them both.”

Mrs. Knowles implicitly grants this point at least in this world by saying “I hope that in another world the sexes will be equal.” Next, James Bowell enters the conversation taking up the logic of Mrs. Knowles position. “That is being too ambitious, Madam. We might as well desire to be equal with the angels.” In this analysis, Boswell implies, what would happen in this “happier world” is that the distinction of the sexes would simply disappear, as would the distinction between men and angels. The common good, however, really wants us to remain what we are even in eternal life. That is, men and women, angels and men, with their differences, do not disappear. It is not a perfection that these glorious distinctions evaporate. This is what creation is about, that different beings exist in it and remain what they are, yet beings who have a common end..

Boswell next affirms a principle that makes the point I have been urging all along. “We shall all, I hope, be happy in a future state,” Boswell observes, “but we

must not expect to be all happy in the same degree. It is enough if we be happy according to our several capacities.” Behind this reasoning is the great principle that inequality and difference of condition and being is itself part of creation. It is not a defect that men and women, or angels and men, are different. To illustrate this point, Boswell gives this example: “A worthy car-man will get to heaven as well as Sir Isaac Newton. Yet, though equally good, they will not have the same degrees of happiness.” To this position, Johnson simply adds: “Probably not.”

## V.

In conclusion, let me stress the importance of what is being said in the Boswell conversation. On first hearing, if we do not think carefully about it, this 18th century conversation will sound to most of us quaint if not outlandish. Yet, what is at stake is the very notion that it is all right that we be the kind of beings that we are with the limits that go with that nature. Within that ranking, we are human beings not gods or angels. We each are given different capacities, even in achieving and experiencing the same transcendent end.

Using the words of St. Francis de Sales, I entitled this lecture “Each one according to its kind and vocation.” Boswell’s phrase is profound: “It is enough if we are happy according to our several capacities.” The temptation of the angels was that a good was offered to beings less in rank to themselves. Adam and Eve were told by the devil, no less, that they would be “like gods, knowing or making the distinctions of good and evil.” They decided to try it out only to find that they lost the original way to their end that they had first been offered.

Why is this all a question of our good and a common good? Precisely because the varied glory that belongs to others, both of our kind and to the angels, indeed the glory of God Himself, does not in principle deprive us of the glory for which we are each created. Our glory does not deprive others of theirs. Indeed, it is the same glory received after the manner of the one to whom it is offered.. We know the same glory according to our capacities. And this capacity and our free response to it decide where we fit into the order of God’s plan in creating us in the first place.

To use Boswell’s terms, it does not matter whether we are the local car-man or Sir Isaac Newton; or to use the terms of St. Francis de Sales, it does not matter if we be a Bishop, a noble lady, a Carthusian, a servant, a princess, or a father of a family. What does matter is that

when we do what we do, we understand that the good that we do is itself also contributory to the common good. The very nature of our minds and wills assures us that the final good we are promised in the Beatific Vision will indeed be ours, according to our kind and vocation. A worthy car-man will get to heaven as well as Sir Isaac Newton, or to reverse the priority, "A worthy Sir Isaac Newton will get to heaven as well as the local car-man."

The common good assures us that the drama of our destiny is both ours and, at the same time, a contribution to the good of others. In the highest things, we are not in opposition to each other. We are given the same final destiny, according to our kind and vocation.

Socrates tells of listening by chance to a man reading aloud from a book of Anaxagoras in which he said that behind the flux of things stands Mind. He tells us that he was quite pleased to hear this position. All things are arranged in a way most pleasing to it. "The particular attains to the common good," the great Canadian philosopher Charles de Koninck observed, "considered

precisely as common good only insofar as it attains to it as to something communicable to others." We attain to our highest good, contrary to the fallen angels, only in so far as we see that our good is communicable to others, only insofar as we, angels or men, male or female, Sir Isaac Newton or the local cab-man, Bishop of Geneva or a Capuchin friar, princess or milkmaid, have the same inner divine life as our common good. And this good is given to us not because it is "owed" to us, but because we were given it as our destiny, yea, even from the creation of the world. "It is enough to be happy according to our several capacities"--"each one according to its kind and vocation."

#### ENDNOTES

1. Charles De Koninck, "On the Primacy of the Common Good," *The Aquinas Review*, 4 (#1, 1997), 16.
2. St. Clement of Rome, "Letter to the Corinthians," *Breviary*, November 23
3. *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), II. 218

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Burtchaell, Benne, and Baylor: The Baylor Project: "Can a Protestant University Be a First-Class Research Institution and Preserve Its Soul?"***

Eds. Barry G. Hankins and Donald D. Schmeltekopf, St. Augustine's Press, (2007)

*Reviewed by John R. Fortin, O.S.B. Saint Anselm College*

Writing about the disengagement of seventeen colleges and universities from their Christian churches in *The Dying of the Light* (Eerdmans, 1998), James Tunstead Burtchaell notes in his preface: "The story in the stories is more melancholy than the author expected." James Benne on the contrary claimed in *Quality with Soul* (Eerdmans, 2001) that there are some, in this case six, notable exceptions to Burtchaell's list

and that therefore one might indeed entertain some hope that the rift between faith and reason in colleges and universities is being maintained and even advanced in some while it might even be restored, at least to some extent, in others. What Burtchaell and Benne offer is clear and well-researched historical evidence to support their claims.

What *The Baylor Project* is about is the future. It is not history in the strict sense, even though some of its content does recount recent history. It is rather a narrative which seeks from different perspectives of institutional life to answer the question of the book's subtitle: "Can a Protestant university be a first-class research institution and preserve its soul?" The question is well phrased for it is not: will it become such a university? The answer to that question is an historical process that is unfolding even now. The real question is: can

it sustain itself as a practicing Baptist Christian top rank, world class research university?

The book consists of thirteen essays which explore a wide gamut of institutional issues facing Baylor as it proceeds with Baylor 2012, a ten-year long-range plan developed in the late 1990's, to move Baylor from what one alumnus has described as a "sleepy, southern university known mainly for good teachers, pretty coeds and its comprehensive ban on dancing" to an internationally recognized research university with a variety of advanced degree programs, a university which at the same time develops and enhances its commitment to the informing principles of Christian faith and culture. The areas of concern include governance, athletics, residence life, tuition, alumni, development, and research.

Of particular concern, of course, is the integration of faith and learning

and those primarily charged with that integration in the classroom, the faculty. Here the issues of the hiring, the promoting, and the granting of tenure to faculty raise serious concerns about the relation of scholarly qualification and Christian commitment. How are these to be measured and evaluated? One of the editors recently commented that evidence that the plan is working can be seen in recent tenure decisions which have been made in the spirit of Baylor 2012.

This book demands careful and considered reading and examination. For while the Baylor 2012 plan is not yet complete and this volume stands just beyond the midway point of the project, some levels tension and anxiety emerge in the essays since Baylor 2012 has definitely not been fully accepted by all constituencies. These tensions have given rise to all manner of internal and external conflicts, acrimony, and in some instances hostile behavior. Indeed Baylor 2012 is so sensitive an issue that the publication of the initial volume of these essays entitled *Baylor Beyond the Crossroads: An Interpretive History 1985-2005* was cancelled in the midst of being printed and all known existing copies were destroyed. Yet the project is of profound interest to any who see in the confluence of faith and reason the only way for a Christian university to be what it is ultimately supposed to be, an educational institution which, in the words of Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, “has as its premise the knowledge that all truth is one and all ways to the truth are one because the Author and the End of truth is One.”

There are two matters raised in the book that cause a bit of worry. First, the manner in which the charter change came about, as recounted by Michael Beaty in chapter two,

seems to indicate that then president Herbert Reynolds rather straightforwardly orchestrated the change. In an effort to detach the University, and so to protect it, from the internal struggles of the Southern Baptist Convention, President Reynolds convinced several members of the Baylor Board of Trustees to change the charter in order to give full control of the governance of the University to the Board. But it appears that some “conservative” trustees were simply not informed about this radical change until the very day of the meeting while many others were not only made cognizant of the proposed change but were also solicited for their support well in advance of the meeting. This manner of conducting business, while perhaps deemed necessary because of the circumstances, is rather antithetical to the general nature of University discourse: open and frank debate of the issues. In the context of a Christian university one thinks of such admonitions as “Do unto others,” and so forth.

The second worry has to do with the hiring process. The worry is not so much the manner in which it is proposed to hire faculty, who, as the book clearly and correctly points out, are crucial to the evolution of Baylor 2012, but that other hires at the University, at least as far as the book indicates, are not subject to the same scrutiny. It would seem vitally important and necessary that all those who have direct contact with the students should be subject to a similar protocol of hiring, especially coaches, in light of the demands of participating in the Big XII Conference, and residence life staff, in light of the demands for creating and sustaining the living and learning environment envisioned in the Project. These people have a tremendous

influence on students.

The jury is still out on the Baylor 2012 project. Whether or not there will be a Burtchaellian melancholic ending or the more hopeful vision of Benne remains to be seen. Will Baylor 2012 succeed or is its project beyond the ability and/or the political will of its Board, administrators, and faculty? Halfway through the project, Baylor indeed is, as editors Hankins and Schmeltekopf claim in the Afterword, beyond the crossroad: there is no turning back from the project. But to what extent and how successfully it will go forward remains to be seen. *The Baylor Project* is a fine book, an enlightening and an important read especially for faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education which are openly and unabashedly connected to a religious faith and which espouse and promote the confluence of faith and reason.

***Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era***

Justin Nordstrom. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. 296 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

*Reviewed by John M. Grondelski, former Associate Dean, School of Theology, Seton Hall University and now an independent scholar in Washington, D.C.*

If anti-Catholicism is the last remaining acceptable prejudice even in our “tolerant” intellectual era, then Nordstrom’s book is especially relevant today, because—like our own time—his book describes an epoch that styled itself progressive. When many people think of American anti-Catholicism, they often go back to the ante-bellum Know Nothings with their lurid Maria

Monk stories or the post-World War I Ku Klux Klan, with its hatred for Catholics, Jews, and blacks. Nordstrom, however, examines a different time, one he says is often neglected in studies of anti-Catholicism: the “Progressive” Era of the first decades of the twentieth century.

The author focuses on newspaper-based anti-Catholicism. Only a few newspapers, based primarily in the rural South or Border States, offered anti-Catholicism as their main stock-in-trade. Those papers, however, had national readerships: at its zenith in 1915, *The Menace* had a circulation of almost 1.5 million (comparable to *The Ladies’ Home Journal*).

The anti-Catholic press of the era bore many similarities to its predecessors: an obsession with the Church as a secretive body that imprisoned women and youth in its institutions while conspiring to subvert American democracy. (Many anti-Catholic papers, says the author, simply reprinted such stories from fellow papers). But Progressive Era anti-Catholicism also took on certain characteristics of its own times: like the broader press, the anti-Catholics often cloaked their venom in the guise of “investigative journalism” designed to expose the “special interest” cabals plotting against the United States.

According to Nordstrom, another interesting twist to Progressive Era anti-Catholicism was that it surprisingly did not focus on immigration, despite the flood of foreigners occurring at the time. Instead, it concentrated on the enemy within: “throughout the 1910s, anti-Catholic papers . . . demonstrated far less concern over ‘shutting the gates’ or sealing off America’s shores to undesirable newcomers. Rather, they were much more intent on under-

mining what they saw as Romanism’s sophisticated hierarchical and political machinery already present on American soil” (pp. 27–28). According to the author, this was in keeping with the Progressive Era view that the “true” American was one who subscribed to particular American ideas rather than one who came from a particular ethnic stock. (The latter criteria did, of course, prevail before and after the Progressive Era). Catholics, therefore, could not be true Americans not because they were Polacks or Wops or Hunkies, but because the Catholic mindset was itself *ex definitione* incompatible with the American.

Nordstrom gives us a good survey of the themes which drove the anti-Catholic press of that epoch. Chapter two, “Help Us to Turn on the Light,” captures the Zeitgeist: like our own, the Progressive Era thought of itself as an “information age.” The anti-Catholic press saw itself as disseminating knowledge that would dispel the darkness of Catholic obscurantism (a key motif in their constant fundraising and subscription campaigns). Other specific motifs of Progressive Era anti-Catholicism, says Nordstrom, were the exposure of Catholic “hypocrisy” and political corruption. As Catholics grew numerically in the United States, they often sought to showcase their role in American history. Their purpose was twofold: to stake their claim to a share of the American Dream as well as to prove their part in it from the start. The Knights of Columbus assumed a special role by honoring Columbus as the discoverer of America, commemorations that often provoked vitriolic responses from the anti-Catholic press, “exposing” Columbus as a morally flawed character and his partisans as historical hypocrites.

(The Knights also took up a proactive role in rebutting anti-Catholic stories and in suing the anti-Catholic press for libel, a story recounted in the book). The anti-Catholic press also obsessed with political scandals in America’s cities, frequently blaming them on Catholic officeholders or officials corrupted by Catholics. This last phenomenon, according to the author, tells us something about the demographics of these anti-Catholics. In viewing urban America as a cesspool of Catholic corruption (in contrast to the wholesome values of rural, Protestant America where the papers were published), it becomes clear that the nativists were often country and small-town folk as much opposed to America’s urbanization as to the Catholics that filled those cities.

The book concludes by arguing that World War I gave Catholics temporary breathing room (until the next wave of KKK anti-Catholicism arrived in the 1920s). Why the hiatus? “Nativism fell out of vogue in the late 1910s chiefly because wartime exigency made its brand of xenophobia and ideological nativism directed towards the nation’s largest religious denomination untenable and gave greater weight to competing claims of national tolerance and unity in general and Catholics’ ‘100 percent Americanism’ in particular” (p. 193). Brief surveys of post-War anti-Catholicisms, represented by the KKK and later Paul Blanshard, follow. The book is amply documented: 50 pages of notes, numerous tables, and 13 pages of cartoons culled from the anti-Catholic press.

The book makes the bows to contemporary leftist social science analysis, e.g., treating childhood as a “cultural construct” (along with the idea that protection is really sometimes only oppression in disguise),

the criticism of “‘rugged’ masculinity” of the Progressive Era (frequently embraced by the traditionalist anti-Catholics), etc. While not a social scientist, the reviewer has read enough in this field to recognize today’s de rigueur orthodoxies. Despite such forays, however, this book remains a solid view into the particular contours and context of anti-Catholicism as it flourished in—and as a reaction against—the Progressive Era. Nordstrom, assistant professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania Hazleton, has provided a thorough, well-documented, and insightful account of one of America’s most virulent and persistent prejudices, as manifested during an era that deemed itself enlightened. Plus que ça change, plus que c’est la même chose. Recommended reading.

***The Just Society: Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius***, May Sim, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2007). pp. xi+224. Cloth, \$85.00.

*Reviewed by Jude P. Dougherty, Dean Emeritus, School of Philosophy, The Catholic University of America*

Sim tells us in her introductory chapter that “My aim is to involve these authors in each other’s problems and to engage both in reconsidering the contemporary difficulties to which they speak with surprising frequency in one voice, or at least genuine harmony.” She succeeds admirably. One comes away from this volume with the feeling that one has audited a brilliant conversation between Confucius and Aristotle. Forced into dialogue by Sim, her authors find greater accord than disaccord on issues related to the self, to family life, and to social relationships.

Sim’s knowledge of Aristotle, it may be noted, was achieved under the tutelage of Alasdair MacIntyre; her knowledge of Confucius derives naturally from her personal cultivation of an inherited Chinese tradition. Virtue ethics thus becomes a focal point in her presentation of both, including her discussion of rights.

In Aristotle’s view, humans are by nature moral beings; each is endowed with a spontaneous sense of morality. They are naturally inclined to meet each other and to live together in families, in villages, or in larger communities; they establish political societies governed by laws that are expressions of common moral intuitions. These natural dispositions are developed through learning and training. This is especially true for those who live within the Confucian orbit. Ethical issues for the Confucian are not determined or formulated apart from the social setting in which they arise. In fact, one does not find in Confucian ethics a clear demarcation between moral rules and other sorts of rules. One finds rather in Confucian ethics a theory of virtue rather than a theory of obligation.

Both Aristotle and Confucius recognize the importance the cultivation of moral virtue for a just society. Each acknowledges the guiding role of exemplary individuals, and each allows for context in the application of principles. Yet Confucius and Aristotle have very different attitudes toward the rule of law. Confucius tends to identify moral principles with customary norms and, unlike Aristotle, relies heavily on the exemplary person to inspire others to moral and civic virtue. Aristotle, while not denying a role for the exemplary figure, recognizes the rarity of such an individual, and

consequently places greater confidence in the rule of law. Given Aristotle’s understanding of human nature and purpose in nature, Aristotle is positioned to evaluate custom in the light of transcendent norms. Law, from an Aristotelian perspective, possesses greater sovereignty than custom, although Aristotle would not dismiss the role of custom in preserving a just society. Identifying another difference, Sim writes, “Aristotle sharply distinguishes the political role of the statesman from the household rule of fathers. Confucius assimilates political rule into household rule: political government is simply the father-son relationship writ large.” Unlike Aristotle, Confucius offers no theoretical analysis of the state and political rule. Absent too is any explicit theory about nature and teleology.

Aristotle’s analysis of the nature of law, Sim concludes, may help the Confucian understand that the rule of law is not antithetical to a respect for custom and the cultivation of virtue. On the other hand, the Confucian account of ritual propriety can supplement Aristotle’s “all too brief account of unwritten law.” Confucians are peculiarly sensitive to what Aristotelians call “ethos,” insofar as they have an acute sense of the way in which ceremony and ritual focus and intensify custom and moral practice.

A not-insignificant contribution of this volume is that Sim, in reading Aristotle through a Confucian lens, brings out aspects of Aristotle that are often overlooked by Western eyes accustomed to reading him in the light of his metaphysics, colored by the subsequent development of his thought in Western moral and political theory.

**How Doctors Think**, Jerome Groopman, MD, Houghton Mifflin Company, (2007), 307 pp. Hard cover. \$26.00

AND

**How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment in the Practice of Medicine**, Kathryn Montgomery, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2006), 146 pp. Hardcover.

*Reviewed by Greg F. Burke, MD, FACP, Department of General Internal Medicine, Geisinger Medical Center, Danville, PA.*

Two books—same name—same theme—different perspectives. *How Doctors Think* is the shared title for two books that best illuminate the process by which physicians use their reason, or fail to use their reason, to arrive at a diagnosis. One book is written by a practicing cancer specialist, the other by a professor of medical humanities and bioethics. The literary styles of the authors differ, but their messages are the same. Medical diagnosis is much more an exercise in logic than a matter of scientific inquiry. A liberal arts curriculum (*artes liberales*) may better prepare one for a lifetime in medicine than will a course of study dominated by the sciences (*artes reales*).

Jerome Groopman, MD is a well-known physician-writer with frequent contributions to the *New Yorker* magazine. His writing style is personalistic and easy going. More story-telling than nonfictional prose, his works are engaging and appeal to a broad public taste. Yet, the many deep insights provided by his work make it well worth reading. Groopman points out that physicians often come to their medical conclusions by “pattern recognition.” Pattern recognition is the process of iden-

tifying syndromes or collections of historical facts, physical findings and laboratory data that provides the diagnosis of what ails his/her patient. He also knows from firsthand experience that such conclusions are often arrived at in a matter of seconds. Groopman illustrates how different specialists achieve their competency by recognizing and remembering their mistakes and misjudgments, and by using these memories in a forward-thinking manner. Good clinicians continue to analyze their practice, learn new information and keep it all accessible for recall. This is less a scientific endeavor than an exercise in intellectual curiosity and “classic” reasoning.

In a series of case histories, supplemented by a variant of “medical reporting”, Groopman takes the reader through the thought processes of physicians. He points out that mistakes and diagnostic failures are often the result of the inability to abandon one’s first clinical impression. The clinician may also, ironically, be too emotionally connected to the patient who suffers from an elusive malady and may avoid a more ominous diagnosis because at a subconscious level he fears for the patient and for their relationship. The author also stresses the inherent conflicts of interest—many of which are financial—that cloud clinical judgment, especially in this era of managed care. He further educates the reader that specialties within the medical profession have their unique challenges. For instance, he admonishes clinicians to provide more information to the radiology consultant to improve his ability to interpret x-rays. As Groopman states, “machines cannot replace the doctor’s mind, his thinking about what he sees and what he does not see.” In other words, the good clinician

can indicate to the radiologist what kinds of things he should look for.

Groopman’s book is a solid introduction into the world of physician cognition. The reader gains an appreciation of how complex diagnostic reasoning is achieved and mastered, but also learns the common heuristic pitfalls physicians tumble into. He challenges clinicians to be willing to learn from mistakes, be totally patient centered, and be attentive to every detail in their day-to-day practice. Groopman does not, however, answer the question of how to create a better “thinking” doctor. Later in this review, I hope to offer my own suggestions concerning the training of young clinicians and how a solid Catholic educational experience will serve that endeavor well.

Kathryn Montgomery in her work *How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment in the Practice of Medicine* presents similar ideas in a more academic manner. Montgomery forcefully argues that medicine is not a science, but an interpretive practice based on clinical reasoning. She asserts that the practitioners of medicine, along with the general public, suffer when medicine is thought of as solely an experimental science.

Her book is divided into four main sections. Part one introduces the concept of medicine as practice, not science. Part two emphasizes the concept of causation. In part three she touches upon the acquisition of clinical judgment and then in the final part of her work brings it all together in a convincing argument against “medicine as science.” She exposes the downside for healthcare professionals and society as a whole if they continue to view medicine not as an art (reason) but as science.

My own clinical experience in medical practice confirms

Montgomery's assertion. Although medicine is based on science and its methods, the reality is that caring for patients is an exercise in deductive and inductive reasoning, and is not typically an experimental process. It is much better to participate in a class in logic than to spend all one's hours in a biology laboratory. I do not mean to suggest that scientific principles of inquiry, experimentation, and reproducibility are not critically important in medicine. Indeed, "evidence-based medicine" has become the normative approach in almost all diagnostic and therapeutic interactions. However, the method whereby a physician arrives at a diagnosis is clearly one of pattern recognition based on prior experiences and inductive reasoning, mixed in with a fair amount of dumb luck. Every human illness is unique and therefore common modes of "reasoned thinking" are helpful, but not sufficient. The clinician must sometimes delve more deeply into his experience and even into uncomfortable areas of prior failures to perfect his skills.

"If you hear hoof beats, look for horses, not zebras." Rare diseases are rare and common ailments occur commonly. This tenet of logic is taught to most medical students in their clinical years of training. Another is "Occam's razor" described in the following terms; "look for a single diagnosis that can explain all findings." One should not forget the associated corollary, Hickam's dictum; "it's parsimonious but it may not be right" or in Wallace T. Miller's restated form "the patient can have as many diseases as the patient damn well pleases". These oft-repeated statements made a great impact on me in my formative years. These so-called clinical pearls are more statements of reason than of science. Montgomery states "for if medicine

is not a science, it nevertheless is rigorously rational".

So what does this all have to do with Catholic education? I would argue that a liberal arts program is better suited for the training of young clinicians than one based on a pure science curriculum.

Having received my undergraduate training at a Jesuit university, I have felt especially prepared to practice in my field of internal medicine. Jesuitical thinking may emphasize the subtle argument, but the broader principles of a Catholic liberal arts education also build an understanding of human reasoning and thought. Courses in philosophy, sacramental theology, bioethics, and for that matter even medieval European history (*artes sermocinales*) were as important to me as those in comparative anatomy, physics, and organic chemistry. Catholics believe that faith and reason, and indeed faith and science, are harmonious. Good doctors are first and foremost critical thinkers. They use biologic sciences to inform their intellect and bolster their differential diagnostic skills. More importantly, they are indebted to both philosophy and the humanities which continually remind them of the dignity of the human person. In his allocution to the *International Congress on Catholic Universities* (April 1989) John Paul II stated "What is at stake is the very meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and of culture, but on an even more profound level, what is at stake is the very meaning of the human person".

A new medical school is anticipated to be established in the same semi-urban city where I attended my Jesuit university. This new school would be do well to seek out and discover the liberal arts tradition of my alma mater. Doing so will help it achieve its goal of training

and mentoring doctors for this new century, doctors not only trained in critical reasoning skills, but also well founded in the art of caring.

***Behold, God's Son. Encountering Christ in the Gospel of Mark***, Christoph Schönborn, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, (2007), translated by Henry Taylor from the German original: *Seht, Gottes Sohn! Gedanken zum Evangelium im Markusjahr*, Vienna: Molden Verlag, (2005).

Reviewed by Rev. Fr. Sebastian Athapilly, CMI, Procurator General and Postulator General, Carmelites of Mary, Roma

The book is a collection of the comments and commentaries of the Sunday Gospels for the year B that focuses on the Gospel according to Mark. They were first published in the Austrian daily *Kronen Zeitung* each Sunday. The book follows the author's similar collection which focused on the Gospel according to Matthew under the title *My Jesus: Encountering Christ in the Gospel*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2005.

The author, the Cardinal of Vienna, is a renowned scholar and theologian. He was a former student of Pope Benedict XVI. The book is, however, written in a simple style understandable to everyone. The commentaries are short spiritual reflections with clear theological insights. This makes the work attractive to common people and helps them meditate on the deeper and existential meaning of faith and the Gospel passages. While speaking of Advent, the author refers to three comings of Jesus: the first coming as a child at Bethlehem, the Second Coming at the end of time, and yet between

the two, the third coming, namely, when he knocks at the door of my life. This can take place at any time, through someone who needs me; through prayer when God speaks to my heart; through some illness; through some happy event (p. 19).

According to Schönborn, Mark is primarily interested in the *person* of Jesus rather than in his teaching. This is illustrated in the passage Mk 1:21-28 where Mark presents Jesus acting with *power* and teaching with *authority*. This strikes the people. The exorcism he performs is the sign of the “new creation” (p. 57).

The cardinal does not shy away from making self-critical remarks regarding the way the Church, including the hierarchy, live the message of Jesus. Reflecting on Mk 6:7-13, he speaks of the “holy fools” and asks pointed questions that are meant as criticism of some of the practices of the Church today (pp. 92). We have to awake from the slumber of security! He asks, for instance: “What does that mean for a present-day bishop or a parish priest or any one of us?”

The meditations open our eyes to the ways and vision of Jesus. One typical example is the meditation on Mk 12:41-44. Jesus’ gaze falls on a poor widow who puts in two copper coins. Schönborn now says that “becoming a disciple of Jesus means, ... learning to look at things the way he looks at them” (p. 144). Jesus then *calls together* his disciples who were interested in other things in the temple. In this calling together, Schönborn sees the intimate connection between the Church and “calling together”, etymologically as well as theologically. He then writes so beautifully in this connection: “The Church is ‘called together’, the congregation of those people whom God, Christ, brings together around

him by his call. He makes dispersed, distracted people into collected people (in both senses of the word). We humans go our own way, each for himself, and are often somehow spiritually ‘scattered’. Jesus calls people together, he gathers them, so that they themselves become ‘collected’” (p. 144). Then the author focuses on Jesus’ way of paying attention to the *internal* attitude of the poor widow. His gaze never halts at externals. We, too, need to be alert to the poor and the little people.

The book is to be recommended for its solid spiritual and inspirational message.

***We Look for A Kingdom: The Everyday Lives of the Early Christians***, Carl J. Sommer, M.A., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 421 pages

*Reviewed by Jerrilyn Szelle Holladay, M.A., Director of Adult Education at the Spiritual Life Center of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita, Kansas*

**I**n *We Look for A Kingdom*, Sommer offers a close look at the social life of the Roman Empire and of the Catholic Church during the years 100-300 AD. Part One examines Roman religion, social life, military service, entertainment and the basics of life in the Roman Empire. Part Two looks at the development of the sacraments, prayer, church organization, persecution, martyrdom, slavery, social divisions among Christians, their works of charity, military service and family life.

Rome was the *sine qua non* civilization of its time, and rightly so for its many splendid achievements, including its rule of law, stability and tolerance of many diverse cultures – except that of Christianity. In spite of official enmity, however, the wit-

ness of radical Christianity ultimately transformed the Roman Empire into Christendom. How did this happen? What implications might this have for the Church today?

Sommer discusses the martyrdoms, the apologists, the street evangelizers, the widespread works of charity and other ways the Good News leaked out into society (p. 109-111, 265-74). But another powerful means of converting Roman society, which we seldom consider today, must have been the fundamentally different life of the Christian family.

Read, for example, Part 1, chapter 3 and Part 2, chapter 8 together to get a picture of family life during this period. The family was the center of Roman society. The *paterfamilias* was its sovereign, with the power of life and death over the household. A newborn remained in limbo for eight days while its father inspected it for imperfections and decided whether it should live or die. Simply being a girl, imperfect, or unwanted was excuse enough to be exposed to the elements. Only after the baby passed this first trial was it given ceremonial washing and formally admitted to the family (p. 42).

Is this shocking? Yes, perhaps it is. But why? While Sommer does not go beyond what happened then, the implications for us today are clear. Do we not confer the same right of life or death to the parent? The main difference is that we offer the “honors” to the *materfamilias* rather than to the father.

Fornication, orgies, homosexuality, adultery, contraception and abortion were common, according to Sommer. Women resorted to abortion for many of the same reasons women do today: to conceal adultery and fornication, to maintain beauty, to avoid danger to the

mother, to prevent overpopulation and to avoid dividing the inheritance between too many children (p. 41). Today we might add the disruption of one's professional studies or career path.

Is it any wonder that as the Romans failed to bring forth new generations, particularly among the ruling classes, the Empire slid into decline, unable to muster the manpower or leadership to defend herself against the barbarian hordes encroaching on her territory? The Roman government offered rewards for having children (p. 42), bringing to mind the bonuses for having children offered by some of today's European governments.

Divorce was common, as was remarriage (p. 44). Family life was a chaos of full, half and step siblings and bitter, even deadly, sibling rivalries (p. 300). Jewish and Greek women could be divorced for any or no reason whatsoever and could only hope that a male family member would take them in. Roman women fared better than Jewish or Greek women, since they could initiate divorce proceedings, keep property and earn a living, at least temporarily. Have today's unilateral divorce laws merely brought us back to the old Roman way of family breakdown?

Christian families were simply and radically different from Roman families. Christians did not divorce. The Church had a firm stance against it, even in the case of marriage to an unbeliever who could well turn in the believing partner and leave him or her open to prosecution and maybe martyrdom (p. 301, 304). Hence the Church discouraged mixed marriages (p. 304). Even the softening of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel didn't necessarily leave Christians free to remarry.

Indeed, some church fathers during this period taught that, while it was permissible for widows and widowers to marry again, it was better to remain unmarried and to dedicate the remainder of one's life to the service of God (p. 300-301).

While the *paterfamilias* remained the authority in the Christian family, the Christian understanding of the roles of husband and wife were altered from within. Instead of exercising the right of a Roman *paterfamilias* to consort with prostitutes, concubines, slave girls or even other men, the Christian husband was to lead his family through sacrificial service and to remain faithful and monogamous until death. The whole idea seems commonplace to us, but was utterly revolutionary for its time.

Women who had the misfortune to become widows or to be abandoned by their pagan husbands were systematically cared for by the Church (p. 210-212). This was highly innovative in a world with few significant charitable organizations. These women were encouraged to remarry if they were young and to be of service to the Church if they were older (p. 212). They were not left to starve or die of exposure.

Slavery was a mainstay of the economy of Old Rome, and one source of slaves was young children abandoned by their families. Sommer tells us, "Each city had a designated area for abandoned children to be left. The slavers would scoop up the unwanted children, raise them, teach them a trade and sell them when the children were old enough (p. 48)." Unlike many Romans, who wanted to limit family size, Christians often went to these holding areas, adopted the children into their families, and raised them as their own. Christianity, by the

way, ended slavery in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, during the so-called Dark Ages (p. 259).

These and many other differences between the actions of ordinary Christians and the harshly self-serving Roman culture of the time must have spoken volumes, and these Christian alterations to the powerful but hard hearted Roman institution of marriage must have had a major impact.

One can only guess how many traditional Romans, while ridiculing Christians for sacrificing present pleasures for a distant and unproven Resurrection, secretly longed for the kind of loyalty and loving kindness they saw among the Christians. One can only guess at the opportunities for evangelization lost today, when Christians fornicate, contracept, abort and divorce at about the same rate as the rest of the population. The figures are touted with glee by the secular world, and many who are searching do not see in Christian families, the steadfast love of God, but the same hard heartedness they see everywhere else. The loss is incalculable.

Every chapter of the book is rich with insight. Be ready for some surprises. Contrary to common popular teaching, Church organization and sacraments of the period are already, this early on, close to what we have today. Even more surprising, it seems that the main problem the Church had with military service revolved more tightly around the issue of pagan religious requirements of soldiers than military service *per se*. Not that rampant killing was acceptable, or that there weren't disagreements among various fathers of the Church about military service (Tertullian stands out here), but the Church's position was far more nuanced than many pacifists present today.

Sommer intentionally omits the heresies of the period, so you will not find them covered here. Also missing – and this is important – is an exploration of the economic weakening and collapse of the Empire through excessive taxation, rationing, price controls, a thriving black market and the destruction of the middle class, all of which contributed to bringing the Empire to its knees before the barbarian conquerors. The reader is strongly urged to fill this gap by further investigation.

Writing for a non-scholarly audience, Sommer hits a bulls eye, with one caveat, that is. Many general readers might balk at 323 pages of text and another hundred pages of bibliography, notes and index. Perhaps, it would be more accurate to say this is an excellent secondary text for a church history class. All in all, this is a wonderful contribution to church history, one I would not hesitate to adopt.

***Why Politics Needs Religion: The Place of Religious Arguments in the Public Square***, Brendan Sweetman, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007. 256 pp.

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

Sweetman, with admirable learning and with cogent argument, has tackled a problem that has vexed some of most enlightened secular elites of our day, namely, how to maintain civic standards of judgment in the absence of divine command and sanction. There is little doubt that philosophical reflection can produce an ennobling code of morality. One can pursue

a fruitful life guided by the Nicomachean Ethics alone. Yet even the most inveterate secularist is forced to admit that philosophy is a poor tutor when it comes to mass instruction. The arguments of the philosophers are likely to elude the populace as a whole. Given this scenario, one would think that polite acknowledgment, if not deference, would be granted to the positive role that biblical morality has played in the history of our nation. Granted that religion speaks with a divided voice, one cannot understand Western civilization apart from its Hellenic and Christian sources.

At length and with considerable erudition, Sweetman analyzes the “secular mind” and the attempts of its contemporary apologists to establish its atheistic world view as the nation’s *de facto* credo. Clearly the secular outlook is more than an abstract philosophy vying for intellectual allegiance. It is a political program that would rob religion of any role in the conduct of public affairs. Sweetman describes secularism as a belief system, a world view, every bit a “faith” as the religion it seeks to replace. Like any religion, it has its “high priests,” in this case, individuals whose pulpit is provided by a compliant media that willingly propagates their views—i.e., the intellectuals and publicists such as Carl Sagan, Richard Dawkins, the editorial board of the *New York Times*, and the executive director of the ACLU.

After defining what he means by a “world view,” Sweetman devotes sections of the book to analyses of the “Worldview of Secularism,” to the difference between “Religious Beliefs and Reason,” and to concluding reflections on “Religion and Politics.” He finds useful a distinction between “lower order religious

beliefs,” beliefs that he takes to be common to most of the world’s major religions, and “unique confession beliefs.” “Lower order beliefs,” he writes, “are those beliefs that are strongly based on evidence, that are justified by an appeal to arguments.” Lower order beliefs, he holds, are likely to be respected by others even if they are not likely to be adopted by others. He adds a cautionary note, for in political debate it is important to recognize that no matter how firmly one holds to certain beliefs, one may yet not want to force them on others through coercive legislation. Sweetman is convinced that the religious voice needs to be accorded equal standing in political debate given that it projects into the public forum a time-transcendent philosophy of nature and human nature, one grounded in classical learning and Sacred Scripture, sadly marginalized in our colleges and universities.

Sweetman concludes by suggesting that in the United States we move beyond the church/state issue and allow religion in the public forum on equal footing with the secular credo that seeks to replace it. We need, he says, “to focus on the moral question that is at the heart of a democratic society, that the constitutional question logically cannot be answered until the moral question is first addressed.” Although Sweetman speaks of “religion” in the abstract, what he says, while applicable for the most part to Christianity, would not be true of all religions, certainly not of Islam.

*The Pope, the Council, and the Mass: Answers to Questions the "Traditionalists" Have Asked*, James Likoudis and Kenneth D. Whitehead, Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2006. 374 pages.

Reviewed by Philip J. Kuna, PhD  
student in Systematic Theology at the  
Catholic University of America.

This newly revised printing of the 1981 edition of *The Pope, the Council, and the Mass: Answers to Questions the Traditionalists have asked*, is a much needed addition to the life of the Church, insofar as it argues for the authority of the Church, a reform of the abuses in the liturgy, and thus a true unity within the Church. The newly revised edition includes several relevant appendixes containing recent Church documents on the appropriate use and function of the "Tridentine Mass", liturgical abuses, a discussion on Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, his followers in the Society of Saint Pius X, and other developments of communities that have retained an affection for the "Tridentine Mass" and a disdain for the changes they encountered after Vatican II. Finally, addendums were given to the end of the chapters, updating new developments in Church documents since the original publication.

In a true apologetic spirit, the authors clearly show the inconsistency in a logic that argues against the opponents of the Church, within the modern world without first accepting the legitimate authority of the Church: "But we cannot complain about the disobedience of modernists and secularizers in the Church if we ourselves become disobedient to the legitimate authority of the Church." Also admirable is the authors' unabashed admittance,

that while the implementation of the decrees of Vatican II was at times not always of the highest caliber, such faulty implementation does not detract from the legitimacy of the Second Vatican Council. This distinction indicates that while even given the pastoral nature of the council, its decrees are nonetheless still binding on all Catholic faithful, and such contradictory implementations are not to be seen as indicative of the entire council: "These scandals have not flowed from the genuine reform of the Mass decreed by the Council, but from disobedience... It is no remedy to these abuses and scandals to engage in disobedience oneself by rejecting or criticizing the authority of the pope. There is nothing traditionally Catholic about that."

Of the 25 questions answered, only a few can be presented here. Understandably, the book places a certain priority to questions concerning the Mass, and in this regard the notion of sacrifice surfaces frequently. The authors ably answer the frequent objection that the notion of the sacrifice of the Mass, if not completely relegated, was at least severely downplayed in the revision of the Missal. Questions 7, 12, 13, and 14 deal particularly with this question. For instance, in question 7 the reader will find specific evidence from the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship (1976) stating that "The Protestant observers did not participate in the composition of the texts of the new Missal" (85), refuting the claim that the Mass was altered simply to please Protestant observers. After further convincing evidence from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which clearly states the sacrificial character of the Mass, the argument is made that a personal interpretation of Church documents and teaching is,

in fact, itself a Protestant ideal.

Questions 8-11 deal primarily with the validity of the *Novus Ordo Mass*, treating the common traditionalist objections, including the apparently implied universalism of the translation of the *pro multis*, and the removal of the words, *mysterium fidei*. Concerning the *pro multis*, a clear distinction is made, on the basis of the Council of Trent, between objective redemption and subjective redemption. That is, while Christ certainly objectively died for all, not all will in fact subjectively cooperate with his grace and attain salvation (106). Thus, the Mass does not imply any type of universalism, as it is criticized for. Rather, it simply proclaims what the Church has always held, the objective redemption offered to all.

Other pertinent topics answer questions on the fruits of the *Novus Ordo*, the position on religious liberty presented in *Dignitatis Humanae* and its relation to the continuity of previous Catholic teaching, the theory that some Vatican officials involved in Vatican II were actually Masonic saboteurs, and especially the authority not only of the Council itself, but also the authority of the pope to revise the Mass.

This thoroughly researched book provides an insightfully clear presentation of the disturbing polemical within the Church today. The arguments are not only detailed, but also easily accessible to the non-specialist. Finally, as the book states from the beginning, it has successfully utilized sources the *Traditionalists* would accept as legitimate to prove their arguments. This book will no doubt be useful for Catholics and non-Catholics who may be coming into the Church, or simply seeking the truth about the decrees of Vatican II.

*Am I Living a Spiritual Life?*, by Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam. Manchester, NH, Sophia Institute Press, 2006, pp. 191

*Reviewed by Rev. Leonard Kennedy, C.S.B., Toronto, Canada..*

This book is a revised version of an original edition published in 1978. The authors have previously published twenty-four books on spirituality, and the fruit of their experience in this area is evident in this present edition. The subject of the book is of interest to every person, and it is encouraging to know that its authors are well-known. The book asks thirty-three questions, and the answer to each of them is about five pages in length. Twenty of the questions deal with “developing a spiritual life,” seven deal with “prayer and participation,” and six deal with “living Christian community.”

Perhaps the best way of conducting this review is to give a brief mention of some things mentioned by the authors as being important for developing a spiritual life.

God is always close to us. This closeness is gratuitous, and “our yes to this gift is the measure of our becoming spiritually mature.” We have to do God’s will even in times of dryness. We must examine our lives carefully and, if possible, with the help of a spiritual director.

We need silence. Since our world is so noisy, we have to develop an interior silence of our own, which is “an emptying of self to make room for God.” Individuals differ in many secondary matters concerning their definition of spirituality, but what is important is the basic meaning of it, which should be the same for everyone. “Slowly I begin to discover those self-centered, envious, or negative outlooks that

distort my view . . . . With God’s grace I may be able to transform these obstacles into occasions for faith-deepening.”

Time should be set aside daily or weekly for spiritual reading books, especially for the Bible. It isn’t easy to be faithful to one’s plan in this matter. And the reading of these books should be meditative, “in quiet recollection and attentiveness to God’s word . . . . Illumined by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we dwell upon what we read.”

It is useful to have a spiritual journal. It slows us down. “I see that I need to spend time in prayer before and after I write . . . . Contemplation has to be the ground of action; it has to permeate all that I do.” “There’s value in writing my reflections in a spiritual journal. Putting my thoughts on paper helps me to appropriate the directives I receive.” In solving problems it might take us years to learn that the weight of the world is not on our shoulders, but rather in the hands of Christ Crucified.

We must have a spirit of poverty. There can be poverty in matters of money but in many other matters also. It consists primarily in giving ourselves rather than our possessions. That is, it is a matter of detachment, “of humility and the awareness of our complete reliance on God, however rich or poor we might be.”

Mortification is necessary; it is “a sensitivity that rises above personal likes and dislikes to include others’ preferences.” We must practice discipline, which is “a gentle mode of loving surrender.” “To consider honestly who I am and what the situation requires of me demands disciplined listening. I can then choose, in the light of God’s design, what is the best way for me to combine self-denial and self-fulfillment .

. . . I listen each time to the voice of the Holy Spirit.” “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate,” St. Paul said.

We should, however, realize that mortification is not an end in itself. It should be directed to the love of God, not to simply “whipping ourselves into shape.” Indeed, we must be gentle with ourselves, gentle but firm, understanding and accepting our limitations as human beings.”

Everyone experiences listlessness, fatigue, dryness, at times. God can send this for our good, or we can cause it ourselves, such as by working too hard. In either case it reminds us of our humanness, of our need to let God in his mercy be the master of our experience. “To grow in wisdom, age, and grace before God and others is to face the truth of who we are. When we lose our illusions of unlimited strength, we grow in humility . . . . Self-knowledge of this intensity is always painful . . . . We have to face the reality of all that will never be, of all that we haven’t done. Our choice is to dwell either on what we’ve lost (our ego-self) or what we’ve (gained (our Christ-self) and the gifts of trust and painful endurance that accompany this call to discipleship.”

Some people are more afraid of death than others are. “Fear of death can be the Lord’s way of calling us to face our finitude. Faith in him gives us wings to reach beyond this life with a joy born of hope. In one sense this fear is part of our nature. In another sense, it has everything to do with faith in God. . . . The separation of soul and body is an unnatural phenomenon and no one can free himself from the dread of this parting. It’s a leap in the dark from which there’s no return. Only faith tells us it’s a leap into the waiting arms of Our Lord.”

*Facing Forgiveness: A Catholic's Guide to Letting Go of Anger and Welcoming Reconciliation*, Loughlan Sofield, S.T., Carroll Juliano, S.H.C.J, and Bishop Gregory M. Aymond, Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press (2007) pp. 127.

Reviewed by Gregory B. Sadler, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Ball State University

This little book stems from years of workshops on anger, forgiveness, and other related matters carried out by the authors, and reflects the lessons of their experience thought through and thoroughly integrated with Catholic doctrine, Scripture, a wealth of other people's narratives and experiences, and ultimately oriented towards the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This book would be a very valuable and useful resource for individual spiritual development, for pastoral counseling, or for workshops and group exercises, dealing with reconciliation and forgiveness, even for catechesis of adults or adolescents. The discussions of forgiveness and reconciliation in this book have the essential, and not easily effected, characteristics of good homilies: they are well-thought out, entirely orthodox, and are written in such a way as to reach any attentive reader open to their message. Its treatment of anger, however, while better than many approaches taken towards that extremely significant human emotion, does have some defects, stemming not so much from what is explicitly said as from what is merely assumed, passed over, or ignored. This small deficit is minimized if the book is viewed as merely a practical resource for the purposes just mentioned, and not as a work purporting to provide and

promote a full intellectual grasp of its central matters: anger, forgiveness, and reconciliation, illuminated by Christian teachings and divine grace. To be sure, it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect systematic theoretical expositions of all of its subject matters from a work of this genre.

*Facing Forgiveness* does, however, progressively develop a fairly systematic and quite detailed exposition of forgiveness and reconciliation, and it challenges its readers to explicitly articulate and modify their beliefs about these matters. This is one of the work's many strong points, precisely why lack of equally attentive discussion of anger, a "powerful, intense emotion" (64), but also, as some traditional theorists such as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas recognized, a complex interpersonal one entwined with considerations of justice, needed at times for attainment or protection of certain goods, and even capable of being virtuous. The book's subtitle, speaking of "letting go of anger", expresses its basic orientation towards the wide range of affects and dispositions set under its rubric. Bitterness, revenge, rage, fury, hostility, and hatred, are all used as synonyms or treated as effects of anger. Wrath gets distinguished from anger, as "a behavior used to express that emotion, a behavior which attacks the other as an enemy" (95), a characterization which is quite correct in what it says, but which clearly leaves much out of the picture, perhaps for those readers unschooled in moral theology or philosophy, who arguably would need the most to be told that wrath is not merely a behavior, but also a vicious habitual disposition. The central focus of the book is not understanding anger, but undoing the lasting and harmful effects it tends to produce, which block the way towards, but are also undone through,

forgiveness and reconciliation.

The numerous and specific strengths of the book lie in its discussions of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is structured in short chapters of only a few pages, each discussing a particular subject matter, and ending in questions for personal reflection. The first two chapters draw the reader into the project through having them examine their beliefs about forgiveness, and then recall and reflect upon experiences of forgiveness, of non-forgiveness, of being offended and of forgiving. The bulk of the book's chapters address the particular subject matters in a progressive manner, and center on individual examples of the subject matter, "put[ting] human faces on a psychological and theological concept" (12). Each of the examples is well chosen and illustrative of the feature of forgiveness under discussion, and certain of the chapters analyze the examples and their narratives in order to develop important and often overlooked aspects of forgiveness. The reason the authors structured the chapters around these vivid narratives is that people "may not know how to forgive because they lack human models of forgiveness," so the narratives provide "tangible, concrete models of forgiveness" (p. 12). These models range the gamut from Pope John Paul II's forgiveness of his would-be assassin, to parents of a murdered daughter, to victims of rape, hostages and captors, persecutors and those persecuted, formerly enemy soldiers, to spouses hurt by infidelity or even by their spouse's intimacy in previous relationships. Forgiveness is also given context by the scriptures cited at the beginning of each chapter, and by the third part of the book, which focuses specifically on the sacrament of reconciliation. The discussion is competent, rooted in Church teachings, detailed and insightful, stressing the

sacrament as a gift to us from God, a gift allowing us the possibility of turning from sin and being reconciled with God, ourselves, and neighbors. Forgiveness is then also understood as a gift one gives to oneself, a determinate way of appropriating the divine gift, and of releasing oneself to have life more fully. In each of the narrative chapters throughout the book, forgiveness is examined in explicit relation to God and the Christian life and teachings, the only truly adequate framework in which it can be understood and practiced.

Working within that framework, the authors both avoid and point out numerous misunderstandings of forgiveness, another strong point of the book. They dispel the “myth that when one truly forgives one will forget” (37), interpreting the counsel to forgive seventy times seven as a call to “recall the hurt and to continually choose to forgive” (37). Another misconception, standing in the way of forgiveness, is “the belief that forgiveness must be communicated to the other and the reconciliation is always a desirable condition” (52). In some cases, for instance when a person has died, these may be physically impossible, while in other conditions, for instance those who have been criminally victimized, com-

munication would make themselves once again vulnerable. Likewise, the authors stress that forgiveness is not merely a matter of emotions, nor something determined primarily at a cognitive level. It involves the will, and often much struggle to will the ultimately correct decision, but is also “a movement of the heart that involves God rather than just an act of the will.” (53) “Forgiveness is usually a slow process” (70), they remind us, also stressing the importance of “distinguish[ing] between forgiveness and justice,” nothing that “forgiveness does not dissipate the obligation for justice” (71–2). False peacemaking, by ignoring the realities of hurts and offenses, takes the form of “failure to address [issues] honestly and openly” which then usually results in conditions “prevent[ing] any real forgiveness for reconciliation from occurring” (91).

The book also narrates and presents some of the costs of holding onto and remaining in anger, hurt and offense. It can expand and continue in self-reinforcing and propagating cycles of distrust, isolation, and hatred. Families become split not only by those who have directly offended and been offended by each other, but also by those then caught on one side or another. Not for-

giving results in remaining moored in negative attitudes and images of others, making forgiveness all the more difficult. Even human beings’ anger at and forgiveness of God is accorded its proper place, in a short but theologically astute treatment suggesting that “[s]ometimes we interpret God’s actions as hurtful, even though God was acting lovingly” (97).

In brief, excepting the one lacuna mentioned above, this little book is a superlative examination of and itinerary into the nature, possibility, and reality of forgiveness, employing an innovative format to draw the reader into a reflective, and hopefully healing dialogue with themselves, the authors, the examples, and especially with God. As one last note, the authors suggest after each chapter pausing to ask oneself and meditatively answer the personal reflection questions, and to incorporate recalling relevant scriptural passages in that process, a suggestion which this reviewer decided needed being put into experimental practice in order to adequately review the work. This turned out to be a very productive and fruitful exercise and method for putting the book to the work it was designed to do.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

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

If there are books you know of that should be reviewed, let Dr. Brian Benestad know at [benestadj1@scranton.edu](mailto:benestadj1@scranton.edu)

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

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

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

**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.

**The Order of Things**, James V. Schall, S.J., Ignatius Press: San Francisco, CA, (2007), Paper, 275 pp.

**Questions and Answers About Your Journey to God**, Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.: Huntington, IN, (2007), Paper, 127 pp.

**The Blood-Red Crescent: A Novel**, Henry Garnett, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2007), Paper, 170 pp.

**Saints for Sinners: Nine Desolate Souls Made Strong by God, Archbishop Alban Goodier**, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2007), Paper, 160 pp.

**The World of Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Mathematician of God**, Massimo Mazzotti, Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD, (2007), Hardcover, 217pp.

**Before I Go: Letters to Our Children about What Really Matters**, Peter Kreeft, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing: Lanham MD, (2007), Hardcover, 255 pp.

**Fit for Eternal Life: A Christian Approach to Working Out, Eating Right, and Building the Virtues of Fitness in Your Soul**, Kevin Vost, PSV.D., Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2007), Paper, 264 pp.

**Exploring Personhood: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Nature**, Joseph Torchia, O.P., Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., Lanham, MD, (2007), Paper, 293 pp.

**Meet Mary: Getting to Know the Mother of God**, Mark Miravalle, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester, NH, (2007), Paper, 120 pp.

**What's So Great About Christianity**, Dinesh D'Souza, Washington, D.C.: Regnery Press, (2007), Hardcover, 348 pp.

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## Archbishop Chaput and Pope Benedict XVI on Catholics in Political Life

The conversation between Pope Benedict XVI and Rabbi Jacob Neusner about Jesus in *In Jesus of Nazareth* Pope Benedict XVI explains that Jesus taught with an authority that “alarmed” his listeners because he claimed to be “on the same exalted level as the Lawgiver—as God” (p. 102). Rabbi Neusner, in his book *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, also expresses alarm in the face of Jesus’ claim to teach with “the authority of God.” Jesus teaches that “[p]erfection, the state of being holy as God is holy (cf. Lev 19:2, 11:44), as demanded by the Torah, now consists in following [him]” (p. 105). Neusner believes that he must follow the Torah, not Jesus, in order to please God and achieve holiness. In addition, Neusner also believes that Jesus is wrongly asking him to give up his obedience to the third and fourth commandments. The pope has an interesting response to this objection.

Pope Benedict also explains a significant difference between the Torah and Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The former not only gives the Ten Commandments, but also lays down specific regulations to govern every aspect of life for the Israelites. “The Torah did indeed have the task of giving a concrete juridical and social order to this particular people, Israel” (p. 117). As one of my teachers used to say, “Judaism is a law; Christianity is a faith.” Pope Benedict nicely explains this dictum: “Discipleship of Jesus offers no politically concrete program for structuring society. The Sermon on the Mount cannot serve as a foundation for a state and a social order, as is frequently and correctly observed” (p. 114). The followers of Christianity are free to follow their own best judgment in devising political, social and

economic arrangements for their societies, as long as they don’t jeopardize “the underlying communion of will with God given by Jesus” (p. 118). Pope Benedict further explains, “The concrete political and social order is released from the directly sacred realm, from theocratic legislation, and is transferred to the freedom of man, whom Jesus has established in God’s will and taught thereby to see the right and the good” (p. 118). The pope, of course, recognizes that the legitimate secularity produced by the liberation from theocratic legislation for every aspect of life has given way to an “absolute secularism,” which does not give due recognition to God and his commandments.

According to Pope Benedict, the rightful responsibility of reason is to discern, with an eye on unchanging divine law, what justice requires in particular situations throughout the ages. In Christian times there will no longer be divinely revealed casuistic law, the continuing validity of which depends on contingent circumstances. I would explain and expand what Pope Benedict says by mentioning several moments in the history of Catholic social teaching. St. Augustine turned to Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas to Aristotle, and Pope Benedict to De Tocqueville, for guidance in relating Christianity to the political and social order. With the knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of democracy derived from these secular authors, Christians, for example, are in a better position to discern how to preserve ordered liberty in contemporary democracies and effectively to attend to the needs of the poor. ☩

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